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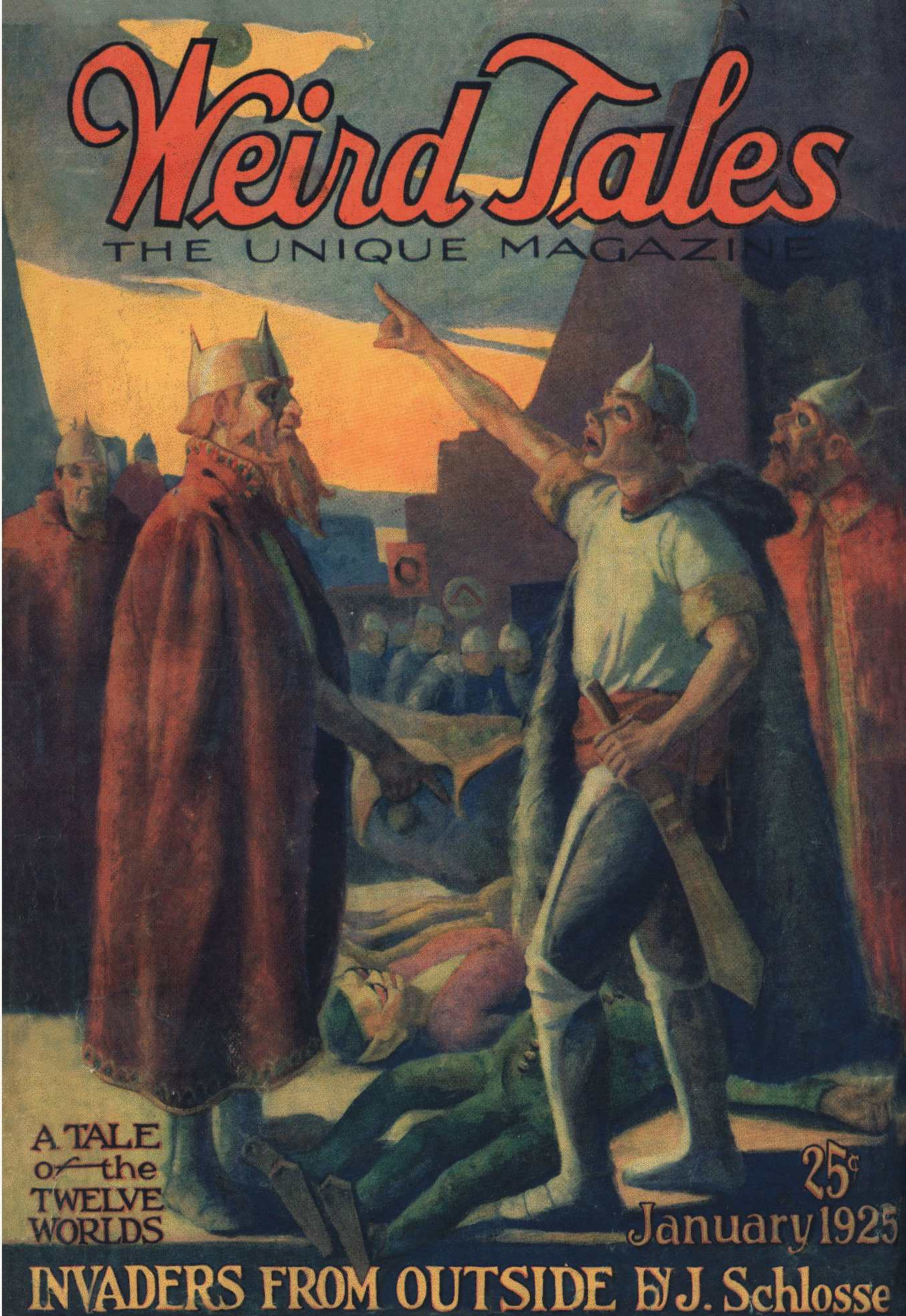
Weird Tales

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE



A TALE of the TWELVE WORLDS

25¢

January 1925

INVADERS FROM OUTSIDE By J. Schlosse

WEIRD TALES

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Vol. V No. 1—25c

No Longer a Secret-Every Man Can Have It!

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME V NUMBER 1

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ON EVERY hand huge brilliant suns, single or multiple, flashed past with their retinue of small dark planets. Though there was no sound to mark their passage through the heavens, yet one felt that here, indeed, was a roaring inferno. Slowly and steadily did the solar system forge ahead through this veritable whirlpool of mighty blazing suns. It was nothing less than a miracle that the sun should be able to guide his charge of planets safely through this densely star-packed region near the center of the Milky Way. Even though the sun now shone with his greatest possible splendor, he was nothing but a tiny dwarf sun within a region where white-hot giants abounded.

The intelligent inhabitants of the solar system had for ages past been sweeping the heavens with their ponderous astronomical instruments, endeavoring to see farther, always farther. Their telescopes were gigantic. With the aid of those huge eyes that stared unblinkingly out into the starry regions of the night, they were able to record, chart, and compare nearly every star within the island universe of which they were an insignificant part.

It can almost be said that no phenomenon of the sky, great or small, escaped their keen-eyed vigilance. Hot glowing suns and cold dead worlds came equally under their curious, all-penetrating gaze. Their system of research was as near perfect as possible; besides, if one or more of the members of that great body known as the Scientific Society of the Twelve Confederate Worlds missed something through an unavoidable local condition, the other members did not.

Always did they keep watch, and though their instruments embraced the limits of the Milky Way yet a large number of cold, dark worlds had slipped in past their vigilance, and one of these was now hurtling at an enormous velocity straight toward the solar system.

Ignorant entirely of its coming, of the curious zigzag course it followed, or of its desperate purpose, the inhabitants of those twelve civilized worlds went on confidently with their researches and their dreams of eternal peace.

Peace? To the average inhabitant of the Twelve Confederate Worlds the meaning of the words peace and war was unknown. Those two words were met with only in the oldest archives on each planet. For the perfect and se-

cure peace that the Twelve Confederate Worlds enjoyed had never been broken. They were the masters of the solar system. Peace was even older than the confederacy, and that was old beyond reckoning. No one knew or had the least conception when the Act of Confederation had been passed. It was forgotten in the bottomless seas of the past.

Not even the industrious inhabitants of Mars, though their civilization had reached its apex two hundred and fifty thousand Martian years before and their written records extended back twice that far, knew when that deathless compact had been agreed upon. Wrought deeply in the smooth, imperishable walls of adamant that surrounded the Moon's capital city, Ishree, was the entire history of the ages that had so swiftly glided into the past; but even this greatest and oldest of all histories faded into a mass of crisscrossed lines of undecipherable script long in the ancient past dealing with that memorable event. The records of the other civilized worlds were just as illegible in regard to the period when the twelve worlds had confederated.

One hundred and twenty million miles out beyond the orbit of Mars was the orbit of the next world belonging to the Confederacy. It bore no name, but was called No. 5. It was situated between Mars and the Jovian system of habitated moons. And then came Jupiter with his four civilized moons, each of which was a member of the Confederacy: Callisto and Ganymede, the two largest; Europa and Io, the two smallest. Far out beyond the Jovian system, about four hundred million miles, lay the orbit of Saturn. Out there he was supreme. He owed allegiance to none but his parent, the Sun. He held continual sway over his five habitable moons: Japetus, the outermost; Titan, the largest; while Rhea, Dione, and Tethys came in order named. There were, of course, the moons of Uranus, but life there was still in the savage state.

The thrill that the first few fearless Martians experienced when they dared the unknown terrors of the vast airless seas in their flimsy crude craft can never be recalled. Bridging the space between the worlds was as common now as traveling from city to city. But there was no danger now, and neither was there any thrill in it. Even though the Confederacy was admitted to be old, very old, interplanetary travel was necessarily still older. It was the forerunner of the other.

THE very first trip from Mars was to the Moon, which circled the barbarous planet, Earth. Those intrepid Martian explorers expected to throw their lives away when they shot up into the absolute void of space. They never thought that they would return. And their folk waited season in and season out; still they did not hear from them. Years after all hope had been abandoned their craft was sighted in the clear sky. They were returning at last.

The Martians crowded around that ship after the initial shock and roar of its landing was past. As the captain stepped out of his frail craft he was cheered again and again by the admiring populace. Twenty had started out on that first trip into the infinite, yet only seven others besides the captain dragged themselves wearily on to the Martian soil. The other twelve lay buried in a strange world. They had for the most part succumbed to the frightful rigors of the trip over.

Their folk begged them, then and there, to tell of the terrible hardships and dangers that they must have gone through. Those daring pioneers first rested, and then they began their strange tales. That they were thickly garnished with wild imaginings was

suspected, but no one then could tell positively.

The travelers told of the wonderful feeling of lightness that pervaded them as they stepped out of their vehicle; of the Moon's strange vegetation, the great scarlet blossoms that were far larger than any vegetation on Mars. They described the smooth, unbroken plains; the great cities that dotted the lunar landscape; the civilization there that was even older than their own. They recounted in each detail the immense throngs that came to greet them; the perfect hospitality of the Moon dwellers; the genuine welcome.

They next told of the homesickness that had engulfed them and their inability to leave because they were short-handed. More than half of the crew had died and they could not work their vessel back. They had made many friends while they had sojourned there. They told their hosts of their yearning to return to their native soil and the reason why they could not. Their hosts volunteered to help them work their vessel back, and showered them with gifts when they took leave, and invited them to return.

When these first voyagers had told their tales and exhibited metals that were considered almost priceless on their own planet, but which could be had in any quantity on the Moon, their tale so fired the adventurous Martians that there was a stampede to sign on for the proposed expedition that their government was undertaking.

Other explorers started out in the direction of No. 5. They found the inhabitants there as far advanced as they were, but along different lines. The inhabitants of No. 5 were esthetic, pleasure-loving and beauty-loving creatures.

Others went still farther out, to Jupiter and the Jovian system of habitated moons. Everywhere they found civilizations almost equal to their own. They returned to Mars, their home. They had been received with hospitality everywhere, and treated with the respect due to an envoy from one world to another.

The government of Mars entered into a trade compact with the governments of the other worlds. The situation on Mars prior to the return of the first exploring expedition had been critical. The local markets had been overcrowded, and to avoid grave industrial crises it had been absolutely necessary that new markets be found at once.

After the return of the explorers the traders started out. They went in droves. They went almost to the limits of the solar system to obtain markets for their surplus products. That they had found new markets and kept them could be proved by the enormous traffic that each world now carried on with the others. The ancient method of transportation, those old ships propelled by the rocket discharge principle, were too slow. Why, their limit of speed was only about twenty thousand miles an hour. So slow! It took their ancient ancestors from one to eight Martian years to make one round trip. Compared to the modern almost instantaneous method of wireless transmission of solid matter, the rocket-propelled ships were slow and crude.

Though the inhabitants of Mars were the most aggressive, they did not presume to the right of leadership or the right to dictate terms. They were too far advanced to entertain such useless dreams of conquest. What they had or knew they gave without stint to the younger civilizations of the union. All was instantly accessible to every member of those twelve worlds through the Bureau of Knowledge and the Bureau of Means.

It seems like a paradox to say that they were civilized and still peaceful, that they did not understand the full

significance of war. They knew what war was, but not through personal contact. War, they held, was for the savages that lived on the three outer moons of Uranus, or for the nameless four-legged things that so miserably existed on the planet Earth, but not for the highly intelligent beings who owed allegiance to the Confederacy.

That strange, alien world that was speeding toward them, meanwhile, remained totally unknown. Its small size and its tremendous distance might have been the reason why their mighty telescopes could not bring it into view, or perhaps the curious zigzag course it followed.

It made no difference how far advanced their civilization were, they could not read the future. That was admitted to be beyond the realms of possibility. But why couldn't there be one, only one, out of the combined populations of the whole twelve worlds to warn them of the approaching danger, to tell them that a strange world was approaching out of the depths of space at an inconceivable velocity?

THE inhabitants of the Twelve Confederate Worlds were not individualists. They had advanced beyond that stage on the day when their separate worlds had united, for on that day each race had given up its deep-rooted dream that its own peculiar species had been created supreme above all others. It was the intelligence, not the form or color of their fellow creatures, that they held in high esteem.

Messages in the musical tinkling universal language of the solar system were hourly broadcast from the central broadcasting stations on each planet. The latest news and all the improvements in the field of science throbbed through the ether on equal terms with the commercial matter that was being sent out continually.

It was strange that their instruments should be of such strength that they were able to search out and assign to its proper place the smallest and most minute star, yet not know of the approaching body.

A message came from Mars, the most industrious member of the Confederacy, that its scientists were working on an intricate instrument that would easily separate into its component parts the thousands of star clusters that dotted the region beyond the Milky Way. When this new instrument would be completed, the Martians promised, they would be able to see the surfaces of the dark bodies that attended the bright stars throughout the heavens.

The Confederacy was enjoying its golden era of peace and prosperity. There was no sign of war or strife. The tremendous advancements in every field of activity had long since eliminated the drudgery from existence. Life was very sweet, but not cloying. One question loomed up large: would not this perpetual peace and ease breed a race of cowardly degenerates?

The inhabitants of the twelve worlds had never been called upon to risk their lives against an invading force. They might be soft, as compared to their progenitors of the dark and bygone past, in the matter of muscles and in their ability to resist the naked elements. But what of it? Life was not so hard now. There really was no need of brawn. And besides, their science had made them practically immune to all the disease germs that bred within the solar system. Even though they were soft in the matter of muscle, their span of life was from twenty to fifty times the full life span of their early ancestors. Who could foretell whether they would prove in a pinch to be a race of cowardly degenerates or not?

And then, entirely unexpected (for danger always comes unexpected), from one of the huge observatories on Japetus, the outer moon of Saturn, there came an imperious command that all broadcasting immediately cease. As the broadcasting died down a message was repeatedly flashed through the ether: "A large body of planetary dimensions is hurtling toward the solar system at a terrific velocity."

The Martians worked night and day to complete their intricate half-finished instrument for long distance observation. It was completed at last and ready to be tested. It lived up to their highest expectations. Without any further delay it was sent to Japetus and there set up for observation.

Nothing further could be learnt with the old instruments. The inhabitants of each world waited for something definite to come from the Martian observatory on Japetus.

Some frightened inhabitants of the Confederacy demanded that governments declare martial law and conscript every individual so that they could commence building and outfitting a fleet of great stellar transports large enough to give every one a chance to flee from the doomed solar system. A few, more learned but equally wild, suggested that the Scientific Society of the Twelve Confederate Worlds concentrate their combined energies toward finding a way to hurl Neptune, the outermost of the solar family, out to meet it. But most of the inhabitants waited quietly, numbed by the terrible threat of doom.

No attention was at first paid to those who let their emotions run away with them, but later, when the hysteria of the few was spreading like wildfire, it was decided to banish all who were inclined to excessive nervousness to some far off spot until the crisis was either past or their fate definitely settled.

THE first reports, though not officially confirmed, came at last from Japetus. Its distance was estimated to be a little less than the distance that it takes light to travel in half a year. It was much farther away than the first wild reports had led them to believe. Later came its size, speed, and direction.

It was generally considered that it was a dead world—a piece of slag—hurtling through space at the incredible velocity of eighteen thousand miles a second! Just one-tenth the speed of light. At that speed it would be upon them in less than five years!

Its diameter was ascertained to be about two thousand miles, or one-fourth the diameter of the planet Earth. It was nothing but a tiny speck as stellar sizes go. Small as it was, at that rate of speed, it was large enough to wreck the civilization of the solar system. The question that naturally came to the inhabitants of those twelve civilized worlds was: was it only a burnt-out cinder thrown off by some mighty sun with such unerring aim and such great force that it should flash through the heavens straight for the solar system? Or was it inhabited by sentient beings?

A reassuring official report was sent out. It said that there was absolutely no cause for alarm; that when the approaching body reached the spot in the heavens where the sun and his attending planets now were, the entire solar system would have moved on many hundred million miles away on its own course. At the rate of speed with which the approaching body was traveling, the attraction of our sun could not swerve it from its course; no, not even if our sun were ten thousand times his own size.

The astronomers welcomed its coming. Its speed was an unexplainable phenomenon of the heavens. "Nothing but a head-on collision with some

larger body could stop it," they declared.

All its surface peculiarities were known by even the youngest inhabitant of the Twelve Confederate Worlds. It was as smooth as a billiard ball—proof of its great age. A snowlike substance covered its surface, probably to a depth of five hundred feet. But the knowledge concerning it extended no deeper than its surface.

If their instruments could have seen beneath the snowlike covering, seen what was going on there, the Confederate Worlds would have begun feverish preparations for one of the most desperate struggles that had ever been fought.

They thought of tracing it back. At that speed (so they reasoned) nothing could have turned it from its course, and so it must have come almost as straight as a ray of light. But they were wrong, very wrong, for its flight was not governed solely by the mechanical laws that govern matter. The Confederate Worlds made no allowance for such a thing as a directing will. If they had known of its curious zigzag course, could they have accounted for it? They knew no laws to explain why it should swerve sharply aside when it came into the neighborhood of some of the mighty suns that had dotted its course as it flashed on its way toward the solar system, and then, after passing them, resume its former course. Instead of repulsing, those mighty suns irresistibly attract any wandering bodies that chance to come within the field of their influence.

It was impossible to trace back its course, but if they could have done so, they would have been dumfounded at the immense distance that the approaching body had covered.

It was a visitor from a far off region, indeed. Out beyond the borders of the Milky Way the star clusters gleam as thick as the stars shine overhead on a clear, frosty night. But they do not shine with the sharp brightness of nearer stars. It is their distance, impossible to comprehend, that makes them appear nothing but a patch of soft, hazy light, notwithstanding the fact that each cluster shines with the combined light of fifty thousand to one hundred million huge flaming suns!

Everything must in time grow old. The living take their substance from the dead. The suns grow old and die. Everywhere in the heavens the ruins of dead star clusters can be seen—huge, shapeless masses that are absolutely dead-black.

And that approaching world and many others had come from somewhere out there, not from a living, glowing star cluster, but from the outskirts of a dead, intensely black region. From a region, if such a region can be imagined, where all matter has nearly reached a state of perfect equilibrium. Where all matter is nearly stable, and so all matter almost dead. There were no flaming suns there to give light to that terrible darkness. Each body within the borders of that lifeless region was breaking down. The molecules were disintegrating, the atoms flying free. In the boundless sea of ether the atoms were moving sluggishly away in vast, cloudlike masses. This was the end of a universe.

Like slinking rats from a sinking ship this approaching body had come from that region. It came with a grim, fixed purpose, nearer, still nearer. It was invisible to the naked eye. It was calculated to soon pass the solar system.

Some of the more hot-blooded members of the Scientific Society of the Twelve Confederate Worlds requested permission to take one of the society's interstellar vehicles, provision it for a lifetime, and go out to meet and board it. They painted in glowing pictures the advantages that the

Scientific Society would gain from their sacrifice, and the perfect descriptions that they would be able to broadcast back.

Their request was refused on the grounds that the new Martian instrument for observation installed upon Japetus could easily follow its flight for ages to come. It would be only a useless sacrifice of life to attempt to board that strange object.

In the secret code of the Scientific Society word was sent out that this body had actually stopped in its headlong journey. It hung poised, motionless, then began to fall slowly toward the solar system. These new and terrifying facts were not given to the general public. It would not help matters if they knew, but might bring on another attack of hysteria. The Scientific Society could hardly believe the evidence of its observation instruments.

The body continued to drop slowly toward the sun, and then, as it neared the orbit of Neptune, it turned, and at an acute angle it began to head for old Neptune, who was crawling out of the west to meet it. A collision seemed imminent. Its speed was very slow, no more than eighteen hundred miles a minute—just a fraction of its former tremedous speed, and it became still slower. When the newcomer came within a quarter of a million miles of Neptune it began to circle him, as if it were a moon.

The Scientific Society heaved a sigh of relief, and gave out the facts then to the public. The changing speed and the deliberate actions of this new member of the solar family were unexplainable; still, all the threatened danger seemed past.

THE instruments that had been brought to bear upon this new member showed that the snowlike substance that covered its surface was quickly evaporating under the warm, kindly glow emanating from old dying Neptune. In a little while all the snowlike substance had evaporated. It had turned into an almost transparent envelope of heavy, bluish gas.

The surface under the covering was then seen for the first time by the observers on the Twelve Confederate Worlds. Nearly the entire area of this new world was covered with square or oblong structures. In some places the square structures had been concentrated for reasons that were as yet unknown. In those places the foundations were truly massive; the structures had been built in tiers, each succeeding tier smaller than the one beneath it; and up, up they went until they formed pyramidal structures several miles in height.

Strange creatures that walked erect on only two feet next made their appearance. The inhabitants of the twelve worlds marveled. The two-legged creatures moved here and there, also seeing, it seemed, the surface of their world for the first time. They must have come up from beneath the surface. They were clad in a uniform, gray, hairy material that hung loosely upon their frames. Their movements were at first listless, but gradually they began to quicken. They looked around for a while and then went below the surface again.

It was not until the next day that they really began to come up in numbers. For the two succeeding days they poured up in a constant stream. In a little while the surface of their world was black with them. They must have hollowed out the very bowels of the planet to have accommodated such vast numbers. Like bees in a hive they were now swarming over their huge pyramidal structures and the smaller oblong buildings, everywhere.

The Scientific Society now realized that it had not been blind chance that had steered this body toward the solar system. It was evident that those intelligent creatures had directed their

world to this, a more favorable location.

Realizing that these creatures were intelligent, and thinking that they would probably need and appreciate aid after their long journey, the Twelve Confederate Worlds generously sent out a delegation to the newcomer to inquire if they could be of any assistance. Form or color meant nothing to the inhabitants of those twelve civilized worlds; it was intelligence that they held in high esteem.

No sooner did the party from the Confederate Worlds land than they were surrounded and killed! Neither a reason nor a warning had been given. They were killed with about as much compunction as one would kill some loathsome insects. After killing them, these strange two-legged creatures were seen to go about their tasks as if nothing had happened.

The inhabitants of the twelve worlds were startled, horrified. They actually did not know what to do. The act had no precedent in all their histories. Something must be done. But what? A reprisal? They did not even think of a reprisal, for they were essentially a peace-loving folk. It was unwise to send out another delegation to demand an explanation. They tried every means of interplanetary communication, but they elicited no response.

A few hours after the killing, a group of those strange creatures, but evidently in high command (for they were dressed in a bright red instead of the usual gray, and the gray-clad creatures prostrated themselves whenever the red-clad group came near them), had come up to view the remains of the slaughtered delegation. They were seen to question in turn those who killed them. Those questioned were seen to point up toward the sun, and toward the Twelve Confederate Worlds. The red-clothed were next seen to go over and examine the interplanetary vehicle that the delegation from the twelve worlds had arrived in.

After the event of the red-clothed group the inhabitants of this strange world were seen to start building some new huge pyramidal structures and repairing the old ones.

Always before had it been the Confederate Worlds who were the masters of every situation, but now they were plainly bewildered. They decided to bide their time and wait. They did not fear the invader. It was quite a different matter, this killing of a few unsuspecting individuals, from attacking the twelve civilized worlds.

FROM the moment that the strange world so suddenly arrived, and with its first ruthless act took up its sullen position as a new member of the solar family, the watchful eyes of the Twelve Confederate Worlds did not leave it for an instant. Every act was viewed with suspicion. Intently did they watch the two-legged creatures repair and build the huge pyramidal structures that reared their heads several miles above the surrounding surface. With deep wonder they watched them bring out from the interior of their planet large, metal, boxlike objects. They were not producing them one at a time, but by the thousands, and stacking them up near the huge pyramidal structures. On the very pinnacle of each pyramid there was a square opening that was exactly the size of those metal boxes, and each opening extended down to the very base of its pyramid. The Scientific Society, try as it would, could not discover to what use those boxes were being put.

The numbers of those strange two-legged creatures were seen to increase, and still increase. The Scientific Society had often discussed, wondering, how so many could exist on so small an area. There seemed hardly room for a fraction of their numbers.

Where did they get their supply of food? They did not grow it on the surface, for there was no room. Did they manufacture artificial foods? Several times in past ages the Scientific Society had produced artificial foods, but the inhabitants did not seem to relish them, though they were as palatable and nutritious from the chemical standpoint as any of the foods that nature produced.

It was just three Martian years from the moment that they had arrived to the solar system until they began to leap the tremendous void that separated Neptune from the four moons of Uranus. From each square opening on top of the pyramidal structures a steady stream of metallic cubes flashed out into the bleak void of space on their journey toward the moons of Uranus. Each square box was large enough to accommodate one hundred of those queer two-legged beings.

They landed upon the four moons of Uranus, and with the cubes that had carried them across the void they formed a wall surrounding their first rude camp. They immediately set to work building a city. The structures that they put up were identical with those that covered the surface of their own world. After their first city was completed these ruthless two-legged creatures went out in their thousands and commenced slaughtering for their furs the wild life that had lived there prior to their coming—killed those living creatures just for the bit of skin or fur that covered their backs!

The world of their origin, now the moon of old Neptune, still continued to send those metal cubes in a steady stream to the moons of Uranus. City after city sprang into existence. They flourished, growing so swiftly that the outskirts of each city soon blended into the outskirts of its neighbors.

The Twelve Confederate Worlds still continued to think of peace. It seemed strange that the inhabitants of those twelve worlds did not realize their danger. They went about in the smug belief that they were invulnerable.

The one thing that most amazed those who studied the strange, two-legged aliens was the speed with which they continued to increase their numbers. In a very short time the four moons of Uranus were too small to hold them. An air of intense activity pervaded the four moons of Uranus. They commenced building pyramids that were to be at least six miles high. As soon as these were completed the square, metallic cubes made their appearance and were stacked up by thousands near by.

The invaders leapt from the moons of Uranus to the five habitable moons of Saturn, which were members of the Confederation. The inhabitants of those five Confederate Worlds were unprepared. There was a steady whiz as the cubes shot through the air of those five worlds. They came in countless hordes.

Rhea, Dione, and Tethys, the three smallest, were snuffed out in a twinkling. Japetus and Titan put up so savage a front that they were able to hold them off. Each sent its desperate appeal for help throbbing through the ether.

Even though the invaders had many efficient death-dealing weapons and used them ruthlessly, the unprepared inhabitants of Japetus and Titan put up so grim a struggle, fought so fiercely with what they could lay their hands upon, that they were able to stop the forward charges time after time. Still it was plain that those pitiless two-legged invaders held their most desperate attempts at resistance cheaply —held them in sneering contempt— held even the whole combined power of the Twelve Confederate Worlds in contempt—played with them as a cat would play with a mouse!

The Confederate Worlds awoke to their danger at last. Was it too late? They sought in their museums and in the old archives of their early histories for plans of death-dealing devices that their own ancient, blood-thirsty ancestors had used. They discarded their foolish dreams of peace and selected the ideas for the most terrible weapons that they could find; and they began to manufacture these with lightning rapidity. Meanwhile, the inhabitants were conscripted, and the use of the weapons explained to them; and they were soon ready to be sent out against the invaders. The Twelve Confederate Worlds did not make the terrible mistake of underrating their antagonists.

A GREAT force of invaders had surrounded Eelee, one of the largest cities on Titan, and were slowly forcing the weary defenders back. The invaders fought with swift, death-dealing weapons, while the defenders had only sticks and stones to oppose them. Was it any wonder that the dispirited inhabitants of Titan were being forced back on every hand?

The city of Eelee was full of weary, trembling fugitives who had fled before the invaders from the surrounding open country. The morale of the defenders was breaking. Time after time they tried to fight through the slowly tightening ring of those terrible two-legged invaders. The defenders were slaughtered in their thousands. They were driven back from every nook and cranny until they met in the center of their city. This could hardly be called their last stand: they were merely waiting their turn to be butchered. In one solid, compact mass they cowered in the public square in the center of the city. The only protection at their backs was a solidly built public building, Eelee's central station for wireless transmission of matter. Would help never come?

There came a shout of encouragement from the main wide entrance to the wireless transmission of matter building, and a solid line, some thirty deep, of fully armed Jovians from the four Confederate Worlds of Jupiter leapt out to attack. A wide avenue was immediately opened in the tightly packed mass of Eelee's cowering populace, and the Jovians leapt through and spread out fanwise in front of the defenseless inhabitants.

Each of the Jovians in the front lines carried on his back a small tank that sprayed out a hundred feet in advance a chemical, which ignited everything it touched and burnt with a hot, livid flame. Those behind them carried stubby metal tubes, which would bark with short, thunderous reports, and which left ruin and death in the ranks of the invaders.

Help had come in the blackest moment. Similar scenes were taking place in all of the larger cities on Titan.

Back, back they drove the invaders. The Twelve Confederate Worlds (now there were only nine, and two of those threatened with momentary extinction) hurled their conscripted forces across the void so swiftly and in such numbers that the invaders were startled. Reluctant to give ground that they had previously gained, the two-legged warriors contested desperately each inch of their retreat. From every direction they were met by the defenders, who were armed with weapons as good as their own.

Could these be the despised, peace-loving inhabitants of the solar system whom they had meant to destroy so as to have undisputed possession of the entire solar system? They could hardly believe it, for the once peaceful Jovians fought with a ferocity that was terrible.

Whenever the invaders stopped and tried to stand their ground, the defenders swarmed up; the chemicals sprayed fires upon the two-legged in-

vaders; and those in the lines behind the first came with their short metal tubes that roared with thunder and wrought havoc in the ranks of the invaders. The Jovians forced them back, always back, and began to surround the isolated detachments of the invaders and destroy them. Not till they had wiped them completely from Titan did they turn their attention toward the beleaguered inhabitants of Japetus.

The inhabitants of Japetus were still fighting desperately when the Jovians came. Following close on the heels of the Jovians came the first detachment from No. 5. There was also a steady influx of invaders. A desperate battle raged for possession of Japetus. Reinforcements were pouring in on both sides.

The invaders, who had successfully destroyed the inhabitants and buildings on Rhea, Dione, and Tethys, now turned their attention toward Titan. Once more the invaders stormed Titan. They did not drop down upon defenseless inhabitants this time. They were met and repulsed by a strong force of beauty-loving inhabitants from No. 5. Those beauty-loving beings from No. 5, despite their estheticism, fought with an incredible fury in defense of the union of the twelve worlds.

When the news of the first setback reached the invaders, from the four moons of Uranus and from their densely packed parent world steady streams of cubes shot out toward the Twelve Confederate Worlds. They were bringing new and better weapons to combat those of the Confederacy. They were coming at incalculable speed, using their own secret means of propelling the cubes besides the additional attraction that the sun's gravitational force exerted upon them. But though the invaders could send their forces swiftly, the Twelve Confederate Worlds could transport their defenders ten times more quickly.

Prior to the invasion, the passenger service from world to world had always been subordinate to the commercial traffic of the wireless transmission of matter system of transportation that interlaced the twelve worlds. But with a few slight modifications the whole system of transportation was made available for passenger service. The Twelve Confederate Worlds were now able to hurl their defenders from world to world at the speed of light.

In a steady line the defenders would march into a station for wireless transmission of matter, enter the automatic transmission chamber and there receive the preliminary charge of specific high-frequency current that would cause temporarily suspended animation; then they would automatically be carried to separate vibrating chambers of high intensity, which would cause the electrons that composed the bodies to be impinged upon the sending apparatus in the compartment; a few minutes later, the process reversed, they would be ready to leave the receiving station at their destination. After the experience of leaping millions of miles at the speed of light they would be none the worse except for a slight touch of nausea.

NOW the invaders came in countless swarms. The number of cubes that had attacked the five moons of Saturn was as nothing compared to the flood of cubes that whipped past the orbit of Saturn and headed for Jupiter's moons. The remnant of invaders who were still attacking Japetus shot out to join the main body of invaders as they shot past the moons of Saturn.

A detachment of cubes, about fifty thousand in number, leapt ahead of the main force of invaders and attacked the moons of Jupiter. The Confederacy hurled its forces there to repulse them. But it was only a feint on the part of the invaders, for

their real objective was lone No. 5. They had been taught a lesson on Titan and Japetus. No longer did they hold the fighting qualities of the Confederacy in contempt.

They did not leap down upon the surface of No. 5 as they did upon the five moons of Saturn; instead, thousands of cubes filled with high explosives and noxious gases were directed toward No. 5's surface. After that, the terrible, two-legged invaders landed and killed off all that were left of the half-gassed inhabitants. They also destroyed all the stations for wireless transmission of matter.

The invaders made No. 5 their headquarters. Cubes were pouring in from every direction. It seemed that they were abandoning their own world that circled old dying Neptune. The four moons of Uranus were also being deserted by the two-legged invaders. They were massing for one supreme attack. No. 5 would be the center from which they intended to sally forth.

The inhabitants of the Twelve Confederate Worlds realized it. Thousands of the defenders offered their lives, offered to steer large interstellar vehicles loaded to the limit with high explosives to No. 5. But those in supreme command demurred, for the Scientific Society had just perfected a new, terrible weapon. This was manufactured with all possible speed and sent to the eight remaining worlds of the Confederacy. Hope flamed anew throughout the eight sorely tried worlds.

The invaders did not delay an instant. They had experienced only two setbacks. So far they had the best of it. They sent a stream of cubes filled with explosives and gases toward Callisto, the outer moon of Jupiter, and destroyed all life on it. At the same time they sent a mighty force to Mars.

The Martians had been preparing a fleet of swift interstellar vehicles and were prepared to offer stubborn resistance. As the invaders neared Mars, the Martians left the surface of their world and went out to meet them in the empty void. The two forces met, and from the start the Martians were outclassed. They were slowly forced back to the surface of their own world, for the cubes were superior in every way to the Martian craft.

From the six remaining Confederate Worlds, jets of intense light leapt toward No. 5. This playing of light on the invaders seemed so weak and ineffectual! It was the new weapon. The light at times appeared to be of delicate purple. It would grow until it was a bright purple, then fade into invisibility. It seemed the weapon of a child, and yet whatever it touched was destroyed.

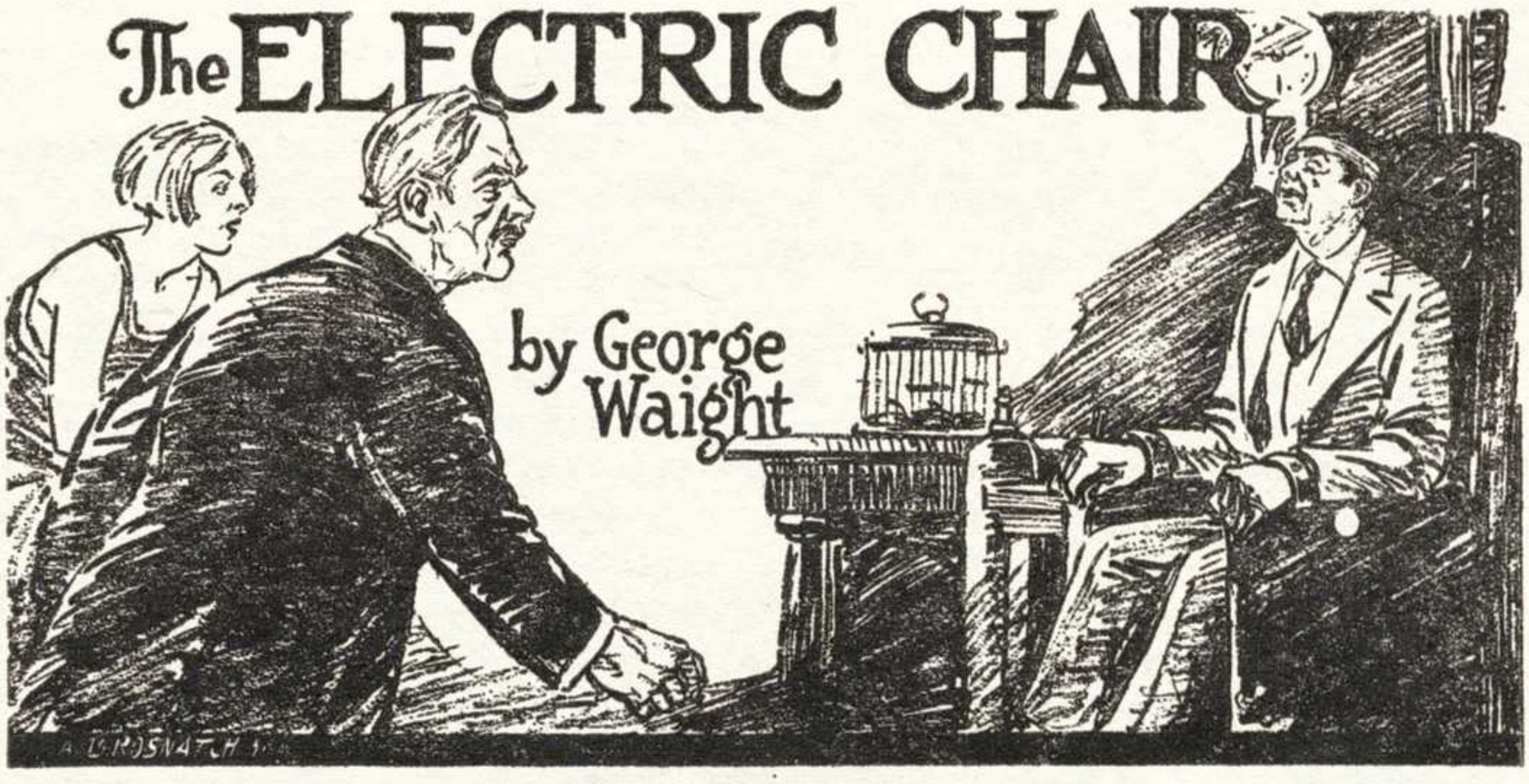
The invaders shot their cubes out in every direction, but were picked off by the jets of all-destroying light. Whenever two jets of light touched a cube, there was a short explosion; that was all. The purple from the twin jets would fade, and the results that followed were the same as if the terminals of powerful electric currents had short-circuited there. The jets of light were merely carriers for an electric current that was capable of vaporizing any substance that came between any two jets.

The jets of light from the six worlds had now reached No. 5, and were destroying everything upon the surface. The invaders came to the bitter realization that this was the beginning of their end. They had waited too long. They should have attacked the Twelve Confederate Worlds on the day of their arrival. They tried to leave No. 5 by the cubes, but the twin jets of light easily picked them off.

The Confederation turned its attention to Mars. It sent its forces down upon Mars as the rain comes

(*Continued on Page* 182)

The ELECTRIC CHAIR



by George Waight

"'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls
And matter enough to save one's own."
—Browning.

THE FACTS were carefully hushed up at the time. Strange stories, it is true, began to be whispered in the clubs about the eccentricities of Dr. Ainsworth and his electric chair, but nothing definite ever leaked out. Now that that weird scientist is dead and buried, the true story of what happened in his laboratory can be made public for the first time.

It all began in a conversation that took place one afternoon early in 1919 in the smoking room of the Athenæum Club, of which Dr. Ainsworth was a member.

The talk had turned on the subject of death and the fear of death. Mortimer, the actor, had given it as his opinion that it is not death which men fear so much as the uncertainty of what is beyond. Almost inevitably he quoted "Hamlet" in support of his contention.

Hamilton, the Harley Street brain specialist, joined the discussion at this point.

"If that is true," he remarked thoughtfully, "it should follow that if a man were confronted with a mystery stranger even than the mystery of death, he would choose death rather than face the greater mystery. I doubt it. I doubt it very much."

"By Jove, yes!" Wordsworth, the soldier and celebrated explorer, remarked suddenly. "That reminds me of a story I read somewhere during the war. Some German captain had captured a number of British spies, and instead of shooting them outright, he gave each of them a chance. For half an hour he put them, separately, of course, into a room out of which two doors led. He told them that one door led straight to the waiting firing party, but where the other door led he refused to tell them. Each man was given his choice. This German fellow had the reputation of being a pretty cunning fiend, I remember."

"They chose the firing party, I fancy," Mortimer remarked sotto voce.

"Each man," Wordsworth continued quietly. "Each man guessed that something pretty grisly lay behind that other door—Chinese tortures, mutilation, hanging. Each man, as it came to his turn, chose the firing party. With that they knew exactly what they were in for."

Arthur Sinclair, the young author whose book, "The Slender Hope," it

will be remembered, made such a sensation in the last year of the war for the keenness of its sensitive imagination, had so far taken no part in the discussion. Now he suddenly broke in, speaking with sharp conviction.

"But that's absurd!" he said. "Why, the other door might have led to freedom, for all they knew!"

"That's exactly where it did lead," the soldier finished quietly. "I told you that the German was reputed to be a pretty considerable expert in frightfulness. You see, none of them had the courage (and they were brave men, too, or they couldn't have been spies in wartime) to face the horror of the unknown. They chose the death they knew."

For a time there was silence. Each of his hearers was interpreting the story in accordance with his own thoughts.

"I wonder, I wonder," Dr. Ainsworth muttered, half to himself. "I wonder."

2

SINCLAIR was taken by surprize when Dr. Ainsworth invited him to dine at his house about a month later. He had never been able to determine whether the doctor objected to him personally, or whether the natural reluctance of a man of fixed habits to lose an efficient and charming housekeeper accounted for the doctor's strong hostility to Sinclair's engagement to his niece. As the date of their wedding approached, the scientist's opposition intensified rather than diminished, so that when he went out of his way to invite the young man to dinner, the latter surprizedly wondered whether this was to be construed as a flag of truce.

At any rate, on this occasion the doctor showed not the slightest sign of hostility. At dinner, seated with his guest on one side of him while Mildred, his niece, faced him at the other end of the table, he was affability itself. Dr. Ainsworth enjoyed a European reputation as a man of science, and in the course of his career he had managed to rub shoulders with most of the celebrities of the continent. When he chose to exert himself, his reminiscences of men and manners were well worthy of attention.

After the port had gone round the table, Mildred left the two men with their cigars, with an admonition not to be too long before joining her in the drawing room.

When she had left the room, the doctor passed the decanter again to his guest and continued to engage him in close conversation. By the time that an inch and a half of white ash showed at the end of his cigar, he pushed back his chair and rose from the table.

"Before we join Mildred, I should like you to see one or two little things in my laboratory, which I believe may interest you," he remarked, and led the way upstairs, past the door of the drawing room, to the top floor of the house, which was given up entirely to his researches.

Sinclair had never entered the laboratory before. His first impression was a swift recollection of schoolboy days, when he had worked in a room that presented just such an unbroken array of bottles and balances and strange-looking instruments, except that here there seemed to be more of them. His attention was attracted by a line of cases on the right of the room apparently containing a series of waxworks, of which he did not immediately appreciate the significance. It was as he was moving over to examine these that he first became aware of a strange sensation of dizziness stealing over him. The room darkened and he felt that he was about to fall. The voice of his host sounded for a moment as from an immense distance before it trailed off into nothingness.

3

SINCLAIR stirred slightly, and his eyes opened. Once more his brain was beginning to function dimly, and he had a vague sensation of being closed in. He made to move his hand and discovered that he could not. His head felt as if it were rigidly held in a vise.

Slowly, as consciousness came back to him, he became aware of his surroundings. He remembered entering the doctor's laboratory. Then the sudden blackness had come. He saw now that he was still in the laboratory. He supposed he had fainted. That no doubt accounted for the sensation of being bound. He became aware that he was sitting upright in a large, hard chair. He could not see the doctor.

Slowly, as if testing his faculties, he tried to turn his head. He felt as if something was pressing his head down, and discovered he could not move it. A new dizziness swept over him. Visions of sudden paralysis flickered through his brain. With an effort he regained control of himself. At least he could move his eyes. That was something, anyway. At this point he caught sight of his hands, which were lying along the arms of his chair, and he discovered that iron bands encircled his wrists and that these bands were fastened by a chain to the arms of the chair. Utterly at a loss, he tried to move his feet, only to learn, after moving them about six inches, that they were similarly fastened.

He closed his eyes, attempting to shake off what he supposed must be the nightmare of a dream.

At that moment he heard a step. Opening his eyes again, he discovered that Dr. Ainsworth had come round in front of him and was watching him smilingly.

"Ah, conscious again, I see," Ainsworth remarked in a tone of satisfaction. "Quite comfortable, I trust?"

Sinclair made a motion to pass his hands over his eyes and was reminded again that his hands were fastened. He looked stupidly at the other man.

"What has happened?"

The doctor gave a little chuckle and stood for a moment longer looking down at him before he answered.

"A little experiment. Just a little experiment."

He turned away and came back with a mirror, which he held up before the younger man.

Sinclair looked, and saw his head crowned with a metal cap, to which were attached strange-looking wires.

"I don't understand," he muttered. "I fainted, didn't I?"

Again the doctor laughed his curious, satisfied laugh.

"Not exactly," he said. "No, not exactly. I'm afraid I must plead guilty to having put something into your coffee."

Sinclair would have shaken his head in bewilderment, but his head was secured, as he had noticed in the mirror, by a vise attached to the back of the chair.

"I don't understand," he repeated. "Please explain what has happened. Why am I fastened like this?"

The doctor had laid aside the mirror and now stood facing the young man in the chair. Behind him, long rows of labeled bottles and phials formed an appropriate background, together with instruments of which Sinclair could not guess the use.

The doctor's manner was now that of a lecturer addressing his class.

"I shall have to take your mind back some time," he began. "You will no doubt recall hearing that very interesting little story of a German captain and his captured spies, who were given the choice, you will remember, of going to a known certain death or of meeting a fate the nature of which remained a mystery."

He paused. Sinclair had almost forgotten the incident, but he now recalled it.

"In that story, each of the victims chose to face the firing party. You, I remember," he continued in a tone of easy reminiscence, "were scornful of this and declared that they ought to have chosen the other door which might have led, as it actually did lead, to freedom. Personally, I keep an open mind as to the psychology of the problem involved. I find it an interesting speculation—intensely interesting. This evening, however, we are going to put this most interesting psychological problem to the test."

He paused a moment.

"And you, my dear Sinclair, are going to be the means of solving it."

Sinclair had not yet understood to what this introduction was leading, but already he felt a vague premonition of disaster.

"It may occur to you to wonder why I have chosen you personally as the subject of this experiment," Dr. Ainsworth continued, assuming more and more the manner of a lecturer. "I have had two reasons for that. In the first place, it was necessary for me to find a man of keenly sensitive imagination, as you will realize later; and in the second place, you are aware that I regard with the greatest distaste your intention of marrying my niece, Mildred. The idea of such a marriage is, in the highest degree, repugnant to me. However, considerations such as those must always come second to a man of science. I only mention them as affording an additional ground for my reasons in selecting you. The psychological experiment is, of course, the main thing."

By now Sinclair had serious doubts as to the sanity of this extraordinary old man. His feeling of uneasiness was rapidly giving place to one of serious alarm.

"You have not yet explained why you have fastened me to this chair," he reminded the smiling scientist. "At least, I suppose it is you that I have to thank for it."

Dr. Ainsworth nodded brightly.

"I am coming to that. I decided to use you, as I said, for my experiment. As you will remember, the problem is this: if a man is faced with the choice of alternatives, one of which leads to certain death and the other to some unknown fate which may range from freedom on the one hand, to a slow, revolting form of torture ending in a loathsome death on the other hand—if he is faced with choice, which alternative will he select? That is our problem, and this evening I look to you to decide that problem by being faced with just such a choice."

Taking no notice of the young man's startled exclamation of horror, he continued blandly.

"It was, of course, comparatively easy to bring you to this laboratory of mine, and, as you entered, to inject you with a drug that at once rendered you senseless, while I fastened you in this chair to ensure your continued presence during our little experiment. It was a more difficult question to reconstruct the factors of the problem. I have given some considerable thought to this matter. You may not have noticed very carefully the chair in which you are sitting. I recommend it to your careful study."

He paused a moment to allow his next words their full significance.

"IT IS an electric chair such as is used in executions in America," the doctor went on. "On your head, as you have seen in the mirror, is a metal cap to which are attached two wires connecting with the storage batteries, which you cannot see but which are close behind you. Near your right hand" (the doctor indicated a small table set close to the chair, which Sinclair now noticed for the first time)

"you will see a switch. Press that switch to the right and a current of electricity of enormous power (I need not weary you with the exact figures) will run through the metal cap on your head, through the metal chair on which you sit, and, passing through your body, it will make a complete circuit, with the result that you will be instantaneously and painlessly electrocuted. That constitutes one horn of the dilemma. That is the way of certain and known death. You will recognize that that corresponds to the firing party in the original story. Do I make myself clear?"

Sinclair shivered. The doctor had made himself only too clear.

"We now come to the alternative," Ainsworth continued. "The uncertain factor."

He opened a drawer and took out a small syringe and held it up to the light. Sinclair could see that it was filled with a colorless liquid like water.

"You may have heard, my dear Sinclair, of some researches I have made into the causes of certain diseases. I have succeeded in isolating the germs of a number of the better known diseases and of some others less widely known. All round this room you can see test-tubes filled with various liquids. Each of these contains the bacilli of some disease or other. This, for instance" (he picked up one at random), "contains the germs of the disease generally known as meningitis. In short, there are enough germs in this room" (he waved his arm to the line of glass tubes) "to destroy the whole of Europe."

He picked up the syringe once more and held it lightly in his right hand.

"What does this contain? That is the question, isn't it? You see, you are to have the choice between electrocuting yourself, or injecting yourself with the liquid in this phial. You remember you gave it as your opinion that the men in the story would have chosen the unknown fate which, as a matter of fact, led to freedom. Well, you may do the same. You may choose, if you wish, the contents of this phial. It may have the same result. It may perhaps contain merely water, in which case you will be none the worse for your little adventure. On the other hand it may contain the same as this tube." (He again picked up the tube in which were stored the germs of meningitis.) "In that case you will not have long to wait for your fate. In three or four days the symptoms should develop, and in about three weeks you will be dead. Not a very pleasant form of death, perhaps, but comparatively rapid. Then, of course, there is the cerebro-spinal variety of meningitis. It may be that. Also, I fear, not very pleasant. Or tetanus—what you call lockjaw. That would be rather disagreeable."

His voice had sunk to a sort of drone, and now he hardly glanced at his victim in the chair. All his attention seemed focused on the glass tubes, which he picked up one by one and named, dwelling on them, as if to handle them gave him pleasure.

"This is lupus," he went on. "It is an Eastern disease. I have a model of a sufferer from this disease."

He went across the room and came back with a glass case containing a model in wax of a man's head. The nose had completely rotted away, the teeth were entirely outside the mouth and festooned round the protruding tongue like a necklace. It was difficult to imagine anything more revolting.

"Of course, the model was taken from a patient in the last stages. In your case, the disease would develop in a year or two, but you would not reach the stage I have shown you for many years.

"Here is the consumption bacilli (I am afraid you might go in fear of that all your life), diphtheria, leprosy," (he picked up one tube after another) "rabies—ah, that would be

particularly disagreeable and might not show itself for a couple of years. A curious disease.

"But I weary you with this recital. You will see for yourself that there are many more tubes from which I may have chosen."

He waved a hand to indicate the array of phials.

"The disease in the case of some of these would develop in a few days. In others, it might remain for several years in the system before it showed itself. I think I have said enough to convince you that if you choose to inject yourself with the contents of this hypodermic syringe you will go in fear of death or some form of disease that is a thousand times more horrible than death for a number of years at least. On the other hand, the contents may be perfectly harmless. See, I place it beside your left hand; you will find you have just sufficient freedom of movement to inject yourself with this, or if you prefer it, to push over the switch and electrocute yourself painlessly and immediately. The choice is yours."

He stopped and regarded his victim with interested eyes, trying to mark what emotions were racing through the young man's mind. Presently he resumed his lecture.

"You will have half an hour in which to make your decision."

With a great effort Sinclair threw off the horror that was seizing hold of him, and when he spoke he had succeeded in infusing some degree of calmness into his manner.

"But this is perfectly ridiculous," he protested. "I don't know whether you consider it a practical joke or not. If so, it seems to me to be in extraordinarily bad taste. In any case, I shall certainly refuse to make either one choice or the other."

The doctor looked down at him thoughtfully.

"I had anticipated that," he remarked. "For a time I was at some loss to devise a means which would force you to a choice. I think you will admit I have succeeded. In the days of your war service (and very distinguished service it was, permit me to say) you were doubtless familiar with the poison gases used by our enemies. To a man of science such devices have an element of crudity, and the gases used were not as powerful as they might have been. I have devoted some attention to that subject, and I think I may say that I have evolved a gas that is infinitely superior to anything used during the late war."

The doctor walked across to the corner of the room, and came back dragging with him a large metal cylinder, which he placed just in front of the other man.

"I have a supply of this gas here," he continued. "You will notice this wire."

He indicated a length of tubing.

"One end is attached to a tap-valve on the cylinder. The other end I shall attach to the clock in the corner of the room in such a manner that when the clock strikes the hour, the tap will automatically be opened and the gases released. I am quite sure that you, with your knowledge of the effect of even the comparatively inefficient German gases, will certainly make a definite choice rather than allow these gases to be released on you."

The doctor had never raised his voice. All the time he had spoken in a quiet, calm manner that served only to lend an added horror to the proceedings.

Sinclair passed his tongue over his lips, which had become quite dry.

"How am I to know the whole thing is not a bluff?" he demanded.

"It is, of course, very important that you should be convinced on that point," the doctor admitted. "Otherwise the whole psychological value of the experiment would be lost. I think

this little experiment will satisfy you.''

He disappeared behind Sinclair's chair. When he returned he was carrying a small metal cage.

''Here, as you see, I have a rat in a cage. Please watch what I do.''

After setting down the cage on a bench at some distance from Sinclair he came across to the chair. ''I now detach the terminals from your skull cap and attach them to the bars of this cage, so. Next I fasten this piece of rubber tubing to the tap of the gas cylinder, so. Now I connect this wire from the gas cylinder to the striker of the clock. We will move back the hands to two minutes to 9 for the purpose of this experiment . . . there. As we are dealing with only a very small animal, a whiff of gas will be sufficient, and I shall turn off the tap almost immediately. You will not require a mask, but it is as well to be on the safe side.''

He saturated a handkerchief with some liquid and tied it in front of Sinclair's mouth and nose. He then saturated a similar handkerchief for himself.

''This will protect us,'' he remarked. ''Now when I give the word, I want you to press your switch over. You see, I have adjusted the current of that also, to our needs.''

He made some adjustment of another switch.

''There is still one minute to go. Watch.''

THE next sixty seconds seemed an eternity to Sinclair, whose eyes wandered backwards and forwards between the clock and the doomed rat.

At last the clock began to strike, and as it did so, Sinclair observed that the wire had jerked open the gas cylinder. Almost immediately the doctor reached out a hand and closed it again. But the gas had already served its purpose. The mouth of the rubber tube leading from the cylinder had been within a few inches of the cage. Suddenly the rat rolled over on the floor of its cage and commenced to struggle violently.

For a moment the doctor watched its convulsions, then ''Switch on!'' he commanded suddenly.

Mechanically Sinclair pressed over the switch by his right hand. A blue spark flashed at the bars of the cage. The rat gave a tiny shiver and its struggle ceased forever.

''You see, it is quite dead,'' the doctor remarked. ''Switch off.''

For a minute there was silence in the room. The doctor busied himself refastening the electric terminals to Sinclair's skull cap and rearranging the mechanism of the clock, which he again set at the correct time: half past 9. When he had quite satisfied himself with these proceedings, he turned back to his victim.

''That the electrocuting machine and the gas cylinder, at least, are no bluff, I'm sure you are convinced. The injecting syringe may be, of course.''

Sinclair could feel the sweat breaking out on his forehead.

''But this is sheer murder!'' he made a last protest. ''Don't you realize that you will be hanged if I am found dead in this room?''

The doctor smiled.

''Your solicitude for my welfare is charming,'' he said. ''But he sure that the small knowledge of science to which I may perhaps lay claim has not left me without efficient means of disposing, both by electricity and by chemicals, of any trace of your body. Always supposing, of course, that your tastes lead you toward the electric switch. I shall leave you now. You have half an hour in which to make your choice. At 10 o'clock the gas cylinder will come into action. I shall come back a few seconds earlier to disconnect that, if you have already chosen. If not, be under no

delusion that I shall interfere. I give you my solemn word of honor that I shall not do so. I need hardly say that I await the result of your deliberations with the liveliest interest."

Ainsworth crossed toward the door. At the threshold he paused.

"Just one word more. The walls of this room are specially constructed to shut out from the rest of the house the noise of explosions that occasionally become necessary during my researches. To shout would be the merest waste of breath on your part."

A moment later the door had closed behind him.

4

ALMOST inevitably Sinclair employed the first few minutes of his half hour in shouting for help, only to discover that Ainsworth had spoken no more than the truth when he called the room sound-proof.

He soon desisted and attempted to focus his mind on his situation, but the horror of it was such that only with the greatest difficulty could he escape from the paralysis that had seized his brain. Sheer numbing terror gripped him. The grisly experiment with the rat had convinced him that it was indeed no bluff with which he was dealing. Meanwhile the hands of the clock inexorably traveled toward the moment when even deliberate choice would be denied him by an agency more terrible than either horn of his dilemma could be. Helplessly his eyes traveled from the switch, so conveniently close to his right hand, to the hypodermic syringe equally handy on his left.

Gradually he forced himself to realize that it must be one or the other.

He looked at the electric switch. Certain, instantaneous, painless, but —death.

The syringe looked harmless enough. Water perhaps. That would not do a fellow any harm—but then one couldn't be sure. One wouldn't even know afterwards, not for a year perhaps, not for two, three, four, or even longer. How could one go on, dreading from day to day the outbreak of some awful disease, like the man in the model. Good God! Death were better a thousand times than that! But on the other hand, there was always hope. "Hope springs eternal". Yes, and fear also.

Still, to die suddenly with all the world bright and inviting, and love...

This brought another aspect of the problem to his tortured mind.

Suppose he chose the syringe, and kept his life for the time at least: what was he to do with it? One couldn't marry, and have children, perhaps, with a thing like that, maybe, in one's blood. That dream was ended either way. Pretty damnable. Just what would life be like? Love shut off, fear sitting daily on one's shoulders. If one only knew when it would strike. But one would never know—never know. That was the constant tenor of his mental travail. Always his mind came back to that. One would never know.

After all, what was death? Clean, swift (when one had seen five years of war, death wasn't quite the staring horror it seemed to the man in the street). Pretty rotten, of course. One hated to be snuffed out like that, but there were worse things.

His mind went back by a freakish turn to the story of the captured spies who preferred the death they knew. He remembered his own unbelief.

"Damn it, the fellows were right!" he cried bitterly.

It was just three minutes to 10 when he shut his eyes tight, gave a little gasp, and pushed over the switch.

5

THE doctor had returned from the dining room. He had no intention of joining his niece until he knew the result of his experiment. He lit

himself another cigar, and sat down to wait and to speculate.

He was interrupted in this revery by his niece, who suddenly appeared at the door.

"However much longer are you going to be?" she demanded; then, coming into the room, she perceived that the doctor was alone. "Why! what have you done with Arthur?"

Dr. Ainsworth looked at his watch. It was a quarter to 10.

"We are having a little experiment, a very fascinating experiment," the doctor continued. "Listen, dear, and tell me what you think will be the outcome. For myself, I am unable to make up my mind."

He thereupon went over the facts of the case to the girl, speaking as he would have spoken of any other scientific experiment of his. He did not even notice the horror in his hearer's face.

"Why! You're murdering him, uncle!" she cried, springing up.

The doctor looked at her agitation with surprize. Then he smiled a slow smile.

"My dear, it's quite harmless," he said. "There is no danger. When I came out of the room, I disconnected the current of the batteries. He can do himself no harm."

"But the other thing! He may be choosing that!"

Ainsworth laughed outright.

"Water, dear, water. I shall, of course, tell him afterwards, when he has made his choice. There only remains the gas, and that is disconnected also. You see, dear, it is quite bloodless."

The clock then pointed to five minutes to 10.

"Oh, hurry, uncle, hurry!" the girl panted. "It's torture! I think you must be mad. It's cruel—cruel!"

"On the contrary, dear, it is as fascinating an experiment as any I have undertaken. Doubtless he is making his decision now."

He had allowed the girl to drag him upstairs.

"I have always supposed that experiments with the human mind would be of all experiments the most fascinating, and I see now that I was right in supposing so," he remarked on the way up.

"By the way, if by any chance this young man of yours has chosen to face the uncertainty of the injection, and if, suspecting his blood to be tainted, he asks to be released from his engagement to you, before knowing the injection to be harmless, I shall entirely withdraw my opposition to your marriage. A most fascinating problem."

He had reached the door of the laboratory and fumbled with the handle.

"Oh, hurry, uncle, hurry. He must have had such a terrible fright."

The old man chuckled, "I dare say he has."

He had.

When they reached him, he was quite dead.

AS OBLIGATED

by Armstrong Livingston

1. *The Bathroom Bell.*

SIR GEOFFREY COOMBE, Bart., snorted contentedly as his round bald head and his plump white shoulders emerged above the waters of his morning tub; without troubling to open his eyes, he reached over the edge of his porcelain container and groped blindly along the length of the heated towel rail. Then he snorted again, in a very different key. The second housemaid, derelict in her duty, had evidently neglected to place any towels upon the device intended for them; worse than that, a more thorough examination through reluctantly opened eyes showed that there were no towels in the room at all.

Of all life's little misadventures, this is admittedly one of the most annoying. The baronet was on the point of being very annoyed indeed, until his eye chanced to fall upon the button of an electric bell that was placed in the wall at the side of the tub. A sudden smile came to his face instead of the threatened frown, and his blue eyes were twinkling as he reached up and pressed firmly upon the button.

"That's one to Hodgkins!" he murmured good-humoredly. "I must tell the old chap about it the next time I see him. He'll be tremendously bucked."

When he had added this new and perfectly equipped bathroom to the ancient country seat of his fathers, that bell had been a bone of contention between Hodgkins and himself. The baronet, weary of antiquated appliances, had drawn the plans of the room himself to the end that they might be perfect, and with the aid of a London catalogue of modern lavatory fixtures, plus his own vivid imagination, he had succeeded admirably. He was proud of those plans. . . .

Of course the task of executing them had fallen to the lot of Hodgkins, the village plumber. Any other arrangement would have been manifestly improper. Hodgkins was a tradition. Ever since plumbing had been invented a Hodgkins had been plumber for a Coombe, just as a Stubbs had always supplied the meat and a Smith the groceries. The system worked excellently for all concerned: the village profited by the patronage of the Hall, and the Hall benefited by good meat and groceries and plumbing. Traditions, properly adhered to, have a practical as well as a sentimental value.

Hodgkins had glanced over the plans and warmly approved them. A glow of pride suffused the amateur draftsman's being, to be presently chilled by a growing doubt in the plumber's eye.

"You've not allowed for a bell, Sir Geoffrey."

"A bell in a bathroom? Don't be silly, Hodgkins!"

"It's not silly, sir. You'll want a bell—there."

Hodgkins had jabbed at the neat plan with a sadly maculate finger, and when he removed it there was no difficulty in finding the spot he had indicated.

"Just where you can reach it from the tub. Handylike."

"Absurd! Have you no sense of decency, Hodgkins? Under what conceivable circumstances would a man in a tub want to ring a bell—especially if he knew it was bound to be answered by a housemaid?"

Hodgkins accepted the implied challenge with gusto. He began to enumerate a series of hypothetical cases in which a bell by the bathtub might be most useful, and when he presently showed signs of deserving the reputation he had in the local Conservative Club of being its most eloquent and long-winded member, the baronet threw up his hands in despair.

"Have it your own way! I can always tie a bow of pink ribbon on it and pretend it's a mural decoration."

"Yes, sir."

Hodgkins, having gained his point, magnanimously proceeded to explain his insistence.

"You'll not regret it, Sir Geoffrey. You see, sir, it's like this: my father always did his best for your father, and my grandfather for yours before that, and now it's up to me to do the best I can for you. So when my judgment tells me you *ought* to have a bell in that bathroom, I'm just plain obligated to say so!"

"Thank you, Hodgkins," replied the baronet gravely, and not ungratefully. He might reserve his private opinion about the matter in dispute, but he could also appreciate the stubborn determination of the old plumber to do his best for the Coombe family. "It is really a pleasure nowadays to meet anyone who takes the interest in his work that you do."

Sir Geoffrey, twiddling his toes in the bath while waiting an answer to his summons, smiled as he recalled that conversation with Hodgkins. The smile faded slowly away as he reflected that quite an interval had elapsed since he rang, and that the water in the tub was getting deucedly chilly. He reached for the bell again, and this time his finger lingered on the button with a pertinacity that he devoutly hoped would cause consternation in the servants' hall. . . .

He had not entirely regained his poise when he bustled into the breakfast room and seated himself at the table. His wife was already in her place at the other end, deftly sorting the morning mail.

"Henrietta," he began promptly, "I wish you would please send word to Hodgkins that the bell in my bathroom doesn't work. I rang three times this morning for towels, and nothing happened. It was most embarrassing. I had to scuttle to my dressing room, dripping like a—like a half-drowned rabbit!"

"Very well, Geoffrey, I will have it attended to," answered Lady Coombe soothingly.

She paused in her shuffling of the mail to examine an envelope.

"Here's a letter to you from the Psychical Society!"

"I was expecting it. I met Matthews, the secretary, the other day, and he told me they were going to invite me to address them some evening this week."

"Really!"

Lady Coombe's slender eyebrows were delicately arched for an instant, but they straightened again as she remembered that her husband was an astute politician.

"They control some votes, I suppose?"

"Possibly in the next world," said Sir Geoffrey, and added with a little chuckle: "Of course there's no reason why a far-sighted statesman shouldn't build up a constituency there—in advance!"

She ignored his flippancy, but the eloquent brows signaled her amusement at his new hobby.

"Is it possible that you are a believer in spooks?" she asked, mildly derisive. "At your age? Really!"

"I'm—interested. Frankly, I am. One hears such extraordinary stories. . . . There must be some truth in these well-authenticated cases of apparently inexplicable phenomena."

"One hears!" she repeated skeptically. "But does one ever experience?"

"Ah, that's it," admitted Sir Geoffrey readily. "Listening to another man's account of a 'manifestation' is not like having one of your own. But I'm afraid I'm not the sort of a person to attract a spook!" he ended with a sigh.

Lady Coombe surveyed his plump, matter-of-fact face good-humoredly.

"No, Geoffrey, I don't think you are!"

She picked another letter from the pile beside her.

"Here's a dinner invitation from Agatha. Of course we'll accept...."

2. *The Bell Bewitched.*

IN THESE days of international conferences, a serious politician's life is not his own. Sir Geoffrey Coombe, who had expected to spend many pleasant week-ends at Coombe Hall, found himself fluctuating instead between London, Geneva, and Cannes—and other hospitable points. Fully six months had gone by before he and Lady Coombe returned to the Hall, glad to escape from the turmoil of London life and photographers. This was real comfort.

While he was taking his bath next morning Sir Geoffrey's eyes inevitably rested upon the bell-button so conveniently placed beside the porcelain tub. It was equally inevitable that his mind should revert to that unhappy morning when he had scurried through the hall to the haven of his dressing room.

"Wonder if it has been fixed?" he mused.

He could think of no excuse for ringing at that moment, and he was a kindly man who did not like to disturb his servants unnecessarily. But the question stuck in his mind all the time that he was shaving and dressing, and when his morning toilet was finally complete he decided to have it answered. He went back to the bathroom and pressed the bell. . . .

After some moments he rang again, and a little later a third time. Then he went into another room and rang the bell there. A maid appeared with commendable punctuality.

"I've just rung three times from the bathroom," he told her severely. "Why did no one answer?"

"It couldn't have rung, Sir Geoffrey," answered the girl. "I've been right in the pantry, and I must have heard it if it had. Did you want something, sir?"

"I wanted to know just that," said the baronet grimly. "Thank you, Jane."

He came into the calm serenity of the breakfast room like a thundercloud.

"Henrietta, did you tell Hodgkins about that bell in my bathroom?"

"I spoke to the housekeeper, certainly," replied his wife tranquilly. "It must be all right now."

"Well, it's not!"

"Then I will speak to Mrs. Smith again."

Like a good housewife, she reported the result of her inquiry at dinner that evening.

"Mrs. Smith tells me that she referred the matter of your bell to Hodgkins. He was quite upset."

"I'll send him a card of sympathy," said her husband crossly. "I'm upset myself, and can feel for him."

"He came to the house two or three times, while we were away. He tinkered with it, but couldn't find the trouble."

"It's an electrician's job," commented Sir Geoffrey absently.

He was wondering why these modern cooks sent up a brown dressing with a chicken instead of a white.

"It serves me right for leaving that bathroom to the tender mercies of a village plumber!"

"Don't be silly."

Lady Coombe helped herself liberally to the salad—she was conservative in everything else.

"You could have done nothing else. Hodgkins would have been mortally offended. His father worked for your father, and his grandfather—"

"Worked for my grandfather!" groaned the baronet. "I've heard it all from Hodgkins himself, Henrietta!"

"It's rather fine, though, when you come to think of it," said Lady Coombe thoughtfully. "Hodgkins represents a generation that is dying out—the generation that did its work, and was humiliated if that work wasn't satisfactory. He told Mrs. Smith one day that such a thing had never happened before; that neither he, nor his father, nor his grandfather, had ever been obliged—he called it 'obligated'—to remedy any work done at the Hall."

"Well, he hasn't remedied it yet," grumbled the baronet.

"How are the spooks getting on?" asked Lady Coombe softly.

Sir Geoffrey looked mildly surprized at the sudden change of subject; a little suspicious, too, for his wife had recently derived a lot of quiet amusement from what she called 'spoofing spouse's spooks.' Before he could reply, she explained the connection.

"I was thinking of your Psychical Society," she said dryly. "I thought you might like to tell them about your bathroom bell, because Hodgkins swears it is bewitched!"

AGAIN Sir Geoffrey's presence was required in London, and once more several months slipped by before the Hall was warmed and aired throughout to receive its master.

This time he did not have to be reminded of the bell that had refused to respond to the pressure of his august finger. Curiously enough, the thought of that bell had continuously cropped up in his mind even during the stress of the past few months—and some of them had been very stressful indeed. Whenever a bell had rung for anything, he had been reminded of a bell that would not ring for towels. . . .

Fortuitously, on the afternoon of his arrival at Coombe Hall, he met the housekeeper in a darkened corridor of the old house.

"Oh—Mrs. Smith! Has that bell in my bathroom ever been put in order?"

"I'm sorry, Sir Geoffrey, but I don't think it has. Hodgkins—the plumber, you know, sir—has been here several times. But—"

"Confound Hodgkins!" cried the baronet angrily. "Hodgkins is an antediluvian fossil who doesn't know a brass washer from a tin bathtub!"

His voice rose high, and even in that dim light the startled housekeeper could see that his face was growing purple.

"Why did you call in Hodgkins? Why didn't you get somebody with some sense? I know that Lady Coombe left it to you. Why haven't you attended to it? What are housekeepers coming to? Oh, Lord—why does a sane man *have* a housekeeper?"

He went down the corridor without waiting for an answer to this conundrum. Mrs. Smith was staggered by the violence of the assault, which was as unexpected coming from him as if it had come from the tweeny and by no means more to be endured by a hard-working self-respecting woman with three children and a husband to support. . . . Before she could frame a crushing reply, she was staring down an empty corridor, and her honest brain had arrived at a just appreciation of the trouble. She recalled a few anxious remarks that Her Ladyship had dropped anent her husband's health. Politics had been very trying of late; Sir Geoffrey was no longer a young man; the doctors had warned him very gravely. Mrs. Smith mechanically pulled up her skirt and wrung her hands thereon, a custom that she had not thought of for twenty years.

"Poor dear!" she murmured sympathetically. "If only you wasn't a sick man—!"

Sir Geoffrey ate a very hearty dinner that evening, his appetite obviously improved by the fresh country air. Presumably it was still further improved by the fact that his doctor had sternly tabooed one or two of the dishes to which he helped himself twice. He remonstrated feebly across the table with a pair of eyebrows.

"Nonsense, my dear, nonsense! I feel like a two-year-old Clydesdale!"

He glanced sideways.

"Don't stand there like a graven image, Parkins; don't you see I want some more claret?"

"Go on, Geoffrey!" urged his wife bitterly. "Make an idiot of yourself, do! But don't forget to take a notebook to bed with you; it will be so useful at the next meeting of the Psychical Society when you try to describe your grandmother's ghost!"

He did in truth spend a restless, storm-tossed night. If he felt like a Clydesdale at all in the morning it must have been a very elderly specimen indeed. He swayed slightly as he got out of bed, and his hands gripped the footboard while he steadied himself.

"Gad!" he muttered. "My digestion must be properly out of whack!"

He clung to his base an instant longer.

"These doctors aren't such fools as we like to think 'em!"

A dim memory stirred in him to the effect that a hot bath is good for indigestion. He went to his bathroom, turned on the taps, and ran the tub full of water as hot as he could comfortably bear it. He discarded pajamas and wrapper, kicked off his slippers, and luxuriously submerged his body in the warm depths. . . .

He hardly knew what happened after that. A terrible pulse throbbed in his brain; a mist swam before his eyes; a chill raced from his head to his feet. Vaguely, he realized that he was ill—very ill—*dangerously* ill! Frightened, he flung a finger toward the bell beside the tub, and as he pressed it he remembered that it did not ring. . . .

That was his last thought before he lost consciousness. The room circled about him, a panorama of porcelain and white tile. His body relaxed into the tub, and the agitated water presently calmed above his face. . . .

3. *As Obligated.*

THAT was the beginning of a serious illness for Sir Geoffrey. A month, two months, passed. Life fought against death. The grim shadow hovered dangerously close for a time, then lifted, then returned again to frighten the watchers by the bed, and finally drifted away to bide a better opportunity. June found Sir Geoffrey able to sit up in his own room; in July, the doctors permitted short excursions in a wheeled chair through the beautiful grounds of Coombe Hall.

It was on a sunny morning in the latter month that the invalid first betrayed an awakening interest in his surroundings. Through the lingering days of convalescence he had led an apathetic, almost somnolent existence, answering with a perceptible effort when spoken to, and never speaking of his own initiative. But this morning, warmed by the sunshine, his tired eyes brightened and a touch of color crept into his sunken cheeks. He lifted his head and spoke over his shoulder to the old ex-soldier who was quietly propelling the chair.

"Saunders, I'm bored with this confounded park! Are you strong enough to wheel me as far as the village?"

"Plenty strong enough, Sir Geoffrey. Bless you, sir, you don't weigh no more than a feather, and these new chairs move along at the touch of a finger."

The touch of a finger. . . . The phrase struck upon Sir Geoffrey's ear with odd force, and he idly pondered the words while he was rolled along. He vaguely felt that there was some dormant memory in his mind that should have been awakened by their sense, but the memory stubbornly remained asleep. Presently, with the impatience of an invalid, he gave up the futile effort to recollect.

They proceeded slowly the length of the beautiful drive, passed through the handsome gates, and slipped into the main street of the neat little village that lay beyond. Women and children came to the doors of the tidy cottages; men stopped their work to grin bashfully and touch their hats. One and all, they were glad to see the baronet out again, and he, brightened by their welcome, nodded and smiled his appreciation. But suddenly, as they came abreast of a small shop, he straightened in his chair and spoke sharply to his attentive nurse.

"Hullo, Saunders! What's this? Why is there a new sign over Hodgkins' place?"

"Hodgkins, sir? Why, he's been dead this matter of two months or more. Went out very sudden, sir. I think the doctor said it was his heart. His widow sold the business, sir, and that's why there's a new sign over the door."

"Dead! Hodgkins dead!"

Sir Geoffrey's voice was shocked.

"I'm very sorry to hear that."

He was silent a moment, thinking of the man who had taken that path which he himself had so nearly followed.

"I would like to see Mrs. Hodgkins, Saunders. Where does she live? Is it far?"

"It's right across the street, Sir Geoffrey."

The old soldier twisted the chair as he spoke, and in another moment brought it to a standstill before a cottage door. A woman came out, gaunt, dull-eyed, black-garmented. She looked straight at the man in the chair, and there was an appreciable interval between her recognition of Sir Geoffrey and the curtsey she dropped.

"I'm glad to see you up again, Sir Geoffrey," she said.

"Thank you, Mrs. Hodgkins . . . I've only just heard of your loss, and I've come to tell you how sorry I am. I did not even know that your husband had been ill."

"He was hardly that, sir, but he'd been depressed like for a few months."

She hesitated, and added in a low tone with an edge of bitterness in it: "It seemed to me that he was never the same man since the time that bell went wrong at the Hall."

"Eh? What?"

Sir Geoffrey, wincing as if from a blow, leaned back in his chair and half closed his eyes. The clear sunlight bathed the little group by the cottage door, bringing out the stern, unrelenting lines of the woman's face and revealing the minute wrinkles of pain that twitched at the corners of Sir Geoffrey's mouth. It was Saunders, mindful of his trust, who broke the silence. A righteous indignation quivered in his speech.

"You've no business to say such things to Sir Geoffrey, and him as ill as he is."

He made an impatient movement as if to wheel his charge out of this danger zone, but the baronet opened his eyes and checked the old soldier's impulse with a prohibitory motion of his hand.

"What do you mean, Mrs. Hodgkins?" he asked gently.

The rebuke from Saunders had startled the woman into a softer mood. Her attitude became faintly apologetic, and she looked a little frightened as she marked the effect of her words in the baronet's altered features.

"I'm sure I'm sorry if I'm talking nonsense, sir, but it's only what I think to be the—the truth. I know he felt downhearted about that bell. . . ."

"I am distressed to hear you say so, Mrs. Hodgkins. I sincerely trust you are mistaken. After all, the thing was but a trifle."

"Not to him, sir; he was always one who took great pride in his work," answered the widow with quiet dignity. "That was why your bell upset him so. It preyed on his mind, sir. I could tell from the way he talked about it, and from the way he acted a dozen times or more when he'd come back from the Hall without having been able to fix it. The night before he died he ate a very hearty supper, sir, and *that* was what killed him, according to the doctor. I suppose he ought to know. But just the same, the last words he ever spoke in this world were about that bell."

The baronet said nothing for a moment. From behind the chair Saunders glared ineffectively; the woman was fascinated, to the exclusion of all else, by the expression of Sir Geoffrey's face.

"Go on, Mrs. Hodgkins: what did he say?"

"He'd had a very bad night, sir. Restless. . . . About 8 o'clock in the morning I was getting him a bite of breakfast, thinking that something warm would do him good, when I heard him call me from the bedroom. I went in and put my arm beneath his shoulders. 'What is it, Henry?' I asked. 'I've been thinkin' about that bell at the Hall, Maria,' he said. 'I do wish I could have got that fixed up, as obligated. . . .' 'You'll have plenty of time to see to that,' I told him. 'No, I won't, wife,' he said, 'I'm goin' fast now.' It was on the tip of me tongue to tell him to stop his foolishness, when I felt him stiffen in me arms. His eyes were set, sir, like a person who's listening to something far off. 'He's ringin' now, Maria!' he said, sort as if he was chokin'. 'Can't you hear him? Sir Geoffrey's ringin' *now*, and he wants an answer pretty bad!' "

The baronet, his hands clenched on the arms of his chair, waited for the woman to control her emotion. Her worn face was working pitifully.

"And then, Mrs. Hodgkins?"

"Why—that was all, sir. He'd no sooner finished speaking than he fell back dead against my arm."

"What . . day . . was . . that?"

"May third, sir, a little after 8 in the morning."

Sir Geoffrey tried to think, tried to remember, but presently abandoned the effort. He covered his eyes with one shaking hand.

"It is all most distressing, Mrs. Hodgkins—most distressing. I cannot tell you. . . . You have my deepest sympathy, as you must know. If there is anything that Lady Coombe or I can do, you must certainly tell us. . . ."

He stammered out the awkward phrases, halted, and abruptly turned to his glowering attendant.

"Back to the Hall, Saunders. I am tired. . . ."

He was very still on the way home; so still that the conscientious Saunders wheeled the chair as rapidly as was consistent with comfort, his loyal heart filled with self-reproach because he had ventured to take his charge beyond the confines of the quiet park. But beneath the surface calm the invalid's mind was working rapidly, and he was no sooner back in his own room than he spoke crisply to his faithful companion.

"Saunders!"

"Yes, Sir Geoffrey."

"What day was I taken ill?"

"Well, sir, I—I wasn't here then—"

"You must have heard."

"Yes, sir, so I have. The other servants have mentioned it. It was May third, sir."

"That's what I thought. But everything seems so hazy. . . . Saunders, I want you to do something for me."

"Yes, Sir Geoffrey?"

"I want you to go into my bathroom and ring the bell beside the tub. Come back and let me know if it is in order."

"Yes, Sir Geoffrey."

At the end of five minutes Saunders returned from his mission.

"It is not, Sir Geoffrey. I tried it twice, and waited, but nobody came."

"Thank you, Saunders. That is all."

THE convalescent was very quiet for the rest of the morning and for the better part of the afternoon. Yet it was not the quiet of an invalid who is fatigued so much as the quiet of a man who is deep in thought. At 5 o'clock he volunteered to Saunders the information that he felt much stronger. At 6, the whole household was electrified by the announcement that Sir Geoffrey had sent for the mail which had accumulated during his illness.

He was hardly half way through the pile of correspondence when 7 o'clock arrived, and with it his evening meal of weak tea, toast, and soft-boiled eggs. In their wake came Lady Coombe, whose custom it had been to have a tray in her husband's room since he had been able to sit up. She opened his eggs, buttered his toast, and fussed about him generally until she was assured of his comfort.

"You're feeling better, Geoffrey?"

"Much better, my dear." He continued to slit envelopes. "By the way, Henrietta, how long have I been ill?"

"Since May third. The doctors warned you, you know, and they think the hot bath you took that morning—"

"Ah, yes! That bath! I can't seem to remember much after I got into it. I lost consciousness, I suppose?"

"Lost *consciousness!* My dear Geoffrey, you nearly *drowned!* The servants heard you ring, thank heaven, and got you out just in time."

"They heard me—what?"

"Ring. You must have rung just before you fainted."

"Then, the bell—rang!"

"Of course. Oh—!" She suddenly remembered. "I'd forgotten! It was that bell which gave poor Hodgkins so much trouble, wasn't it? He must have fixed it just in time. . . . Oh, Geoffrey, suppose he *hadn't!* And now—and now he's dead! Did you know that, Geoffrey?"

"Yes, I heard so today."

The answer came from him mechanically. He had been opening letters while they talked, and at that moment he had reached one which he held for a second in his hand. He was not given to premonitions, but he was seized with a perfectly genuine one as he read the neat letterhead at the top of the sheet. It was with something of an effort that he drew his eyes from the conventional form of address, from the opening lines that expressed regret at his illness, and fixed them upon the paragraph which was the meat of the communication.

"I must tell you something which I am sure will interest you very much, as I have often heard you wish that you personally might receive some message from the other side. At a recent séance, held by some members of this society, a message came through that was clearly sent to you. It was very indistinct, very cloudy, as though coming from one who had only just passed over. The name of the sender was doubtful; it might have been Hodges, or Hopkins. The message itself was quite incoherent. It seemed to refer to a *bell,* and two words, steadily reiterated, finally resolved themselves into *'as obligated'*. It will be most interesting if you can throw any light on this evident attempt to communicate."

Sir Geoffrey, a little shaken, stared at the letter. He continued to stare until his wife reminded him that the eggs were getting cold. . . .

THE BROWN MOCCASIN

A Tragicomedy of Animal Life

By DAVID BAXTER

The great armored loggerhead umpired the contest and a score of brilliant dragonflies flew over the pool and watched as the mud puppy fought with the dreaded brown Kansas watersnake. And it was the alligator turtle that won out in this struggle between the moccasin and the salamander.

In WEIRD TALES next month

ON SALE AT ALL NEWS STANDS JANUARY FIRST

STRANGE tales are told of the rajah of Lacra-Kai, of the justice he dealt, of the rewards he gave; but the strangest of all these many tales is that of the gift he gave to Zaid, the Persian who had served him long and well. A crafty man was the rajah, an eastern Machiavelli who by his devices had retained the sovereignty of his petty state almost unimpaired by British rule; a keen, shrewd diplomat, a polished cosmopolitan, an oriental wearing a thick veneer of European culture. In short, he was an enlightened monarch, a tributary prince who was left quite to his own devices as regarded the internal administration of his state. But it is of his gift to Zaid whereof we are to deal.

In the privacy of his palace, screened from the view of his people, the rajah was quite European, dispensing with the pomp and glitter and formality that is supposed to surround all eastern potentates at all times. Therefore it was that Zaid the Persian, who had served his master long and well, not only sat, but also smoked in the royal presence as he listened to the words of his lord.

"Zaid," the prince was saying, "but for your courage and fidelity I would surely have been assassinated; therefore have I summoned you this afternoon so that you may receive some token of my gratitude. Name whatsoever you desire and it shall be yours, for I mean to reward you richly."

"My lord," replied Zaid, "there is but one request that I would make, and that is mad beyond all conception of madness. . . ."

"Nevertheless, let me hear it; tell me what is on your mind. Forget that I am rajah of Lacra-Kai, and consider me but as your friend who is indebted to you; therefore speak freely."

"For ten years I have been favored by your munificence," began Zaid, speaking slowly. "For ten years I have been the friend of kings; but all that is nothing."

Zaid paused. A far-away look had crept over his features; he seemed to be gazing through and beyond the rajah, and back to some dimly remembered, almost forgotten episode of the past. And then, picking his words as one groping in the dark picks his

steps, he told how, twenty years previous, he had stood on the edge of the crowd in the square before the great temple of Kali, awaiting the arrival of the procession at whose head the present rajah would be riding. Zaid, a boy scarcely a dozen years old, ragged, dirty, half starved, part of the scum of an eastern city, stood that day to watch the rajah ride past in state. All the color and magnificence, all the barbaric pomp of that oriental court was there, dazzling, the concentrated, fiery splendor that marked a prince's accession to his throne. And all this the boy saw, yet saw not, for he had eyes for none but the rajah. High above the crowd, on the back of a great elephant he sat, dark, calm, impassive, and arrogant as a god. Not as a man, exultant, but rather as some high, passionless fate solemnly advancing across the wastes of space. The prince was oblivious of the pomp and splendor, oblivious of the tumult and applause: on that day it seemed to Zaid that he saw not a man, but destiny itself in march. And as the rajah drew near, the great temple gong clanged with a reverberation that seemed to shake the very base of the universe; a strange, unearthly vibration that mingled with the resonance of brass the hiss of serpents and the rustle of silk; a sound that rose and fell, resonant, sonorous, awful. Through all this the rajah sat calm and inscrutable, above all exultation, above all human emotion. But at the sound of that gong, at the sight of that hard, impassive face, a great madness possessed Zaid, so that his blood became as a stream of flame. And he swore that he, too, would some day ride in such a procession, would bear himself with that same godlike hauteur, that same superb arrogance; he, Zaid, hungry beggar lad and scum of the streets, dared have such a vision.

Silent were the gongs; vanished the procession; and the new rajah ruled in Lacra-Kai. But with Zaid the vision remained, following him over half the earth, and returning with him to Lacra-Kai, where, ten years later, he entered the service of that same rajah, and, by strange turns of fortune, rose to rank and power in that same court; for in the East all things are possible. Who has not heard of the blacksmith who founded the Sassanian dynasty that once ruled Persia?

Such was the tale Zaid told the rajah.

"AS STRANGE a tale as I have ever heard," mused the prince. "You have indeed prospered." Then, suddenly, "And all this is apropos of what?"

Zaid started, as one waking from a dream, then laughed oddly.

"Hear my desire, then deal with me as you will. For twenty years that vision has haunted me. Much has happened since then; much have I seen and experienced, but through it all, this mad desire has persisted. And at last it happened that I entered your service, and that, having served you well, it has pleased you to grant me whatsoever I might desire. Therefore, seeing that this great madness has haunted me all these years, I make this request: that I be permitted to ride in state as I saw you ride twenty years ago, so that I may fulfil the oath I then swore."

Whereat the rajah replied in the tone of one who denies some child a dangerous toy: "Fool! To grant you that favor would be to sign your death-warrant. Were you to ride thus at noon, poison or dagger would find you before dawn; for no man may enjoy such a mark of favor and live. What? Have you lived in this land all these years and do not realize the penalty you would pay? Consider a moment: my son is dead; the succession to the throne lay among my three nephews. One of them sought

to hasten his succession. The plot was discovered, and the plotter I punished by showing him a mark of extraordinary favor. Immediately it was rumored about that I had selected him as my heir; and within ten days he died. But not by my command, for that was superfluous. The princes of the blood, and the lords of the court. . . .''

The rajah made a suggestive, sweeping gesture with his hand, then continued, ''Me you were able to save from assassination; yourself you could not save, nor could I save you. You would ride in state; rumors would drift about. And you know the rest.''

''Even so, my lord; I know the rest. But I will take my chance. It is not good for a man to cherish a vision, however mad, without having made some effort to attain it.''

''Think again, Zaid, think again! Cast aside your insanity. Choose whatsoever else you will . . . a lakh of rupees . . . . ten lakhs if you will . . . . jewels the like of which you have never dreamed . . . . and I have a dancing girl whose equal is not to be found in the entire world . . . . all this, and more, is yours, for you have served me well; it is to you that I owe my life. Be reasonable, friend, be reasonable.''

''Be reasonable? That is the one command I can not obey, for in me there is no reason. This mad vision has haunted me entirely too long. So, though it may cost me my life, as surely it may, let me see it to a finish. For there at least would be a roundness, a completeness to my career that in no way else could I attain. In the square before the great temple of Kali I found the inspiration that led me to enter your service, to attain your favor, to serve you well; and in that same square, if need be, I will meet my doom. The cycle will be complete. After that, let come what may, for I shall have cheated destiny of the rare gift of satisfaction, the gift so often denied to kings. And after all, is the assassin so sure of finding me? Is that conclusion inevitable?''

The rajah smiled as one upon whom great understanding has suddenly descended.

''Zaid,'' he said, ''you are more than ever a man after my own heart. Mad you are, stark mad and raving; I understand, for I, too, have been haunted by visions. But none has understood my thoughts, even as none would understand your mad desire. It would be misconstrued, and . . . . you know the result.''

SUDDENLY the rajah arose.

''Come, Zaid, let me tempt you with the things I have but named.''

And Zaid was led through subterranean vaults, treasure vaults full of gilded arms and armor, trays of flaming jewels, great chests of age-old coins, dinars and mohurs of gold, the secreted plunder of a hundred generations.

''All this leaves you unmoved? Then let me try again.''

The Persian accompanied his master to the very heart of the palace, to a hall overshadowed with twilight —a broad, spacious hall whose walls were curiously carved with strange figures in unnamably odd postures. engaged in unmentionable diversions. And then his ears were caressed by the soft, sensuously wailing notes of reed and stringed instruments: his senses were stirred by the dull pulsing of atabals, throbbing like a heart racked with passion. And through the purple gloom of incense fumes he saw the lithe, swaying, gilded bodies of dancing girls, slim and wondrously beautiful. One, emerging from the figures of the dance, slowly advanced and made obeisance before the rajah.

''And this is Nilofal, the matchless bayadere, she whose equal is not to be found in the entire world. Should she please you. . . .''

The Persian, lost in admiration, saw that she was perfection incarnate, outstripping the maddest flight of the most voluptuous fancy. But when he turned to reply, the rajah had disappeared; and the door through which they had entered was barred.

What allurements, what sorceries, what fascinations Nilofal used to entice the fancy of Zaid during those three days, we shall never know. Suffice it to say that she failed in her efforts to separate the Persian from his madness.

Once again Zaid stood before the rajah, who smiled with the air of one whose cleverness has just reaped its reward in the solution of a difficult problem.

"What now, Zaid? Was Nilofal to your taste? Surely she must have been; and certainly she is worth all the dreams that have haunted men since the beginning of time."

"My lord," replied the Persian, "you have tempted me as man has never before been tempted; yet am I to sacrifice the vision of twenty years in favor of a treasure vault and a lupanar? Although you may refuse it, I nevertheless hold fast to my first desire."

"So be it then; and tomorrow at noon you shall see it satisfied."

And then and there were preparations made for Zaid to ride in royal state through the streets of Lacra-Kai.

NOON the next day. The rajah, watching from the roof of his palace, saw Zaid in the gilded howdah, mounted on the great elephant that carried none but princes of the blood. Calm and serene and godlike sat the Persian: a king he seemed, and the descendant of a hundred kings, for at that moment he was about to fulfil his destiny. Once again a great understanding descended upon the rajah.

"It was wrong indeed that I tried to dissuade him," reflected the rajah, "for whatever the end may be, it will be as nothing; Zaid is about to accomplish that which he set out to do when he was a beggar, a hungry, nameless urchin. There is something great and heroic in this madness .... but what will happen when he passes the temple of Kali? Can he ever become a man again? .... for in his madness he is more than a man; he has overturned destiny to fulfil a childish fancy. . . ."

And the prince, watching the procession get under way, was lost in admiration of the man who for half an hour would be rajah.

"And having attained his dream, will not the man Zaid have died, though he live a hundred years thereafter in security? And what would life mean to him?"

The procession, turning, had taken Zaid from the rajah's view. Bestirring himself from his revery, he whispered a few words to Al Tarik, his trusted servant.

".... And do not fail me in the slightest detail."

The rajah repeated his instructions. Al Tarik departed. And in the meanwhile, Zaid rode to the fulfilment of his dream.

Through the streets of Lacra-Kai the procession wound. The Persian, as in a dream, bore himself not as a man but as the avatar of some god returning to judge the world. Vanity? A love of pomp? No; surely not that. Rather was it that strange madness that overwhelms men when they snatch from fate the achievement of a vision. On and on he rode, like the slow, sure march of destiny, immutable, irresistible. And but one thought flitted through his brain, the words of some long forgotten sage: "When indeed they do grant to a man the realization of his dream, they straightway reach forth to snatch from him his prize, lest in his triumph he become godlike and gaily toss them from their lofty thrones." His lips curled

in the shadow of a smile, for swift indeed would have to be their envy to defeat him; the great temple of Kali was at hand. He was approaching the square where, twenty years ago, an obscure nobody, a starving beggar, a mere boy, he had seen the vision that now was materializing. And then the great gong in the temple rang, reverberating like the crash of doom, filling the entire universe with its shivering resonance—full-throated, colossal, then hissing with the rustle of silk—a sound that swelled, and died, and rose again.

As slowly as some animated Juggernaut the royal elephant advanced, pace by pace, deliberately, majestically, as though each step took him from world to world. And again the gong, touched to life by the mallet wielded by a temple slave, rolled forth its sonorous, vibrant crash.

A few more steps, and Zaid, the Persian, whom the rajah loved to honor, was before the temple of Kali. High and arrogant was he, as Rama going forth to conquer the world; no longer a man, but transfigured beyond recognition. Again the temple gong gave forth its vibrant note, reverberant, awful; diminishing, then rising and swelling again. And the god, who but half an hour before had been Zaid, the Persian, toppled forward in the gilded howdah. The last roll of the gong had masked the smacking report of a high-powered rifle.

THAT evening the rajah gazed at the body of the man who had served him well, the man he had esteemed and loved as a friend. Pity and sorrow were on his lean, hard features; but regret was absent.

"A king and more than a king," he soliloquized, as he regarded the still, transfigured face of the Persian. "A madman, perhaps—or the avatar of a god, for by his own efforts he rounded his destiny. The cycle is complete, from the temple of Kali, and back again; the circle has closed upon itself. Yes, it is well that I commanded Al Tarik to fire before Zaid endured the agony of becoming mortal again. . . ."

Such was the gift of the rajah of Lacra-Kai. Yet once, at least, though he did not know it, the rajah had made a futile move: the shot of Al Tarik had missed; and there was no wound on the Persian's body.

In WEIRD TALES for February

Wanderlust by Proxy

By WILL SMITH

The most bizarre story ever written around radio. One of the strangest of all strange tales

On Sale At All News Stands January First

Author of "Tea Leaves" and "The Door"

WHEN the Planter's Hotel in Jackson, Mississippi, burned to the ground in the notable fire of 1922, the loss to that section of the South could not be measured in terms of that ancient hostelry's former grandeur. The days had indeed long passed when a Virginia ham was therein stewed in no medium meaner than good white wine; and as the rambling old building was heavily insured, the owners suffered no great material loss. The real loss was the community's, in the deaths by fire of two of its prominent citizens, Lieutenant-Governor Frank Stacpoole and Mayor Cassius L. Turner. These gentlemen, just turning elderly, had been having a reunion in the hotel with two of their old associates, Judge Varney J. Baker of Memphis, Tennessee, and the Honorable Valdemar Peale, a prominent Georgian, from Atlanta. Thus, two other Southern cities had a share in the mourning, for Judge Baker and Mr. Peale both likewise perished in the flames. The fire took place just before Christmas, on the 23d of December, and among the many sympathetic and regretful comments which ensued upon this holocaust was the many-times-repeated conjecture that these gentlemen had been keeping a kind of Christmas anniversary, a fact which added no little to the general feeling of regret and horror.

On the request of these prominent gentlemen, the hotel management had cleared out and furnished a second-floor room with a great fireplace, a room for long used only for storage, but for which, the late mayor and lieutenant-governor had assured them, the four old cronies cherished a certain sentiment. The fire, which gained headway despite the truly desperate efforts of the occupants of the room, had its origin in the fireplace, and it was believed that the four, who were literally burned to cinders, had been trapped. The fire had started, it appeared, about half an hour before midnight, when everybody else in the hotel had retired. No other occupant of the house suffered from its effects, beyond a few incidental injuries sustained in the hurried departure at dead of night from the blazing old firetrap.

SOME ten years before this regrettable incident ended the long and honorable career of this one-time famous hostelry, a certain Mr. James Callender, breaking a wearisome

journey north at Jackson, turned into the hospitable vestibule of the Planter's, with a sigh of relief. He had been shut up for nine hours in the mephitic atmosphere of a soft-coal train. He was tired; hungry, thirsty, and begrimed with soot.

Two grinning negro porters deposited his ample luggage, toted from the railway station in the reasonable hope of a large emolument, promised by their patron's prosperous appearance and the imminence of the festival season of Christmas. They received their reward and left Mr. Callender in the act of signing the hotel register.

"Can you let me have number 28?" he required of the clerk. "That, I believe, is the room with the large fireplace, is it not? My friend, Mr. Tom Culbertson of Sweetbriar, recommended it to me in case I should be stopping here."

Number 28 was fortunately vacant, and the new guest was shortly in occupation, a great fire, at his orders, roaring up the chimney, and he himself engaged in preparing for the luxury of a hot bath.

After a leisurely dinner of the sort for which the old hotel was famous, Mr. Callender first sauntered slowly through the lobby, enjoying the first fragrant whiffs of a good cigar. Then, seeing no familiar face which gave promise of a conversation, he ascended to his room, replenished the fire, and got himself ready for a solitary evening. Soon, in pajamas, bathrobe, and comfortable slippers, he settled himself in a comfortable chair at just the right distance from the fire and began to read a new book which he had brought with him. His dinner had been a late one, and it was about half-past 9 when he really settled to his book. It was Arthur Machen's "House of Souls," and Mr. Callender soon found himself absorbed in the eery ecstasy of reading for the first time a remarkable work which transcended all his previous second-hand experiences of the occult. It had, he found, anything but a soporific effect upon him. He was reading carefully, well into the book, with all his faculties alert, when he was interrupted by a knock on the door of his room.

Mr. Callender stopped reading, marked his place, and rose to open the door. He was wondering who should summon him at such an hour. He glanced at his watch on the bureau in passing and was surprized to note that it was 11.20. He had been reading for nearly two hours, steadily. He opened the door, and was surprized to find no one in the corridor. He stepped through the doorway and glanced right and then left. There were, he observed, turns in both directions at short distances from his door, and Mr. Callender, whose mind was trained in the sifting of evidence, worked out an instantaneous explanation in his mind. The occupant of a double room (so he guessed) had returned late, and, mistaking the room, had knocked to apprize his fellow occupant of his return. Seeing at once that he had knocked prematurely, on the wrong door, the person had bolted around one of the corners to avoid an awkward explanation!

Mr. Callender, smiling at this whimsical idea of his, turned back into his room and shut the door behind him.

A gentleman was sitting in the placed he had vacated. Mr. Callender stopped short and stared at this intruder. The man who had appropriated his comfortable chair was a few years older than himself, it appeared—say about thirty-five. He was tall, well-proportioned, and very well dressed, although there seemed to Mr. Callender's hasty scrutiny something indefinably odd about his clothes.

The two men looked at each other appraisingly for the space of a few seconds, in silence, and then abruptly Mr. Callender saw what was wrong with the other's appearance. He was dressed in the fashion of about fifteen years back, in the style of the late nineties. No one was wearing such a decisive-looking piccadilly collar, nor such a huge puff tie which concealed every vestige of the linen except the edges of the cuffs. These, on Mr. Callender's uninvited guest, were immaculate and round, and held in place by a pair of large, round, cut-cameo black buttons.

The strange gentleman, without rising, broke the silence in a well-modulated voice with a deprecatory wave of a very well kept hand.

"I owe you an apology, sir. I trust that you will accept what amends I can make. This room has for me a peculiar interest which you will understand if you will allow me to speak further, but for the present I confine myself to asking your pardon."

This speech was delivered in so frank and pleasing a fashion that Mr. Callender could take no offense at the intrusion of the speaker.

"You are quite welcome, sir, but perhaps you will be good enough to continue, as you suggest. I confess to being mightily puzzled as to the precise manner in which you came to be here. The only way of approach is through the door, and I'll take my oath no one came through it. I heard a knock, went to the door, and there was no one there."

"I imagine I would do well to begin at the beginning," said the stranger, gravely. "The facts are somewhat unusual, as you will see when I have related them; otherwise I should hardly be here, at this time of night, and trespassing upon your good nature. That this is no mere prank I beg that you will believe."

"Proceed, sir, by all means," returned Mr. Callender, his curiosity aroused and keen. He drew up another chair and seated himself on the side of the fireplace opposite the stranger, who at once began his explanation.

"My name is Charles Bellinger, a fact which I will ask you kindly to note and keep well in mind. I come from Biloxi, down on the Gulf, and, unlike yourself, I am a Southerner, a native of Mississippi. You see, sir, I know something about you, or at least who you are."

Mr. Callender inclined his head, and the stranger waved his hand again, this time as if to express acknowledgment of an introduction.

"I may as well add to this, since it explains several matters, though in itself sounding somewhat odd, that actually I am dead."

Mr. Bellinger, at this astounding statement, met Mr. Callender's facial expression of amazement with a smile clearly meant to be reassuring, and again, with a kind of unspoken eloquence, waved his expressive hand.

"Yes, sir, what I tell you is the plain truth. I passed out of this life in this room where we are sitting almost exactly sixteen years ago. My death occurred on the 23rd of December. That will be precisely sixteen years ago the day after tomorrow. I came here tonight for the express purpose of telling you the facts, if you will bear with me and suspend your judgment as to my sanity. It was I who knocked at your door, and I passed through it, and, so to speak, through you, my dear sir!

"On the late afternoon of the day I have mentioned I arrived in this hotel in company with Mr. Frank Stacpoole, an acquaintance, who still lives here in Jackson. I met him as I got off the train, and invited him to come here with me for dinner. Being a bachelor, he made no difficulty, and just after dinner we met in the lobby another man named Turner—

Cassius L. Turner, also a Jacksonian —who proposed a game of cards and offered to secure two more gentlemen to complete the party. I invited him to bring them here to my room, and Stacpoole and I came up in advance to get things ready for an evening of poker.

"Shortly afterwards Mr. Turner and the two other gentlemen arrived. One of them was named Baker, the other was Mr. Valdemar Peale, of Atlanta, Georgia. You recognize his name, I perceive, as I had expected you would. Mr. Peale is now a very prominent man. He has gone far since that time. If you happened to be better acquainted here you would know that Stacpoole and Turner are also men of very considerable prominence. Baker, who lives in Memphis, Tennessee, is likewise a well-known man in his community and state.

"Peale, it appeared, was Stacpoole's brother-in-law, a fact which I had not previously known, and all four were well acquainted with each other. I was introduced to the two newcomers and we commenced to play poker.

"Somewhat to my embarrassment, since I was both the host and the 'stranger' of the party, I won steadily from the very beginning. Mr. Peale was the heaviest loser, and although as the evening wore on he sat with compressed lips and made no comment, it was plain that he was taking his considerable losses rather hardly.

"NOT long after 11 o'clock a most unfortunate incident took place. I had in no way suspected that I was not among gentlemen. I had begun, you see, by knowing only Stacpoole, and even with him my acquaintance was only casual.

"At the time I mention there began a round of jack-pots, and the second of these I opened with a pair of kings and a pair of fours. Hoping to better my hand I discarded the fours, with the odd card, and drew to the pair of kings, hoping for a third. I was fortunate. I obtained not only the third king but with it a pair of eights. Thus, equipped with a full house, I considered my hand likely to be the best, and when, within two rounds of betting, the rest had laid down their hands, the pot lay between Peale and me. Peale, I noticed, had also thrown down three cards, and every chance indicated that I had him beaten. I forced him to call me after a long series of raises back and forth; and when he laid down his hand he was holding four fours!

"You see? He had picked up my discard.

"Wishing to give Peale the benefit of any possible doubt, I declared the matter at once, for one does not lightly accuse a gentleman of cheating at cards, especially here in the South. It was possible, though far from likely, that there had been a mistake. The dealer might for once have laid down his draw on the table, although he had consistently handed out the cards as we dealt in turn all the evening. To imply further that I regarded the matter as nothing worse than a mistake, I offered at once to allow the considerable pot, which I had really won, to lie over to the next hand.

"I had risen slightly out of my chair as I spoke, and before anyone could add a word, Peale leaned over the table and stabbed me with a bowie knife which I had not even seen him draw, so rapid was his action. He struck upwards, slantingly, and the blade, entering my body just below the ribs, cut my right lung nearly in two. I sank down limp across the table, and within a few seconds had coughed myself almost noiselessly to death.

"The actual moment of dissolution was painful to a degree. It was as if the permanent part of me, 'myself'—

my soul, if you will—snapped abruptly away from that distorted thing which sprawled prone across the disordered table and which no longer moved.

"Dispassionately, then, the something which continued to be myself (though now, of course, dissociated from what had been my vehicle of expression, my body) looked on and apprehended all that followed.

"For a few moments there was utter silence. Then Turner, in a hoarse, constrained voice, whispered to Peale: 'You've done for yourself now, you unmentionable fool!'

"Peale sat in silence, the knife, which he had automatically withdrawn from the wound, still grasped in his hand, and what had been my life's blood slowly dripping from it and gradually congealing as it fell upon a disarranged pile of cards.

"Then, quite without warning, Baker took charge of the situation. He had kept very quiet and played a very conservative game throughout the evening.

"'This affair calls for careful handling,' he drawled, 'and if you will take my advice I think it can be made into a simple case of disappearance. Bellinger comes from Biloxi. He is not well known here.' Then, rising and gathering the attention of the others, he continued: 'I am going down to the hotel kitchen for a short time. While I am gone, keep the door shut, keep quiet, and clear up the room, leaving *this* (he indicated my body) 'where it lies. You, Stacpoole, arrange the furniture in the room as nearly as you can remember how it looked when you first came in. You, Turner, make up a big fire. You needn't begin that just yet,' he threw at Peale, who had begun nervously to cleanse the blade of his knife on a piece of newspaper; and with this cryptic remark he disappeared through the door and was gone.

"The others, who all appeared somewhat dazed, set about their appointed tasks silently. Peale, who seemed unable to leave the vicinity of the table, at which he kept throwing glances, straightened up the chairs, replaced them where they had been, and then gathered up the cards and other debris from the table, and threw these into the now blazing fire which Turner was rapidly feeding with fresh wood.

"Within a few minutes Baker returned as unobtrusively as he had left, and after carefully fastening the door and approaching the table, gathered the three others about him and produced from under his coat an awkward and hastily-wrapped package of newspapers. Unfastening this he produced three heavy kitchen knives.

"I saw that Turner went white as Baker's idea dawned upon his consciousness. I now understood what Baker had meant when he told Peale to defer the cleansing of his bowie knife! It was, as plans go, a very practical scheme which he had evolved. The body—the *corpus delicti,* as I believe you gentlemen of the law call it—was an extremely awkward fact. It was a fact which had to be accounted for, unless—well, Baker had clearly perceived that *there must be no corpus delicti!*

"He held a hurried, low-voiced conversation with the others, from the immediate effect of which all, even Peale, at first drew back. I need not detail it to you. You will have already apprehended what Baker had in mind. There was the roaring fire in the fireplace. That was his means of making certain that there would remain no *corpus delicti* in that room when the others left. Without such evidence, that is, the actual body of the murdered man, there could be, as you are of course well aware, no prosecution, because there would be no proof that the murder had even been committed. I should simply

have 'disappeared.' He had seen all that, and the opportunity which the fireplace afforded for carrying out his plan, all at once. But the fireplace, while large, was not large enough to accommodate the body of a man intact. Hence his hurried and stealthy visit to the hotel kitchen.

"The men looked up from their conference. Peale was trembling palpably. The sweat streamed from Turner's face. Stacpoole seemed unaffected, but I did not fail to observe that the hand which he reached out for one of the great meat knives shook violently, and that he was the first to turn his head aside when Baker, himself pale and with set face, gingerly picked up from the table one of the stiffening hands . . .

"WITHIN an hour and a quarter (for the fireplace drew as well then as it does tonight) there was not a vestige left of the *corpus delicti*, except the teeth.

"Baker appeared to think of everything. When the fire had pretty well burned itself out, and consumed what had been placed within it piecemeal, he remade it, and within its heart placed such charred remnants of the bones as had not been completely incinerated the first time. Eventually all the incriminating evidence had been consumed. It was as if I had never existed!

"My clothes, of course, had been burned. When the four, now haggard with their ordeal, had completed the burning process, another clearing-up and final re-arrangement of the room was undertaken. Various newspapers which they had been carrying in their coat pockets were used to cleanse the table. The knives, including Peale's, were washed and scrubbed, the water poured out and the wash-basin thoroughly scoured. No blood had got upon the carpet.

"My not inconsiderable winnings, as well as the coin and currency which had been in my possession, were then cold-bloodedly divided among these four rascals, for such I had for some time now recognized them as being. There arose then the problem of the disposal of my other belongings. There was my watch, pocket-knife, and several old seals which had belonged to my grandfather and which I had been accustomed to wear on the end of the chain in the pocket opposite that in which I carried my watch. There were my studs, scarf-pin, cuff-buttons, two rings, and lastly, my teeth. These had been laid aside at the time when Baker had carefully raked the charred but indestructible teeth out of the embers of the first fire."

At this point in his narrative, Mr. Bellinger paused and passed one of his eloquent hands through the hair on top of his head in a reflective gesture. Mr. Callender observed what he had not before clearly noted, that his guest possessed a pair of extraordinarily long, thin hands, very muscular, the hands of an artist and also of a man of determination and action. He particularly observed that the index fingers were almost if not quite as long as the middle fingers. The listener, who had been unable to make up his mind upon the question of the sanity of him who had presented this extraordinary narrative in so calm and convincing a fashion, viewed these hands indicative of so strong a character with the greatest interest. Mr. Bellinger resumed his narrative.

"There was some discussion about the disposal of all these things. The consensus was that they must be concealed, since they could not easily be destroyed. If I had been one of those men I should have insisted upon throwing them into the river at the earliest opportunity. They could have been carried out of the room by any one of the group with the greatest ease and with no chance of detection, since all together they took up

very little room, but this simple plan seemed not to occur to them. Perhaps they had exhausted their ingenuity in the horrible task just finished and were over-anxious to depart. They decided only upon the necessity of disposal of these trinkets, and the actual disposition was haphazard. This was by a method which I need not describe because I think it desirable to show them to you.''

MR. BELLINGER rose and led the way to a corner of the room, closely followed by the amazed Callender. Bellinger pointed to the precise corner.

''Although I am for the present materialized,'' he remarked, ''you will probably understand that this whole proceeding is in the nature of a severe psychic strain upon me and my resources. It is quite out of the question for me to do certain things. Managing to knock at the door took it out of me, rather, but I wished to give you as much warning of my presence as I could. Will you kindly oblige me by lifting the carpet at this point?''

Mr. Callender worked his fingers nervously under the corner of the carpet, and pulled. The tacks yielded after several hard pulls, and the corner of the carpet came up, revealing a large piece of heavy tin which had been tacked down over an ancient rathole.

''Pull up the tin, too, if you please,'' requested Mr. Bellinger. The tin presented a more difficult task than had the carpet, but Mr. Callender, now thoroughly intrigued, made short work of it, though at the expense of two broken blades of his pocket-knife. At Mr. Bellinger's further direction, inserting his hand, he found and drew out a packet of cloth, which proved on examination to have been fabricated out of a trousers pocket lining. The cloth was rotted and brittle, and Mr. Callender carried it carefully over to the table and laid it down, and, emptying it out between them, checked off the various articles which Mr. Bellinger had named. The round cuff-buttons came last, and as he held these in his hand, he looked at Mr. Bellinger's wrists. Mr. Bellinger smiled and pulled down his cuffs, holding out his hands in the process, and Mr. Callender again noted carefully their peculiarities, the long, muscular fingers being especially conspicuous, thus seen under the direct light of the electric lamp. The cuff-buttons, he noted, were absolutely identical.

''Perhaps you will oblige me by putting the whole collection in your pocket,'' suggested Mr. Bellinger. Then, smiling, as Mr. Callender, not unnaturally, hesitated: ''Take them, my dear man, take them freely. They're really mine to give, you know!''

Mr. Callender stepped over to the wardrobe where his clothes hung, and placed the packet in his coat pocket. When he returned to the vicinity of the fireplace, his guest had already resumed his seat.

''I trust,'' he said, ''that despite the very singular—I may say, *bizarre*—character of my narrative and especially the statement with which I thought best to begin it, you will have given me your credence. It is uncommon to be confronted with the recital of such an experience as I have related to you, and it is not everybody who is—may I say privileged?—to carry on an extended conversation with a man who has been dead sixteen years!

''My object may possibly have suggested itself to you. These men have escaped all consequences of their act. They are, as I think you will not deny, four thorough rascals. They are at large and even in positions of responsibility, trust, and prominence in their several communities. You are a lawyer, a man held in high es-

teem for your professional skill and personal integrity. I ask you, then, will you undertake to bring these men to justice? You should be able to reproduce the salient points of my story. You have even proofs in the shape of the articles now in your coat pocket. There is the fact of my disappearance. That made a furor at the time, and has never been explained or cleared up. You have the evidence of the hotel register for my being here on that date and it would not be hard to prove that these men were in my company. But above all else, I would pin my faith for a conviction upon the mere recounting in the presence of these four, duly subpenaed, of my story as I have told it to you. That would fasten their guilt upon them to the satisfaction of any judge and jury. They would be crying aloud for mercy and groveling in abject superstitious fear long before you had finished the account of precisely what they had done. Or, three of them could be confronted with an alleged confession made by the other. Will you undertake to right this festering wrong, Mr. Callender, and give me peace? Your professional obligation to promote justice and set wrong right should conspire with your character to cause you to agree."

"I will do so, with all my heart," replied Mr. Callender, holding out his hand.

But before the other could take it, there came another knocking on the door of the hotel room. Slightly startled, Mr. Callender went to the door and threw it open. One of the hotel servants reminded him that he had asked to be called, and that it was the hour specified. Mr. Callender thanked and feed the man, and turning back into the room found himself alone.

He went to the fireplace and sat down. He looked fixedly at the smoldering fire in the grate. He went over to the wardrobe and felt in his coat pocket in search of negative evidence that he had been dreaming, but his hand encountered the bag which had been the lining of a trousers pocket. He drew it out and spread a second time that morning on the table the various articles which it contained. . .

After an early breakfast Mr. Callender asked for permission to examine the register for the year 1896. He found that Charles Bellinger of Biloxi had registered on the afternoon of the 23d of December and had been assigned room 28. He had no time for further enquiries, and, thanking the obliging clerk, he hastened to the railway station and resumed his journey north.

During the journey his mind refused to occupy itself with anything except his strange experience. He reached his destination in a state of profound preoccupation.

As soon as his professional engagements allowed him the leisure to do so, he began his enquiries by having looked up the owners of those names which were deeply imprinted in his memory. He was obliged to stop there because an unprecedented quantity of new legal business claimed his more immediate attention. He was aware that this particular period in his professional career was one vital to his future, and he slaved painstakingly at the affairs of his clients. His diligence was rewarded by a series of conspicuous legal successes, and his reputation became greatly enhanced. This heavy preoccupation could not fail to dull somewhat the sharp impression which the adventure in the hotel bedroom had made upon his mind, and the contents of the trousers pocket remained locked in his safe-deposit box undisturbed while he settled the affairs of the Rockland Oil Corporation and fought through the Appellate Division the conspicuous case of Burnet vs. De Castro, et al.

IT WAS in the pursuit of a vital piece of evidence in this last-named case that his duties called him South again. Having obtained the evidence, he started home, and again found it expedient to break the long journey northward, at Jackson. It was not, though, until he was actually signing the register that he noted that it was the 23d of December, the actual date with which Mr. Bellinger's singular narrative had been concerned.

He did not ask for any particular room this time. He felt a chill of vague apprehension, as if there awaited him an accounting for some laxity, a feeling which recalled the occasional lapses of his remote childhood. He smiled, but this whimsical idea was quickly replaced by a somber apprehension which he could not shake off, and which emanated from the realization that the clerk by some strange fatality had again assigned him room 28—the room with the fireplace. He thought of asking for another room, but could not think of any reasonable excuse. He sighed and felt a positive sinking at the heart when he saw the figures written down at the edge of the page; but he said nothing. If he shrank from this room's occupancy, this room with its frightful secret shared by him alone of this world's company with the four guilty men who were still at large because of his failure to keep his promise, he was human enough and modern enough in his ideas to shrink still more from the imputation of oddity which his refusal of the room on no sensible grounds would inevitably suggest.

He went up to his room, and, as it was a cold night outside, ordered the fire to be made up. . .

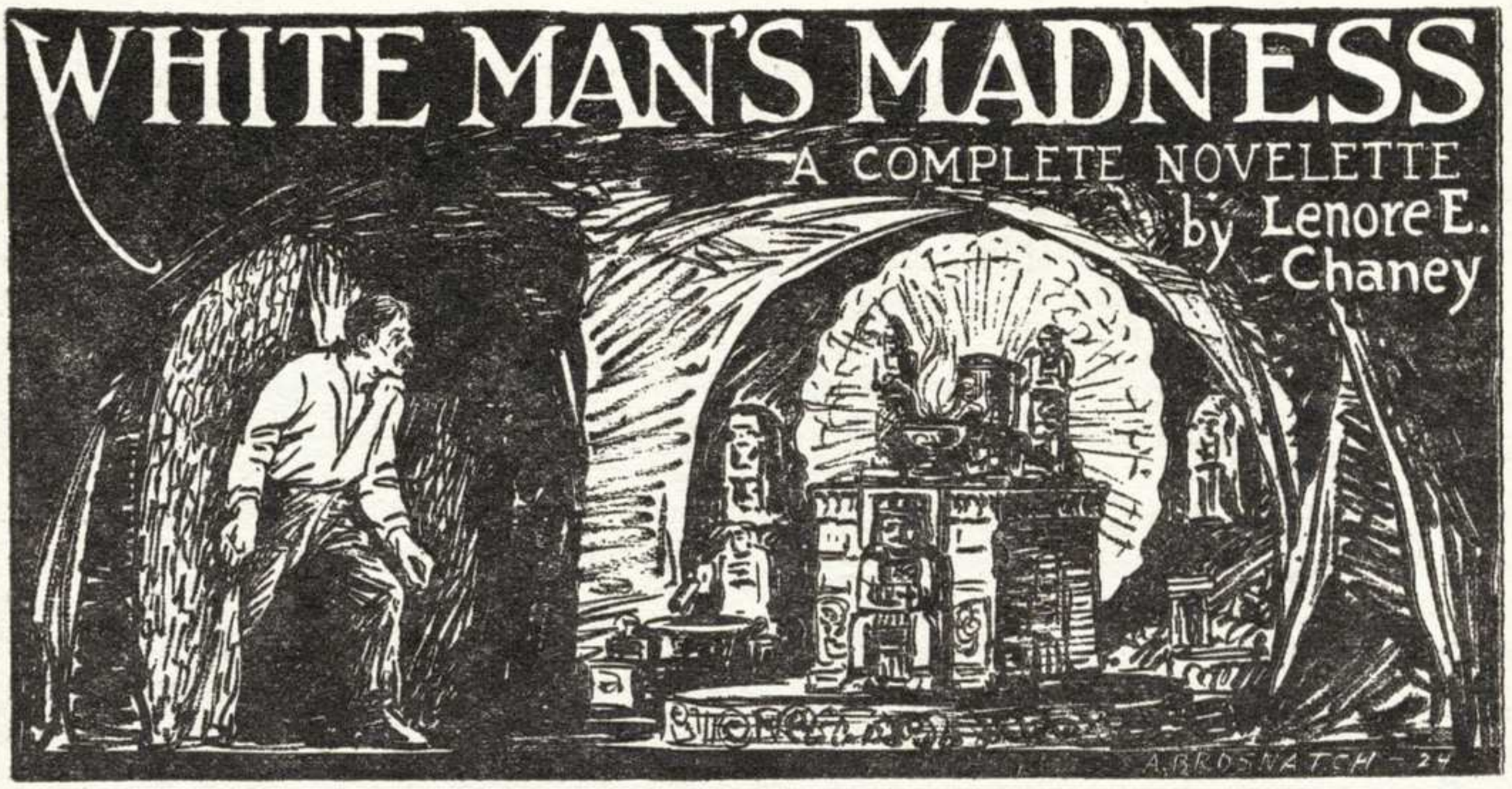
When the hotel servant rapped on his door in the morning there was no answer, and after several attempts to arouse the occupant the man reported his failure at the office. Later another attempt was made, and, this proving equally ineffectual, the door was forced with the assistance of a locksmith.

Mr. Callender's body was found lying with the head in the grate. He had been, it appeared, strangled, for the marks of a pair of hands were deeply imprinted on his throat. The fingers had sunk deeply into the bluish, discolored flesh, and the coroner's jury noted the unusual circumstance when they sent out a description of the murderer confined to this peculiarity, that these marks indicated that the murderer (who was never discovered) possessed very long thin fingers, the index fingers being almost or quite as long as the middle fingers.

WHITE MAN'S MADNESS

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by Lenore E. Chaney



HOUR after hour John Martin staggered up the steep trail, singing bits of ribald songs picked up here and there throughout a rather free and easy past. Occasionally he paused to curse the patient pack-mule that labored along in his wake, or to shout back jests and words of encouragement to the man behind him. Answers to these jests had grown briefer and briefer as the day wore on, for Jackson was not in a frivolous mood.

A little wind began to filter down upon them from the high passes up ahead, and Martin shivered now and then and drank deeply of the flask that he carried in the bosom of his shirt.

At last, as he rounded a point where the trail crept like a thread around the granite breast of the mountain, he was met by a blast so keen, so bitterly cold, that it went through him like the thrust of a knife blade, chilling the very marrow of his bones. Months of dissipation in the dives and barrooms of the coast towns had shaken him out of the strength and vigor which was his rightful heritage, and his heart was jumping like a trip-hammer as he paused and stared irresolutely ahead. As far as the eye could reach, that trail ran on and on, climbing steadily higher in long, slow spirals. In the end it seemed to lead nowhere—it only went on and on, grim and relentless as fate itself. As far as his dazed and uncertain sight could reach, there was no sign of life or human habitation, in this inhospitable part of the Peruvian Andes.

As he stood still, looking from side to side, his right hand fumbled almost automatically to the bosom of his shirt and brought forth the flask, which he tilted to his lips. A surprized exclamation broke from him as the upturned bottle yielded no drop of the precious fluid upon which he had traveled for the past six days.

"Now, wha' you know about that?" he inquired, with a drunken leer at the august peak above him. "Wha' you know about that? The damned thing's empty again! Got to fill her up from the keg—never did see such a bottle—always empty—empty—empty. Here you—now where the devil did that mule go?"

He turned and peered behind him: there was no sign of the burdened mule nor of Jackson, his fellow-traveler.

"Slow as cold molasses," he grumbled, as he stood waiting for them to come up. "Can't make no headway

with a fellow like Jackson—grumbling and growling and dragging along."

For fully ten minutes he stood still, leaning heavily against the rocky wall that lined the narrow trail. He was tired—it was good to rest, even for a moment. But presently, as no sign of either Jackson or the mule appeared, he turned and went back along the narrow, ledgelike trail, and as he went the fumes of alcohol lifted a little from his deadened brain, and he cursed Jackson passionately for delaying their journey. But nowhere was there any sign of either Jackson or the mule.

Suddenly he came to a little path that led off from the main trail up a deep ravine, which cut into the side of the mountain, and which he had not noticed when he had passed it some time before. He stopped at the juncture of the two trails and called:

"Jackson — hoor-aye — Jackson!" and waited anxiously a moment before repeating the call.

There was no answer.

Again and again he called. His own words echoed strangely back to him, but there was no answering shout.

"It stands to reason he must have gone off the trail here," he mused aloud, as he considered the situation. "And yet—he can't have gotten very far—strange he's out of hearing so soon. I'll have to go up here a ways after him, I guess."

He hurried along up the new trail, which he could barely discern in the gathering dusk, and as he went he paused again and again to call out. There was no answer.

He walked faster and faster, breaking now and then into little runs until his laboring heart and gasping breath slackened his pace, for the little fear, that had been only a trifling uncertainty at first, was growing by leaps and bounds within him, clutching with horrible fingers at his quivering brain. His head ached and his bloodshot eyes burned like flames.

Suddenly he stopped. What a fool he had been to leave the main trail! Jackson had simply turned around and gone back, as he had threatened all day to do, for Jackson had long since sickened of their drunken campact to explore the ruined village of which their Indian guide had told such glittering tales. It was like Jackson's cursed selfishness to steal away with the pack-mule and all the supplies. Martin remembered now how Jackson had glared at him in that silly quarrel when they stopped for lunch. They had been good friends and boon companions when they loaded up the pack-mule and started out on this trip, and when their spirits had flagged or their limbs wearied they had had plenty of *chicha* to pour its fiery courage into their deadening veins. On the second day their guide had left them, promising to join them later in the day; and though he had not come they had kept on, with the curious persistency of drunken men and fools, making only a few miles a day, but well satisfied since the supply of *chicha* was inexhaustible. Jackson had wearied first of this foolish expedition; besides, it was growing colder and colder as they climbed higher, and the journey that was to have taken three days at best had already taken six. And now Jackson had made good his threat and turned back, taking with him what remained of their scanty supplies, as well as the blankets and bedding.

As these thoughts ran through Martin's mind, he had already turned around and was running back down the trail. How easy it was to go down hill again: no wonder Jackson had turned back! What fools they had been in the first place to set out with that Indian! Martin remembered now how the fellow's eyes had gleamed as he urged the undertaking upon him. Why, he had practically talked them into the whole thing, hint-

ing at treasure and leading them off the main trail on to this obscure one, on which they had met not a single traveler during the whole of their journey.

That Indian had been a traitor!

MARTIN saw it all now, as he ran along the trail, hurrying to catch up with Jackson before the night fell. He was anxious to talk over with Jackson the duplicity of that Indian, who had been angered, perhaps, at their familiarity with his daughter.

"You never know about these damned *cholas,*" he muttered aloud, as he trotted heavily along. "For all he seemed as soft as butter, that fellow was ready to stick a knife into us all the while. Only it was like his damned impudence to choose this way instead, sending us off up here on a wild goose chase, hoping we'd fall off some of these cliffs and break our necks. Wait till I get back to Huanuco—I'll fix that greaser! Funny—I surely have come back as far as I went up—the other trail ought to show up about here somewheres."

He stopped and looked about him. Nowhere could he see a familiar landmark. He seemed to remember that the ravine had been steep and narrow at the point where it intersected the main trail. He saw now that the ravine had widened out—he could not see the side-walls in the deepening twilight. He seemed to be in a sort of spoon-shaped depression in the mountainside; the trail that he had followed he had lost somewhere, perhaps when he started back, for he saw that what he had taken for a trail was a mere runway that the mountain deer had made, running in steep zigzags from one grazing ground to another. There was no real trail in sight. He could not tell whether he was above or below the main trail up which he had labored earlier in the day.

He was lost!

Lost! He repeated the word again and again, trying to grasp the meaning, and all the time, round and round in the recesses of his mind, fear ran swiftly, recalling stories of other men lost in the Andes and of what had happened to them in the end. He had laughed at these stories in the snug warmth of cheerful barrooms and club lounges, but he did not laugh now as, with white face and trembling limbs, he stopped and peered anxiously into the shadows.

All the food, the blankets and even the firearms had been packed on the back of the mule, for they had found it steep going up the rocky trails and they had stripped down to shirt and trousers. Even Martin's coat had been hooked over the horn of the pack saddle. Last night he had been cold, wrapped in that coat and two blankets besides. What would it be like tonight, still higher up and with neither coat nor blankets to shelter him from the wind that slipped down from those snow-covered peaks up above?

As he thought of these things he was conscious for the first time of the awful silence that reigned about him. Not a whisper, not a sound anywhere, except the sound of his own labored breathing, which sounded harshly in his ears. Involuntarily he tried to muffle that panting breath. The effort made his ears ring and he staggered slightly, as a sudden nausea came over him. He had talked and sung songs while Jackson ate lunch. So long as he had plenty of the ever-potent *chicha* he had wanted nothing else, but now his stomach felt weak and empty.

He went forward a few steps, feeling his way along. If only he could find some place to take shelter for the night, in the morning he would find his way back to the main trail and follow Jackson. But the bare slopes of the mountain offered no shelter—the best he could do would be a fire under some rock. He tried to keep

down the panic that grew and grew within him. He was afraid, horribly afraid; but he must not acknowledge it, even to himself, lest that little spark of self-control desert him utterly. He must not think of what it meant to be lost in this wilderness, of the slow starvation for food and water, the cold and the utter loneliness. He must not think of his own pitiful insignificance in the face of these awful solitudes; he must not think of the thousand and one dangers that lay about him. He raised his chin and tried to square back his drooping shoulders to make a pretense of the courage that he did not feel.

A little sound from the rear made him wheel suddenly and peer anxiously back into the shadows of the ravine behind him. Then, seeing nothing, he went on again. A moment later he wheeled again. Had he heard, or had he imagined, a soft pad-pad-pad of some creature that followed silently along his trail? In spite of his caution his footsteps quickened, and with a little smothered sob he broke into a run, cursing his stupidity for unbuckling the gun from his belt earlier in the day.

He halted, choking for breath, and turned again and listened. There was no sound from along his path. Whatever it was that had followed was gone. He could go no farther—a rock ahead, jutting sharply out of the side of the mountain, offered the only shelter in sight. He felt in his pockets: there was a handful of matches, enough to insure a fire for several days. He looked about for fuel. Earlier in the day he had seen plenty of the resinous little *tola* bushes, which made so bright a fire, and now he looked about in the fading light, eagerly collecting a little bundle of fagots. With infinite patience and care he arranged his fuel and a moment later the flame flared up. His spirits instantly lifted with the mounting blaze. Fire—what a wonderful thing it was: the gift of the gods to men!

He must not let it die down—in his anxiety to get it started he had not collected sufficient fuel, and the dried *tola* burned quickly—too quickly. He hurried about looking for larger wood, but on this side of the mountain there was so little that would burn. One clump of bushes promised well, and he hurried toward it eagerly. He did not see until too late, that the supposed bush was really the top of a *quennar* tree that grew out of the side of a deep fissure in the mountainside. Before he could stop himself, his momentum carried him over the edge of the chasm, and he fell, clutching at the air as his body shot downward. And as he fell a last despairing cry burst from him.

"The fire!" he cried. "The fire!"

Hours later he came back to consciousness for a moment.

He was being lifted up and placed upon a litter of some sort. A groan of agony came from his lips, and instantly he felt a hand, as soft and light as thistledown, laid upon his forehead, and a woman's voice, infinitely tender, murmuring over him. Then the black cloud slipped down again over his brain and he knew no more.

2

HE AWOKE to find himself lying on a rude bunk against the side of a stone hut, and through the open door the sun streamed in, warm and cheering. He was dazed for a moment, and tried to rise to his feet, but instantly sank back again upon his pillow. Then he discovered that his left leg was in splints from the hip down and that his left shoulder was tightly bandaged. The memory of his plunge down the abyss came back to him; he had broken a leg and perhaps dislocated a shoulder in a fall that might easily have cost him his life. His head ached and he felt the fever

throbbing through his tortured body; he closed his eyes again and moaned aloud.

Instantly he felt that soft hand again on his forehead, and a low voice, vaguely familiar, sounded in his ears.

"Ah, the señor is awake at last," she said in Quichua. "He would like a cool drink, perhaps?"

He opened his eyes and looked up at her.

"Water, water!" he begged. "I am so thirsty—so thirsty!"

"Si, señor, I know," she answered, deftly slipping her firm round arm under his head, as she held a cup to his parched lips. "Just a little while and you will be better. Drink deep—that is well! It is the good cold water that shall make the fever fly away."

He sank back to his pillow with a sigh of relief, and in a moment had drifted away again into oblivion.

When he awoke it was evening. Through the open door of the hut he could see the long, dark shadows that lay over the mountains, and he shivered a little. He felt stronger now—the fever and the pain had both subsided, and his mind was clearer than it had been for days.

Where was he? Who were these people who had picked him up and carried him here? Who was the woman who had been with them and who had given him the drink of water a little while ago?

He lay upon a bed made thick and soft with the fleece of many sheep, and a warm, thick blanket covered him lightly. For a long time he was fain to lie quietly and as comfortably as the pain would permit, but his mind was restless by nature, and his curiosity was aroused. At his side stood a rude table, and on it rested the cup from which he had drunk. His eyes fell upon it as they roved about the room. He started and gave an exclamation of surprize, for the cup, curiously shaped and somewhat battered, was made of gold. He had heard many tales of the fabulous riches of some of the mountain tribes in the Andes, and his blood quickened at the thoughts that rose up within him at sight of that cup of gold. He coughed, stirring noisily.

Instantly from the door of the hut came that voice, like a silver bell.

"Ah, again the señor wakes, is it not? Perhaps he is again thirsty?"

He smiled up at her and nodded assent.

"I would like another drink. That cold water tastes very good to me."

She laughed merrily, as she held the cup to his lips.

"The señor is so very thirsty today, but tomorrow he will be so much better. Then he will beg for food, but now, the water is enough, is it not? Rest you quietly now; in a little while our dear *Uilca* will come again to see how well I have taken care of you."

"But wait—don't go," Martin begged, as she turned away again. "Tell me, how did I come here? How did you happen to find me? I didn't think there was a human being within a hundred miles of me when I fell."

She shook her head doubtfully, but turned back and seated herself at his side.

"I do not think I should stay to talk with you now, for you are to keep very quiet, you know. Still, there is so little to tell. My brothers and I, we were returning from a visit to a neighboring village. We lingered long and so, in order to hurry, we took a short cut across the canyon, because we are good climbers and we do not mind when the way is steep and rough. As we came along I heard a noise, as if one groaned. I insisted on stopping to look—my brothers laughed at me and said I dreamed; but I would not go on until we had searched. Then we found you, lying crumpled up at the foot of the cliff. You had fallen from high above, and I do not see why you were not killed, but so it was. We made a litter from

two branches and my cape, and we carried you here, where our good *Uilca*, the very wisest one in all the world, he bound your poor leg into splints and bandaged your shoulder, and in time he will make you quite well again. And because we found you, my brothers and I are to be your nurses—that is, if I do not disobey the order to keep you quiet. If I should talk more I should be sent away and one of the old women set to watch in my place."

"I will be quiet," Martin promised hastily, and she laughed at the anxiety in his voice. "Don't let anyone else come—I want you to be my only nurse."

"Do not fear," she laughed. "I will not permit anyone else to care for you, for did I not find you myself? Close your eyes and sleep again. Only while we sleep do the sick bodies grow well and strong again."

Martin obediently closed his eyes but he did not sleep. From time to time he stole glances at the slender figure of the girl beside him. She had the lissome grace of the wild creatures of the woods; she sat limply as if every muscle were utterly relaxed; and yet he knew that at the slightest sound she would be instantly alert and poised for action. She was dressed in a soft, clinging garment of cream-colored woolen material, and around her waist was a girdle made of golden links, fastened with a flat disk, curiously carved. Gold, and more gold—was it so cheap with this tribe that the girls made belts of the precious metal?

Martin had had some little experience with the Indian women who frequented the coast towns, and was familiar with their love of bright colors and gay adornment. But this girl was not like other Indian women—at least like none that he had seen. She was tall and straight, her back unbowed by burden carrying, and her clear-cut, sensitive features were vaguely familiar to him, but for a long time he could not place the type. Her eyes were large and dark, heavily fringed with curling black lashes, and when she looked at him their slumbrous depths lighted luminously. All at once he remembered: he had seen these same features during years of wanderings in the East—the Aryan Brahmins of India. But what had given this daughter of the Peruvian wilds the form and features of the best product of the Aryan race? How came India to Peru?

As he lay turning this over in his mind, footsteps approached and an old man, clad in a long dark robe of llama hair, entered the hut. At sight of him the girl sprang to her feet and made a little obeisance; evidently this was the priest of whom she had spoken. Martin watched the pair curiously as the girl, in some strange dialect which he had never heard before, began eagerly speaking. Evidently she was describing his own condition, for the priest nodded once or twice in apparent satisfaction, before he threw off his outer garment and turned to his patient. Like the girl he wore around his waist the heavy girdle of gold links, except that his were heavier and the buckle at the center was set with green stones.

"YOU find yourself better?" the priest inquired of Martin, speaking in the common language of the mountains. "I am glad to see that our rude surgery is, after all, proving satisfactory."

"For which I am indeed grateful," Martin answered. "Indeed, I cannot begin to express my gratitude to you and these kind people who have saved my life."

"Life is dear to every living creature," the old man answered, as he deftly examined the dressing of the wrenched shoulder. "And yet, my son, that life is only of real value which serves mankind. I trust that your life is of that nature."

Martin flushed red under the scrutiny of those keen eyes. He had not expected so searching a reply to his conventional remark, and he found himself at a loss for an answer. Seeing this, the priest went on:

"You are an American; is it not so?"

"Yes, an American mining engineer. I have been employed until recently at the Sunuco mines. My name is Martin—John Martin."

"You were found in a strange place for an American mining engineer," the priest replied. "How came you so far away from the beaten tracks of the white men?"

Martin hesitated. Evidently he was to be required to give an account of himself, and he realized that it would be very difficult to deceive this apparently simple old man. More difficult, however, would it be to explain truly the drunken stupidity which had landed him in his present predicament.

"I was traveling with a friend of mine; we planned to explore some ruins in this vicinity, of which we had been told by an Indian guide in Huanuco, who started us on our journey and pointed out the trail which was to lead us directly to the ruins. I believe now that the fellow deceived us. At any rate we did not find the ruins, and we traveled six days instead of the three that he promised would be sufficient."

"And your friend—where is he now?"

"I do not know," Martin answered with a touch of impatience. "He was behind me, with the pack-mule that carried our camp supplies. I must have gone too fast for him—at any rate I suddenly missed both of them, and I had turned back to look for them when I got off the trail. I followed a side trail, thinking Jackson had turned up it, and when I tried to find my way back I found myself lost. It was getting dark and I was trying to find wood for a fire when I fell. That's the whole story."

The moment the last words were out of his mouth Martin realized that they had been a mistake. In some indefinable way the priest's manner had changed from the open friendliness with which he had first greeted him to a certain chilly politeness that told Martin plainer than words that the old man believed him to be lying. At any rate he asked no more questions, but busied himself in making his patient as comfortable as possible.

As the priest stooped to help the sick man shift his position, Martin saw a heavy gold chain around his neck, from which dangled a pendant, as the old man bent forward. Martin gave a gasp of astonishment and delight as he saw that pendant, and his eyes gleamed like fire. It was an emerald, the largest one he had ever seen, roughly cut in the shape of a heart, and from the center there shone a tiny point of flame, as if a small diamond had been set within the very center of the green stone.

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" Martin ejaculated, and then bit his lips in annoyance. Why had he spoken? The priest turned inquiring eyes to his, and then, seeing his eager glance, looked down at the pendant and hastily slipped it inside of the folds of his tunic, looking suspiciously at Martin's burning eyes as he did so.

"It is nothing," he answered sharply, "only a little bit of green crystal, whose only value is in its meaning. "In the heart of life the divine fire burns. May you meditate upon that message, my son, until I come again."

With a word to the girl he turned and went out of the hut, and she followed him.

Martin was glad to be left alone for a moment, for he was trembling violently and he needed time to compose himself.

Who were these people?

Ever since he came to Peru, Martin had heard tales of strange mountain tribes, old in the land when the Incas reigned, long before Pizarro and his cut-throats had set foot on these shores. He had heard tales of fabulous riches that they had hidden away in mountain temples, riches that had hitherto proved utterly beyond the reach of the white adventurer. And now he, Martin, practically an outcast among his own people, was thrown by an accident among one of *these very tribes, a tribe which used* vessels of gold for common household use and whose priest wore a fortune around his neck in a single pendant.

This was luck which he must take care not to spoil by giving away his real design. The priest was no fool, and neither was the girl. He would be very careful.

He smiled when he thought of the girl, and his eyes kindled. How easy it was to read her simple heart, already infatuated with the white man that fate had cast at her feet! He supposed Indian maidens were fully as romantic as white ones—nature used the same methods in all climes.

But the thought that sent the blood coursing through his veins was the thought of a green, heart-shaped stone, with a tiny flame at its core.

"In the heart of life the divine fire burns."

3

FOR some days Martin found his entire attention absorbed by the demands of his pain-racked body. He had not only the slowly-knitting leg, but the complete nervous and physical collapse which followed the shock of the fall, as well as the aftermath of his prolonged spree. But slowly his brain cleared and his nerves grew steady, and his native strength came back little by little, so that each day saw an increase in strength and vigor.

While a great part of the nursing devolved upon the young brothers, yet a large part of each day the girl spent at his side, and these were bright hours for Martin. She was beautiful, full of natural grace and poise, and Martin forgot everything as he looked at her except the light shining in her dark eyes and the touch of her soft hand. Under his ardent glances, her eyes drooped and a dusky rose crept into her cheeks.

One day, when Martin was able to move about for the first time, he leaned upon her arm as he made the first uncertain steps. After a few moments he was obliged to rest, and as he sank down upon his couch again he drew her down with him, pressing a hot kiss upon her round, bare arm.

"I love you! I love you, Taia!" he whispered hoarsely. "I love you."

Two large tears gathered in her great dark eyes, but she did not draw away. Instead she dropped upon her knees by his couch and pillowed his head against her breast.

"I know, I know," she murmured. "I know, beloved. It is written in the stars that we should love each other."

"Then why do you weep, dearest?" he asked, as his arms went around her slim figure. "Are you not happy that we love each other? It is not a time for tears."

"I do not know," she answered simply. "I am happy, and I am sad also. From the beginning, when I saw you lying there so white and still, I loved you, and I knew that you would love me in return. Of course I am happy in that love, and yet pain lies close to my heart, for now I shall be Taia no longer. I am Taia only so long as my heart is for my own blood; now that a stranger and a white man has taken possession of it I am Taia no longer."

Something in the mournful repetition sent a little shiver down Martin's spine. Many women had loved Martin, to their sorrow, but none had been like unto this girl. For a moment his heart smote him, but she was so beautiful! The touch of her warm

young body, vibrant with life and love, made him tremble with delight.

"Are you sorry that you love a white man, dear?" he queried, half playfully, secure in his Anglo-Saxon superiority.

Her reply shocked him a little.

"Oh, if only you were Indian!" she ejaculated. "If you were Indian you would be like a god. But do not fear, I will love you just the same. It shall make no difference to me at all; I promise to forget that you are white."

He smiled ruefully, and changed the subject.

"But tell me what you meant about changing your name," he asked. "Do married women change their names in this tribe?"

"Ah, no! But I am not like other women in this tribe—I am Taia!" she answered proudly. "I am the One Set Aside—but now, alas, I will no longer be so."

"Listen," she continued, seeing his perplexity. "I will tell you how it is. You must know that my people are very, very long in this land. Long ago, in a time when the white race lived like beasts in their northern caves, then did my forefathers come to this land. They came from a land very rich in wisdom and all the arts that make life beautiful, and in this land they set up temples and halls of learning, and from the homeland came great teachers who instructed the people. Then at last there came a great earthquake, which rocked and twisted the whole earth until there was not a land untouched by it, and after the earthquake came great ocean waves, which swept all before them. For many months our people took refuge in their highest temples and prayed without ceasing. When at last all was quiet again, the homeland had disappeared, completely swallowed up by the sea, with all its great cities, its monuments of beauty and its wise men.

"The few who were in this land, cut off from the home which had been the very center of their lives, still remained loyal to the teaching that had been given them, worshiping their god in the temples as before, only now no teachers came to teach and explain the true doctrine. Then, many years later, when this land was rich and prosperous, came the white men, bringing sorrow in their train. They rifled our temples of gold, but they laughed at the golden teaching, which would have made their hearts glad and their lives beautiful. My people were scattered, as you know, but I shall not dwell upon that unhappy time.

"The priest of our tribe was a wise man, and he drew his little flock away to these mountains. Here we guard our sheep and till the soil of the rich valleys where the grain grows high, and here we have lived in peace for fully five hundred years. And because we have kept the faith, it is promised that there shall be born to this very tribe a great teacher, greater even than the teachers of the olden time. And when he comes, so great will be the power of his wisdom that all the world will listen to his words, even the white man, who will turn to the worship of the true law. In that day the great golden altars will be set up again in the sight of men, and the great golden disk will gather the rays of the sun itself and reflect them into the heart of the world. Oh, what a wonderful time that will be—how happy!"

Martin, watching the color come and go in her cheeks, thought he had never seen so beautiful a picture.

"But what has all this to do with your name, dearest?" he queried idly.

She sighed as she answered.

"Do you not see? To each of the maidens of our tribe is born the hope that she may bear the body which this great one will use. From the beginning was I trained and taught to serve in the temple, because of a dream that

my mother dreamed at my birth. I was called Taia, which is to say, 'The mother of the worshiper of the sun,' and I was bound about with this golden chain to signify that I was bound to the service of my people. But love laughs at chains, and so my heart has broken through its fetters, dear as they were, and has lit itself at the flame of your love. Loving you I can never be betrothed to one of our own blood, and the great one comes never to mixed blood. So it is written.

"But think not that I grieve, dear one. For you I gladly give up the dreams of my mother, and lay aside this golden girdle. Another will be chosen in my place to serve in the temple and await the call, which may come, nay, which *will* come, soon. But I will make my home in your heart, beloved, and pray that in another life we may be of one blood."

Martin could hardly repress a smile at her earnestness. To him the tale was the tale of a child, but it would not do to let Taia know this. Under the fervor of his caresses she was soon smiling again, and when she presently left him there was no cloud on her brow.

After she had left him, Martin lay and considered the situation that her words had revealed. There was evidently a hidden temple, as he had suspected, where these people worshiped —a temple whose great golden altars were hidden away against that time when their god should come again. He conjured up a vision of that temple, somewhere in these mountain fastnesses, and his blood beat through his veins in a fever of desire.

GOLD! Gold! The fabled treasures of the Incas paled beside the picture that this simple Indian girl had unwittingly drawn for him. To her the gold evidently meant nothing; all her attention was centered upon the teaching; but to Martin the story brought, not a vision of a spiritual teacher, but dreams of the capitals of Europe, whose innermost portals would be opened wide for him if only he could lay hands upon this treasure.

He was really attracted by the girl, for women were his second great weakness, and he was a born lover. When he had begun this love making, the girl's loveliness had been sufficient attraction, but now there was added another and a greater reason. The girl loved him, she would deny him nothing. Given plenty of time, he would win his way into her innermost soul, so that she would hold no secrets that she did not willingly share with him. It was pitifully easy, for she knew nothing of the hesitations and evasions of her more civilized sisters. To her the path of love led straight to the doorway of marriage, and marriage surely meant giving all.

A few days later she appeared, closely followed by the *Uilca*. Martin saw at once by the latter's stern and forbidding countenance that Taia had confessed her love, and that the confession had not brought pleasure to the priest. He braced himself for a struggle, as the old man went directly to the point.

"I am told that you wish to wed this maiden. Is that true?"

"I do," Martin answered, a little nervously.

He had not originally meant anything so serious, but these savage customs were not binding in civilized lands. The priest considered him somberly.

"It is not well for a maiden to go outside her race when she seeks a husband," he said. "Do you understand, that in lifting your eyes to this woman you must forsake your own people and become one of us? Perhaps you wish time to consider these things?"

Martin paused, the barest fraction of a moment. He could have laughed aloud at the old man's assumption that he was "lifting his eyes" when he took an Indian girl for a wife. But

he had no mind to let any such thing interfere with his plan.

"I understand all this," he answered steadily. "I still wish Taia for my wife."

Without another word the priest turned and left them, motioning them to await his return. Presently he came back again, followed by the two brothers of Taia and several of the Indians of the village. Joining the hands of the two, he went rapidly through a sort of ritual, of which Martin could understand only a word here and there. Then he took from around Taia's slim throat a golden chain, from which hung the familiar golden disk, and this he hung around Martin's own neck, and lifting Martin's right hand he laid it upon the girl's bowed head.

"You are now one," he said. "Walk together in the law. Take heed lest sorrow come through fault of your own, since sorrow earned is sorrow doubled."

Turning gravely, he walked out of the hut, followed by the others, and Taia and Martin were left alone. The girl was pale, and Martin kissed the heavy-lidded eyes and begged her to smile again, but the grim manner of the priest had put a chill upon her spirits which nothing but love could lift again.

4

THE days that followed were the happiest days that Martin had ever known. Spring was well advanced in the mountains, and daily he walked abroad, leaning upon Taia's arm and drinking in the beauty and wonder of the world. Soon he had no real need of her assistance, so quickly did his own strength return, but still he leaned upon her, because he saw that it gave her such pleasure to feel herself of service to him. When they walked forth over the carpet of wild flowers that everywhere spread before them, she was as gay and happy as a little child.

But presently, underneath Martin's smiling exterior, a fever of impatience began growing. Although he was still young, he had long ago left the days of innocence behind him, and the sweetness of this quiet life began to pall upon him. Again and again he tried to lead the conversation back to the subject of the hidden temple, for after all, that was the thing that was keeping him in this stupid Indian village.

But Taia, who was eager to anticipate his every other wish, would not speak of the one subject upon which his heart was set. As his impatience grew, his temper waxed short, and presently, before three weeks had passed from the day of their marriage, he spoke sharply to her, so that she turned away to hide the tears.

He was quick to beg her pardon for this lapse, for some instinct told him that she was not a woman who could be brow-beaten into submission. Only love could win her to his will.

One day, after Martin had definitely thrown away his cane, they walked far up the mountainside and sat down an overhanging ledge. Below them lay the high plateau with the village near its upper end, while the flocks grazed peacefully on the grassy slopes below.

Martin watched them idly; he had no interest in flocks and herds. Taia, however, was a born herdswoman, and talked incessantly of the flocks and the good pasture, which made them fat and frisky. Martin wished she would talk of something else.

"Is it not wonderful?" she exclaimed for the tenth time. "One, two, three years and everything goes well with the flocks. Plenty of grass, no sickness, no trouble, everything so happy! When you are quite well, beloved, then you will go out with the other men and watch the flocks, is it not so? I shall be so happy when you are quite as the others, only I know you are so clever and so brave,

you will soon be a leader among them. Strict account is being kept of our flocks now, for does not one-third of all our family stock belong to you? Are you not proud of a wife who brings you so much wealth?''

He smiled at her enthusiasm.

''I do not give a rap about your sheep,'' he returned, and then, seeing how crestfallen she looked, he added quickly, ''I only care about your own bright eyes and your pretty smile. They are worth more to me than many sheep.''

She dimpled with pleasure at the compliment, and laid her cheek against his shoulder in a childish caress.

''Ah, yes, I know!'' she returned softly. ''You are filled with such beautiful thoughts, so loving always, that you do not think often of the other things. And yet I think that it is good for the family that one of us shall be fond of the sheep, and so we shall always have plenty of everything that we need. I know you care only for love, but I shall look after all things for you, for have you not given up everything, friends and home and people, for me?''

He was quick to seize the opening.

''Tell me, Taia,'' he said, slipping an arm around her and drawing her close, ''tell me more about this religion of yours. Why am I not taken to the temple you told me about? Am I not truly one of your people now? I should go where my wife goes, it seems to me.''

''Everywhere I go, there shall you go also,'' she answered gravely. ''But I go no more to the temple, since I am your wife. Think not, beloved, that you alone have paid a price for our love. Because of it, I go no more to the holy places of my people.''

Martin started.

''But why?'' he persisted. ''Why should you give up your religion, and remain away from your temple? Why do we not go together? Thus do husbands and wives in my country.''

''Thus do we also,'' she returned proudly, ''when husband and wife are Indian. But it is forbidden that any stranger should set foot in our temples. Listen, I will explain once for all, and then we will speak of these things no more. For our law is not of my making, nor even of the *Uilca* who now leads us, but comes from the past and cannot be changed by the desires of our hearts.

''Once our temples were open to all who came to bow their knees at our altars. All in this land worshiped the sun god, and seeing that there was a certain metal in the earth which shone like the sun itself, my people made many beautiful works of art and our temples were filled with rare and wonderful treasures.

''Then came the white men, and the sight of the golden vessels upon our altars wrought in them a kind of madness, so that they turned and slew all about them and laid waste the land. My people fled to the mountains as the sheep flee before the wolf-pack, knowing not which way to turn.

''Then came one of the wise men of our people and he explained what had happened. Because the white man would not listen to the teaching of the great law, they were stricken with a kind of frenzy at sight of the gold, which is the symbol of the god, and they remained under the curse of that frenzy so long as the gold remained in their sight. So our people hid away the gold in secret places and covered the entrances of the mines from which it was taken, so that the eye of the white man no longer fell upon the thing that made him mad. And sure enough, when the gold was hidden from sight, then peace and quiet came again and all was well. But such is the power of that strange disease over the white race that even now, after all these years, if one of them were to discover the hidden

treasure, then war and bloodshed would burst forth over all this land, and my people would be hunted down like dogs. And therefore, though I love you more dearly than life itself, dearest, yet I must obey the law of my people. Oh, I know what you would say, that you are not like those others. I know that you would not willingly bring pain and suffering upon us for the sake of the senseless metal that is like any other stone, save only that it shines more brightly. But you are a white man—the madness might seize upon even you, for in that old day none was immune. But let us not think of these things, for I fear that I do wrong even to discuss it with you, except that I want you to understand that it is for very love of you that I save you from the great curse that would surely come upon you should you persist in seeking this forbidden knowledge. Forget it—sweep your mind clean of all these thoughts, which come only to destroy our peace. Have we not everything in the world to make us happy? Why should you seek further?"

"Nonsense!" Martin returned huskily. "That story of the madness is a child's tale—a myth. At any rate you ought to trust me—if you really love me."

She drew away from him, and her voice was cold as she answered:

"It is not a good thing to question the love of the woman who has given herself to you. Let us go down."

Martin smothered the curse that rose to his lips and turned and followed her. He must not lose his temper, but such provocation tried his greatest powers of self-control. His only hope lay in this stubborn, ignorant Indian woman, to whom the legends of her tribe were of more importance than anything he could say or do.

THEN began days of secret torture, when the humdrum life of the village wore upon his nerves like a file. For days Taia was strangely cold and distant, but he set himself deliberately to win her back again, and before long he was rewarded by seeing her full of love and happiness again. He seemed to have entirely forgotten the subject of their quarrel, making no further references to the topic that had distressed her.

He watched the villagers as they came and went about their affairs. He explored every path that led away over the plateau, and sat for hours on ledges overlooking the plain, seeking to discover where they went, and whether any went secretly. But the Indians were open and frank in all their movements; their ways were simple and easily followed. He could discover no mystery here.

Behind the village a well-beaten path led to the deep pool, at the bottom of a high waterfall, from which the village took its water. Farther down, the stream broadened out and ran peacefully between wide banks, and here the flocks came to drink. Martin used often to go and sit by that pool and ponder over the problem that vexed him. He studied the steep cliffs above, over which the water fell; they seemed utterly inaccessible for human feet. The plateau widened out below the village, though the mountains were close on either side. Somewhere, either to the right or to the left, there must lie the secret trail that led to the temple.

Try as he would, he could not discover that any of the Indians ever left the village, and yet he knew that they did go, and often. Then one night, turning restlessly from side to side upon his bed, he heard a sound outside on the path. Instantly he was quiet, listening. By dint of almost breathless concentration he made out the sound: moccasin-clad feet were slipping past the hut, but he could not detect whither they went, and he dared not move lest he awaken Taia. But the first mystery was solved: they went to worship before their shrine in

the darkness of the first hours of the morning. Or else—why had he not thought of that before?—they went to greet the morning sun, and the temple must lie some distance away.

For days thereafter Martin was in a fever of excitement. He felt himself near the goal. It maddened him to reflect that the very children about him held the secret, and held it as well as any adult. These Indians, quiet and placid, looking at him with their opaque eyes, which baffled every attempt to read their meaning, came in the end to fill him with fury. He hated them, men, women and children, the while he ate their bread, but most of all he hated the old priest, for some instinct told him that the priest knew him for what he was; despite every effort of his will Martin could not force himself to meet those piercing eyes which seemed able to probe his innermost soul. When they met, as they did many times a day, Martin bowed coldly and turned away, giving the old man no chance for conversation.

Time was passing on winged feet, and still he was kept chained to inaction. He dared not make a false move, and he could not make a direct one. He became moody and silent, and Taia's face grew sad as she began to realize that he was in heart and spirit an alien among her people. She was too simple, however, to realize that he felt himself above the people of her tribe; she had a naive pride in the glories of her own race, which was amusing to Martin, but he was seldom in the mood to smile at it.

One day, after a sleepless night, he rose and walked toward the hills alone. Something must be done soon; he simply could not bear this life much longer. Rage, smoldering in the depths of his being, threatened to burst into a flame that would destroy everything. His only salvation was to get away as much as possible, to brood secretly over what he had come to consider the bitter wrong that was being done to him.

He sat down at last to rest, high up on the mountain overlooking the valley. He meant to climb up to the peak above the waterfall, but his leg was not quite up to so great a strain yet. As he sat staring moodily before him, he heard a noise in a thicket near him, and turned to see one of the village children, a crippled boy of about twelve years of age, regarding him solemnly with wide, questioning eyes.

"Hello, Roca," he called out indifferently. "What are you doing away up here?"

The boy flushed and half turned away, and something in his hesitation brought Martin suddenly alert, suspicious. What *was* the boy doing up here? Was he trailing Martin or was he, perchance, returning from—?

With his most engaging smile he motioned the boy to a seat by his side and began to talk lightly of many things. Roca, diffident and shy at first, was soon chatting gayly, sitting alongside Martin on the ledge and flinging pebbles into the abyss, while Martin told him stories of the great world outside.

Suddenly Martin threw an arm around his shoulders and said:

"Now, Roca, tell me: where is the path that leads to the temple? Tell me, and I will make you a kite that shall soar as high as the *alcamari*, above the very tops of the mountains."

He felt the slight body stiffen inside his encircling arm, but the boy made no answer. The long strain of repression was slipping now; and Martin trembled as his clasp tightened cruelly around the thin shoulders and his voice grew sharp.

"Speak up, I tell you! I'm tired of this damned nonsense. Where do you go, at night, when you creep away in the darkness? Where do they all go? Talk quickly, or I will find a way to make you speak."

The boy quivered and shrank away from the menace in Martin's voice, but he did not speak.

Then the long pent-up fury burst forth, for the man had gone mad through the passion of thwarted desire. For all the centuries of civilization have but served to lay a thin veneer over the cruelty of the savage, and, given sufficient prodding, the beast within breaks forth now and then, either in organized fiendishness, as in the public Inquisition, or in private deviltry that finds no historian ready to record it.

An hour later, spent and a little sick, Martin staggered down the trail alone, and he did not yet know the secret of the path. As he went along he thought of what Taia had said of the madness in the white man's brain. It had seized upon him, Martin, even as it had seized upon Pizarro's men, five hundred years before.

5

THE next morning Martin kept his bed, pleading illness. Somehow he could not bear to walk abroad, to face those placid Indians. Taia accepted with tender solicitude his explanation that he had strained his leg the day before, and busied herself in making him comfortable, until he begged her to go away and leave him alone.

About 10 o'clock she came rushing into the hut, weeping bitterly.

"Oh, a terrible thing has happened!" she cried. "A great sorrow: my brother's child, Roca—he has not come back. All night he has been out on the mountain: something has befallen him! His mother thought nothing of it at first, for he is often out late; but never, never did he stay away all night! Even now the men are searching for him. If only you would rise and go with them! You are so clever, you would be sure to find him."

A spasm of pain crossed Martin's face. Taia instantly dropped down at his side, and laid her cheek against his.

"There; I forget that you are ill. Rest you quietly—I will explain to the others. Besides, I will go in your place—I loved him more than all the rest."

Martin murmured a few words of sympathy, but his lips were stiff and he sighed with relief when she was gone. He had no fear that the search would be successful. But he could not banish a vision of a pair of haunting dark eyes, filled with tears like the eyes of a wounded doe.

"Oh, to get away—to get away from it all!" he cried over and over to himself. To get away from these damned mountains, from these silent, wooden-faced people, this constant pretense, pretense, pretense! If only he could discover the treasure and steal away with it, they would not be really injured, while his life would be made glorious and triumphant. But if the very children could not be tortured into betraying the secret, what chance had he with the adults? He felt beaten and hopeless—desperate.

As he had foreseen, there was no trace found of the boy Roca, though the search went on for days. Finally one night, Martin, tossing restlessly on his bed, heard again those faint footfalls passing the hut. This time there were many of them, so many that it seemed as if the whole village must be on its way to the temple. As he listened he was aware that Taia was awake at his side, softly sobbing under her breath. He lay very still; he did not want to talk to her now, and presently he knew that she slept again. He dared not rise and try to follow the worshipers, for she would be awake in an instant if he stirred, and so he was forced to lie quietly while another opportunity slipped by him.

"Where did they go? Where did they go?"

Over and over he asked the question, and was not aware that the words slipped from his lips aloud. Suddenly Taia stirred, moaned a little and murmured.

"They go to pray for the soul of Roca in the temple! They go—"

The murmur died away into silence.

Martin lay transfixed with wonder. She had answered his question in her sleep, without knowing that she did so.

Ah! Long he had waited, but it had come at last, the way to his goal. Already his quick mind was busy with its plans: what had been once by accident should be again by design.

The next morning he was like another man, bubbling over with good humor, so that Taia smiled again in spite of her bereavement, and kissed him lovingly as he started away for his morning walk.

"You are well again, is it not?" she questioned eagerly. "Only do not go too far today—you will get too tired again, as you did before. Be careful; promise me."

"Do not fear," he replied, lightly. "This time I go only as far as the herders' huts, where the sheep are turned out of the night pens. I am at last going to begin my work as a shepherd of the flocks."

She clapped her hands with delight at his words.

"Really? How happy that makes me, to hear you speak so! Be sure that my brothers see you working, and the other men as well. They will see that you are not lazy at all—you have only been ill."

Martin guessed readily enough that there had been some comments upon his idleness among the Indians, but he realized for the first time how much Taia must have suffered from the criticisms which he had ignored. It was highly important that Taia's mind should be quite easy about him now. He must have her utmost confidence, and he set himself skilfully to win it, sure of success.

Throughout the long summer days he followed the flocks, easily mastering the trick of turning them hither and yon at his pleasure. It was a lazy life, almost as lazy as his former one had been, for the boy who attended him did most of the work. But it satisfied Taia.

And when the night shut down and Taia lay sleeping quietly in his arms, every night he whispered over and over, softly yet insistently:

"Where is the path to the temple? Where is the path to the temple?"

For many, many nights there was no answer, but he did not lose patience. Then, at last, she stirred fitfully in her sleep, murmuring low, broken words. He could barely catch their import, but it was enough.

All day he went about like a man in a dream. Taia had gone with some of the other women on an expedition into the mountains in search of certain medicinal herbs, and when she returned at night she was weary and a little pale. Martin scarcely looked at her. She had ceased to figure in his thought; she had served his purpose, and the incident was closed. His kiss, as he bade her good night, was cold and perfunctory; her eyes darkened with sadness and her lips trembled, but she said nothing. Already she realized that the love of the white man was as fickle as a spring zephyr.

Martin sat at the door of the hut, after she had gone to bed, staring out into the soft darkness. His impatience was mounting with every passing moment, and yet he had need for the greatest caution now, lest a false step ruin everything. He must leave the village unseen, just before midnight, giving himself time to get to the temple and away again before the morning worshipers appeared.

Twice as he sat there waiting, the old priest passed him, going about the village upon his own affairs. Martin watched him covertly, and finally slipped his stool inside the shadows of the hut, so that the old man would think he had gone to bed. He did not like those keen, prying eyes, which seemed able to read his most secret thoughts.

When at last he considered it safe, he rose and wrapped his thick cape of vicuna hair about him and slipped away in the darkness. It was typical of the man that he did not cast one fleeting, farewell glance back upon the woman whose love and devotion had saved his life.

UP the familiar path he went swiftly and surely, to where the great pool lay at the base of the waterfall. He paused for a moment and looked behind. All was silence and darkness.

Then he stepped quickly behind a great clump of bushes, which grew at the edge of the water, so close that the water of the fall sprayed over it as it fell. Martin almost laughed aloud at the utter simplicity of the thing. The broad path, worn by many, many feet, led just here, where the ground was tramped hard and firm, for it was just at this point that the villagers stood to dip the water from the deep pool. Martin had stood here himself a hundred times, had dipped water again and again upon this very spot and never dreamed that behind the innocent clump of shrubs lay the entrance to the desire of his heart.

Now he slipped quickly behind the bushes. Deep down, half buried in the foliage, there was a rectangular opening into the face of the cliff. Martin stooped and crawled through; he found himself at the bottom of a long flight of narrow stairs cut from the solid rock. Here and there, as he climbed, he saw that narrow fissures in the roof of the passageway let in air, and sometimes he caught a glimpse of the starlit sky. The stairs under his feet were worn smooth. Through hundreds of years had the devotees of that strange cult been passing up and down this subterranean way.

On and on he climbed, most of the way leading upward, but now and then long stretches ran fairly level. He hurried, but he had grown soft through the weeks of his idleness and he found himself panting for breath and obliged to stop often to rest. Yet he must reach the temple and get away again before the priest came for the morning service, and he drove his weary body forward with the lash of his will.

Suddenly, just when he felt himself unable to go farther, the passageway opened out into a great square chamber, hollowed out of the solid rock. He recognized it, from pictures that he had seen of the old temples, as the anteroom where the people gathered for the outer service.

From the ceiling of this room hung dozens of lamps from which wicks set in oil sent out a flickering light. The lamps were curiously wrought, with fine tracing and delicate cut work. Each would be a museum piece of rare value.

The room itself was bare of furniture. Evidently the audience knelt upon the stone floor throughout the service. In the middle of the wall nearest the opening through which Martin had come, a spring of clear, sparkling water gushed out of the rocky wall. The water fell into a deep niche, which had been hollowed out of the wall, and the overflow was carried away by hidden drainage pipes. Before this niche two tall golden lamps burned brightly.

With a little gesture of delight Martin ran to the spring and buried his hot face in the cold water, drinking deeply again and again. The long, hard climb had parched his throat and the cool water was like nectar.

Then he turned again to the wonder-world about him. In the center of the wall opposite the entrance was an opening, draped with a curtain of gold mesh so finely wrought that he crumpled it in his hand like a piece of woolen cloth, yet it was so heavy that he knew it for purest gold.

Through the opening he stepped into the holy place of the temple, and as he did so he cried aloud with wonder and delight. He had been prepared for treasure, but his wildest dreams had not pictured anything half so wonderful as the sight that now greeted his eyes.

Against the opposite wall a great gleaming golden disk, so wide that Martin's two arms outstretched could not have spanned it, made a shining background for the great altar, wrought of solid gold, which stood before it. On the altar itself, in the center, stood a great brazier, of a workmanship so fine that Martin gasped as he looked at it, and in the brazier a fire burned, fed automatically from two little reservoirs of powdered wood. Everything upon the altar was gold—lamps, vessels of all kinds, wrought with such skill and such richness of design that any one of them was worth a king's ransom.

The light from the fire in the brazier was reflected a hundred times from the dazzling surface of the great golden disk, the symbol of the sun god, and Martin's eyes began to burn and his head to ache as he ran from one thing to another in an excitement that was rapidly mounting to a delirium. He laughed aloud again and again, as he spread his cape out in the center of the floor and began to pile vessel after vessel in a heap in the center. He chose swiftly here and there, trying to select the heaviest and therefore the most valuable. All the time he was talking to himself as he worked, running to and fro, tearing golden figures from their niches and ravishing the altar of its golden treasure. He did not notice that his head was pounding with pain and that his eyes burned like twin flames. He was not conscious of his body at all; he saw only this golden treasure—gold, gold, gold, everywhere. He piled it up until upon the floor he had a heap which three men could not have lifted.

Still there remained twice as much more. He ran to the great golden brazier and tried to lift it from its place. He staggered and almost fell, and for a moment a terrible nausea overcame him. He leaned against the altar, panting for breath, and gradually his legs crumpled under him and he slipped down upon the floor, with his head upon the edge of the pile of treasure.

"Been working too hard—overstrained myself!" he gasped, and then a cry of agony burst from his lips as the pain gripped his vitals, twisting him about on the rocky floor while the sweat poured out upon his blanched forehead.

WHILE he lay thus the curtain at the doorway lifted and the old *Uilca* stepped softly into the room. Martin was too far gone now to feel either surprize or dismay at this interruption; strangely enough the very gold itself no longer seemed important to him. A film was drifting over his eyes; he did not care that the priest was rapidly replacing each golden vessel in its accustomed place, nor protest when the pile which he had gathered so feverishly a little while before was completely depleted.

A last spasm of agony burst over him. He cried aloud, "Help! Help!" then shuddered and lay still.

The priest stood looking down at him, and his eyes were full of pity, though his lips were stern.

"Alas!" he murmured. "There is no help for the one who drinks from the guardian spring. White man's madness—ever it leads to sorrow and to death."

RED AND BLACK

by Irvin Mattick

YONG LO was a reptile with an artist's soul. He did not sting with a fang, but belonged to the family of boas and coiled about his victims till the last drop of life was drained from them.

To him blood was not red. It was yellow and silver and green. Golden disks, soft, heavy and velvety to the touch, were chunks of rich blood, transmuted by the alchemy of Yong's spiked roulette wheel from the purses of his guests to his gambling tables.

Silver coins were so much blood squeezed from gullible victims. Crisp, crackling greenbacks, or those wrinkled and fouled, were certificates of blood, left by those who could not carry gold.

This relentless coiling about his victims till their last chip of cash went across his tables under his rakes was the reptilian streak in Yong Lo. His artistic soul verified itself in the grandeur of his gambling room.

First you entered a low, wobbly store that helped to demoralize Hop Alley. In this filthy cube stale tobacco fought moldy spices for stinking ascendancy. Here two Chinese clerks kept store for Yong Lo, but if you were popular, these would rap on a door in the rear of the shop, wait for the panel to slide back and a lean yellow face to appear at the slot.

"Man want see Yong Lo. Pass."

The door would open, the chosen would enter.

But instead of leaving hope behind, they would pass buoyantly into the second room, that red and black alcove, Yong Lo's gambling parlor.

Its walls were red, pigeon-blood red, black stripes running alternately from ceiling to floor, where a red and black mottled rug silenced the tread of feet.

From the center swung a monster lamp wrought of black iron, rose-colored incandescence glowing from the glass lights about which the chimera coiled its hideously scrolled malformation.

The gaming tables were covered with pigeon-blood simonis cloth. Their edges were of jet, hard and gleaming, on which the players drummed money-hungry fingers.

And the wheel—that revolving, striped and figured bowl, the ball bobbing over the flutings—the roulette wheel was a marvel.

The numbers on its black rim were rose color, coral set in ebony. The alternate stripings of the red and black bowl were ebony and lacquer,

polished strips accurately joined, tapering to points where they crowded to the hub. Agog on its race, the wheel was a diabolical kaleidoscope.

Yong Lo presided nightly at the gambling classics. Clad in a mandarin robe of pigeon-blood red, trimmed confusedly with black, he sat high up on a sooty throne of fumed wood. With a red lacquer fan he drummed occasionally on the lion's-head arm of his chair.

Immobile, Yong Lo's drum-skin face was a mask for the greed eating his heart. He presided over the games, contributed to the law in his neighborhood, and hoarded the proceeds of his wheel in a secret cache of the chandelier in the sleeping room behind the gambling parlor.

There were three rooms in Yong Lo's apartment: the mock store out front, the red and black gambling chamber, and this third room in back, a hutch filled with junk, bunks, opium stands, rags for carpets, an oil lamp for illumination.

A big chandelier on heavy chains swung from the ceiling of this last room, but Yong Lo never used the fixture for lighting purposes. The gambling miser trusted more the chandelier bowl swinging near his bunk than the security of banks.

In this cubby room Yong Lo slept.

Just now Lee Gow shared the hole with Yong Lo.

Lee Gow had been offered the seclusion of the den for a few days while hiding from the police. Something the authorities had found in Lee Gow's rooms, something belonging to a murdered white girl, made it impossible for Lee Gow to venture abroad.

Bred in Yong Lo's tong, Lee Gow obtained fraternal cover.

In this room, adjacent to the snarling, money-sucking patrons in the gambling den, Lee Gow crouched in his loft, a rat, apprehensive of the very shadows that moved across the walls.

Occasionally he peeked through the keyhole of the door, to watch the awful faces in that red and black gambling room. Then he would crawl back to his bunk, suck on a bamboo tube and be at peace.

THUS for a week all went well until one night the roulette wheel won too much for Yong Lo. Too much to suit Butch Killian, who noticed that each time Yong Lo tapped the arm of his chair with the red fan, the wheel came to rest at a figure that won stakes for Yong Lo.

Butch Killian had the complexion of a beefsteak and the strength of a tiger.

Once, twice, four times Butch saw Yong's fan tap the chair. Four times the house won.

Butch raised his fists, was about to bellow protest at the croupier, when Yong Lo caught the eye of the infuriated giant. Out of the mongolian's black orbs a terrible warning oozed, a warning that checked the blurt on Butch's curled lips.

Then a wan smile filtered through the quartz of Yong's face.

Butch Killian threw down a hundred on the red.

Three times Yong's fan tapped the chair.

When the wheel stopped Butch Killian picked up nineteen hundred dollars and left.

Far into the night Yong Lo sat in the room behind the den, pondering over the thing Butch Killian had discovered.

While Yong Lo had lived alone here, through nine years of crooked roulette, no one had detected the fraud.

A weary, deeply drawn breath sounded from Lee Gow's bunk. Slowly, as the boa creeps, Yong Lo's brain functioned. He wondered if Lee

Gow. . . . The glib terror of a smile crinkled his tight skin, then slid back to the covering of his skull.

Yong Lo shook the sleeping Lee Gow.

"Lee Gow!"

The sleeper grunted, and his mouth dropped open with the comatose indifference of one drugged.

"Lee Gow! Get up! Yong Lo want you to kill somebody."

Yong Lo shook the torpid fugitive.

Lee Gow's face showed not a whit of understanding.

Beholding the Chinese sleeper, Yong Lo saw the corner of a paper peeping from under a cover in the bunk.

Deftly Yong Lo withdrew this paper. Creeping to his gambling parlor, Yong Lo unfolded and read what Lee Gow had scrawled. An icy smile glazed his face as he finished reading. Once again he read it:

Butch Killian:—

Don't tell cops me hiding here. Me tell truth, Yong Lo put winnings in fake chandelier bowl of bunk room in back. Chandelier on chains, like pulley. Turn crank, chandelier go up, go down. I tell truth, like yesterday about crooked roulette wheel. You write how we get money. Yong Lo he not savvy you me work together. You not tell police, we get Yong Lo cash.

—Lee Gow.

At a secretary in the gambling chamber Yong Lo destroyed Lee Gow's note, and wrote another one:

Butch Killian:—

You be last man leave here tonight. You come back later, ring bell at store door. Me send Yong Lo out to answer bell before he undress from red black mandarin robe. When Yong Lo open door, you choke him, kill, throw him down manhole of sewer on corner. Me wait in hall you come back from manhole. Me open door for you, you follow me, we get cash, divvy, skin out.

Money in chandelier back of gambling room. Seventy thousand. —Lee Gow.

Folding the message he had just written, Yong Lo slipped back into the darker bunk room and replaced the folded paper under Lee Gow's bunk cover.

All next day Yong Lo hovered near Lee Gow, preventing the fugitive double-crosser from reading the message he now carried concealed on his person.

That night, just after Butch Killian's bullying voice boomed in the gambling room, Yong, through curtained glances, saw Lee Gow, under cover of peeking, dexterously push a wad of paper into the keyhole of the door.

Yong Lo recalled how each night Lee Gow hung about the door, and now he understood.

Passing through to the gambling room that night, to take his place on the big chair, Yong noticed the paper had been removed from the keyhole.

Yong Lo let Butch Killian win five heavy stakes. Then Yong got back every dollar, and took every cent the human tiger put on the table, until a bit before closing time Butch Killian had placed nine thousand dollars on the red simonis cloth, and had seen the black croupier rake them in at each gentle, decreeing tap of Yong's fan.

Yong saw the rage cooking in Killian's body.

The maddened man clenched his fists deep in his empty pockets, and the fire in Killian's wild eyes faded, as he stood there a beefy mass. Yong saw the man draw a crumpled paper from his pocket. He saw Butch Killian read the note again; saw Butch Killian sneer cruelly. Then Killian left and the house closed.

LEE GOW and Yong Lo were jabbering in the bunk room, when the store annunciator suddenly snared on the wall.

Lee Gow's eyes widened. Yong Lo took the tiny scissors from his nostrils where he was trimming black hairs,

and looked perplexed. Then he assumed the expression of one startled.

"Lee Gow! Me got tip tonight. Didn't believe first, but guess tip was true. Cops coming to search here, for you."

"Yong! No cops—not let cops in, eh?"

"Must let in, Gow—they smash in, chop in."

"Na—na—na—they find me. I kill white girl—I hide in cellar hole."

Lee Gow was on his knees, the iron ring of the cellar hatch in his spidery fingers.

The bell snared again: one long buzz, then several short impatient whirrs.

Lee Gow tried to open the bolt on the cellar door.

"Yong—help, me hide in cellar. You let cops in, not let them look in cellar!"

"Bah—they look in cellar. Here! Yong Lo have good scheme."

Yong already had his robe off.

"You wear my red black mandarin robe. I wear your clothes. You go to front door, let in cops. I stay here. They pinch me. Think me you in your clothes. Find out at station that me Yong Lo. I not kill nobody, police let me go. You skip while me at station. Thousand cash here in pocket of mandarin robe."

Yong helped Lee Gow into his garments.

The annunciator snared again.

The lamp in the bunk room was extinguished, and while Lee Gow, disguised as Yong, slippered toward the front door, Yong donned another red robe.

In the dark bunk room Yong manipulated something that clinked against the heavy chandelier chains. The iron ring of the cellar door in the floor squeaked on its rusty staple, then Yong Lo, in the rôle of Lee Gow, slipped forward to the store and pulled back the entrance door.

A MAN was crossing the street, coming from the manhole on the corner; a huge man tilting his bulk on tiptoe, much like a hog walking on its hind legs.

The big man came to Yong Lo's door.

"Lee Gow!" Butch Killian growled into the black door opening.

"Sh!" whispered Yong from the darkness.

"Lee Gow, I killed Yong, the cheater—choked him in that red gambling shirt, like you wrote me to. Pushed him down the sewer manhole."

"Hee-hee."

Yong's guarded glee was all Butch Killian heard as he followed the slippered mongolian to the bunk room in back.

"Make a light, Lee Gow. Where's the dead chink's money?"

"Give me your hands," Yong whispered covertly.

Yong's bony fingers took Killian's thick hands and led him in the dark.

"Old Yong never piped a word after I got my grippers on his wrinkled turtle neck."

"Hee-hee," Yong Lo bleated in the dark.

Now they were in the bunk room.

Yong Lo raised Butch's hands upward till the big bully touched a heavy chain.

The Chinaman whispered low.

"You strong, like lion. You pull down chandelier chain. Me light lamp. You pull down money bowl. We divvy cash."

Butch Killian pulled on the chain but the fixture did not lower. Then the big brute grabbed the chain with both hands.

As he did so, smooth rings were slipped over his wrists, were compressed on the thick flesh, snapped.

"Butch big strong feller, pull chandelier down."

"Say, Lee Gow—what the—"

But in that instant his ankles were meshed in something, the tether of which was fast to the floor.

With Killian tugging in the dark, endeavoring to free his legs, the Chinaman slip-slupped to a corner of the room.

A tip of flame dawned in the cup of two bony hands, the match touched the lamp.

When the light seeped through the room, Butch Killian, his arms aloft, handcuffed to the heavy chandelier chain, his feet bound in several windings of folded bed sheeting secured in the iron ring of the cellar door, looked into the placid face of Yong Lo dressed in a red silk mandarin robe.

Butch Killian tore with his great strength at the cuffs securing his wrists, but the steel snarled back at him. He tried to kick free of the sheeting about his ankles, but the ten or twelve-ply bandage of linen was stronger, stronger even than Butch's hydra strength.

Yong Lo stood off a little way and laughed.

"Butch Killian big boob. You let Lee Gow make rummy of you. Lee Gow hide here from cops. He kill white girl. Lee Gow double-cross Yong Lo. Tell you Yong's wheel work crooked. Lee Gow then write you to get my cash. I wrote note, not Lee Gow. I tell you to ring bell and kill Yong Lo when he come to front door. Hie! I send Lee Gow in my clothes. Him think you cops. You think him me. You kill Lee Gow, not me. Lee Gow dead in sewer for killing white girl. You die for killing Lee Gow. You big strong boob. Only Yong Lo get free. Hie!"

At a wall where chains came through the paneling, Yong Lo turned a windlass and Butch Killian was hoisted with the chandelier as it raised on chains, passing through holes in the ceiling.

"Money heavy tonight in chandelier, Butch."

Wrists in the steel cuffs, Butch's arms were drawn taut above his head. Marshaling the strength of four men, he tried to withhold the chains from pulling him upward, but the windlass was a squeaky music box in Yong's hands.

The chains tightened, creaked, till they had lifted Butch's two hundred and forty pounds three inches clear of the floor.

The windlass complained at Butch's added weight, and Yong threw the pawl in the crank ratchet and left the cursing man swinging by his wrists, dangling from the ceiling like a heifer about to be skinned.

"Butch not holler now, else Yong call cops and tell how Butch kill Lee Gow and throw in sewer."

From a bunk Yong Lo brought another sheet.

He wound it about Butch's body, across the stomach. He tied the knot at the back of the suspended man. Through the loop of the sheet Yong Lo thrust a curtain pole, devising an enormous tourniquet about Butch Killian's middle.

Yong Lo belonged to the family of boas that coil and throttle.

He gave the curtain pole a half-turn, taking up the slack in the sash about Butch's torso.

The big man was silent, fumbling with his wits for a way out. He swayed, jerked, cavorted on his fastenings, but the handcuffs held him aloft. The metal gnawed at his wrists till something warm trickled down his cold arms.

He grew weak. Sweat dripped from him, and the shriveled yellow man below him, a spider plying at a huge fly, gave the wooden pole another turn.

The flesh folded beneath Butch's clothing.

He tried to curse, to shout, but rage and exhaustion stifled the effort. The

pole turned another half-circle; the sheet sank in, cramped; a pain floated around Butch's stomach.

The tourniquet was getting stubborn, and the Chinaman now had to tug with all his might to budge the pole farther.

Butch's neck turned black. His eyes grew bigger. Rushing noises swooped down upon him. And still his brute strength fought the death Yong Lo was inflicting.

"Big boob, Butch Killian is."

Yong Lo now had to hang on the pole to move it. The sheet tightened. Something ripped inside of Butch. Crazed, the door of hell just over the pole winding an inch farther, pain racking his vitals, being ground to death in the middle by Yong Lo's infernal pole, Butch Killian tugged on the handcuffs with all his weight and strength.

He drew steadily. In a tug of war with death he pulled on those handcuffs. Continually, harder, horribly, every ounce of effort went into that pull to burst or bend the cuffs about his wrists.

Fiercer, terribly, he drew and drew with those mighty arms, till his temples thrummed, the handcuffs seared, champed through flesh, bit on the bone.

Still Butch drew down with that mighty, tigerish strength; the sheet tightened a bit; his thighs seemed to take what belonged in his torso.

Red and black spots before his eyes, Butch strained on his distended arms, drew—something slocked—something blazed at his wrist—another sickening slock of his arm, like the sound of a fowl being drawn.

A groan from Butch as Yong Lo drew down the pole another inch, flooding Killian's vitals with a hot mass from something that seeped within him.

Then Butch's arm came down upon the Chinaman's head. The blow sent the heathen down, forced him to let go of the pole, which unwound like a pinwheel.

Knocked from his balance, Yong Lo's head bumped Butch's thighs, and the big man opened his legs and caught Yong's neck between them. Still suspended, Killian's thighs closed on the Chinaman's throat, held him breathless in that sinewy vise.

Two minutes, three minutes, four minutes he held Yong Lo, then Butch's senses left.

WHEN they found them next morning, Yong Lo was dead on the floor. A ruby patty of coagulation plastered the Chinaman's black hair, blood that had dripped from Butch Killian; for Butch, when his arm hit Yong Lo's head, had pulled with his beast's strength so mightily on the chain that his wrist gave way, separated where the steel cuff chewed.

His dismembered, clenched fist remained aloft in the locked handcuff, next to his other arm by which he swung, bleeding to death from the handless right arm dangling over Yong Lo's strangled body.

WHEN WE KILLED THOMPSON

by STRICKLAND GILLILAN

MY, HOW I used to lie awake nights, staring into the darkness of the attic, wishing we hadn't done it!

By staring a long time with eyes stretched wide, I could see the rafters; and hanging to the rafters near the little partition that turned part of the attic into a room, were his pants—brown-striped they showed in the daylight—and his white shirt.

There was quite a while before I would admit that we had done it. I kept my mind resolutely bent on believing we hadn't, until by reviewing the circumstantial evidence over and over again I could see no loophole. And when his brother-in-law was reported to have been in the neighborhood asking others about him, and never came near us, I knew it was no use to deny it if any one should accuse us. Yet it would be unfair to confess without the consent of the others involved in the killing.

So I held my peace. With the exception, of course, of the one night at supper when I blurted, out of a dead and oppressive silence, "I wish we hadn't killed Thompson."

Every one stopped eating and looked wildly at me. They had not expected me to say this, evidently.

Mother asked harshly: "What do you mean?"

I got up and left the table hurriedly. I hadn't meant to say it. It was unfair to the others.

THOMPSON had come to our house to board. It was springtime. He was a timber-looker for a spoke and rim company of Portsmouth. People sent him to our house because sometimes we took folks in. We were reputed to have good food, and our little frame home was one of the best in a poverty-ridden vicinity.

Not so much of a home it would appear now. There was a combination kitchen-dining-room, with an old stove in one corner, the stairway to the attic in the corner nearest the stove, the gun hanging over the doorway leading to the living room where the big fireplace was, and an out-of-doors door leading to the back porch where the morning wood was piled in the winter. Off from that back porch opened the little room where the boys of the family sometimes slept. Always one or two of us slept there. Then leading back from the living room was the parlor, and back of that the spare bedroom.

On the wall of the living room hung a chromo entitled "Rock of Ages." It consisted of a large lady draped in a single garment, reaching up with bare arms and clinging to a great stone cross on a wave-washed rock

Mighty religious-looking picture for a home whose occupants would—

And we did set a good table. We had plenty of apple butter and jelly and yellow tomato preserves and peach butter and all kinds of jam and pickled peaches and canned pears, and dried apples — schnitts — and everything else edible. Besides, we kept a flock of cows and mother was a mistress of the art of dairying. Many and many a night I sat beside her churn after dusk in the entrance to the hillside cellar, listening to her working the dash up and down to the rhythmic accompaniment of Scott's "Lady of the Lake" or "Marmion"; or do the churning myself while she sat on her bare feet (she was a more than half wild woman) and recited Campbell's "Hohenlinden" or "The Ritter Bann from Hungary came back renowned in arms," etc. She wasn't the sort of woman one would pick out as a conspirator in taking human life, however. But how can one tell? One knows so little of the inner workings even of those with whom one is most intimate.

Thompson was a quiet man with brown whiskers and a nose that turned up a little. He had blue eyes. I can see him yet. He had a way of sitting, on the cool spring evenings, and staring into the fire that father would have one of us boys build to keep off the chill. There was, as I now see, nothing else for Thompson to have done. The coal-oil lamp didn't give a very good reading light; there was no lamp for the spare room; and we children—I in particular—sat and stared so hard at the man that he couldn't keep his countenance. He was a stranger, and any stranger was mysterious to me. I would sit and look at him for half an hour at a time, endowing him imaginarily with all sorts of miraculous attributes and surrounding him with an aura of dramatic possibilities. It was no fun for Thompson, as I now realize, to be goggled at by a small, freckled boy with mouth and eyes both hanging open.

Now and then he talked. Father was a great pumper. His cross-examination of strangers, of whom he was always wistfully suspicious, was something to listen to and for mother to scold him about afterwards. One night in a burst of confidence, Thompson told us his first name was Charley, his wife's maiden name was Lewis, he lived at Frost Station, over in Athens county, he had a brother-in-law named Lewis (his wife's brother). He referred to the fact that Thompson and Lewis were two very common names. I thought a great deal about that. It has stuck in my mind through all these years as if there were something really significant or important in the statement.

Thompson would disappear early in the day and go to Jake Garret's, Billy Gordon's, Levi Halderman's, Joe Armstrong's or Eli Tope's or somewhere else in the vicinity, looking for the sort of timber that would make spokes and rims for wagon and buggy wheels. Now and then, when he would return in the evening, he would mention that he had found enough for a "cah". It was in that way he referred to a car-load lot of his sort of timber. It would need, he told us, to be seasoned for a year or so after cutting, before it would be ready to make into wheel timbers. I can hear him yet saying he had "found enough to staht a cah". He had no other dialectic tricks, and his "staht a cah" sounded strangely to me. Had it been today I might have accused him of plain affectation. But then I didn't. It was a part of Thompson, the stranger. It seems to me now he was never out of my thoughts, waking or sleeping, from the time he came till now, forty years later.

One day he announced that he was going to Jackson or Wellston to meet his workmen, whom he had arranged for by mail, to come and start cutting

the timber he had contracted for. He was to walk to Simpson's station, to take the train into Jackson. Before he left, Father asked him if he hadn't better settle up for his board. He did so with seeming reluctance. Whether this was because he hadn't intended squaring up, or whether he was a little miffed at being asked for it, we couldn't tell, though I wanted to continue discussing it for days. He left his brown-striped pants in his room, with a spare white shirt. So we were sure he was coming back.

WE NEVER saw Thompson again. Days and days we looked for him and his gang of workmen to return.

They did not come.

No message was received.

As the days went by with no word from him, I began to grow uneasy and apprehensive. Who had been with Thompson last? We had, so far as I could know. I covertly inquired of people who lived near the railroad track between our house and Simpson's, but none remembered having seen a man of that description. Then I began to be afraid, and stopped asking.

Night after night I lay awake till near midnight, thinking about Thompson and wondering what had happened.

I thought: "Maybe he has been killed. If anybody accused us of it, could we clear ourselves? He was here; we would say 'he went away'. Would any one necessarily believe it? Could we prove he went away?"

I speculated on a motive, but could find none except robbery. He might have had money on him.

Then a neighbor told us of Thompson's brother-in-law, Lewis, having been in the neighborhood, inquiring of those who owned timber he had been looking at, as to when the man had been seen last. Lewis never came to see us. We were the last people who had seen him; he had lived in our house. Why hadn't he come to see us? It looked bad for the brother-in-law. It looked bad also for us—the fact that he had omitted us from his list of inquiries. Did he suspect us? What should we say if we were accused of making away with Thompson? Back it came in the inevitable vicious circle to that question.

It haunted me day and night, until I made up my mind we ought to admit the killing. Why try to defend ourselves in the face of such overwhelming circumstantial evidence? No criminal ever felt guiltier than I felt for my whole family.

Then the way they acted when I blurted out an expression of my regret that we had killed the man—that was suspicious. They looked as people would look if they had done such a thing and were surprized that it was known or that any of the conspirators had the nerve to speak above a whisper about the dastardly deed.

The pants—the brown-striped ones—and the white shirt had been relegated to the attic, from Thompson's room. They hung where I could see them. I marveled at the foolhardiness of the folks in keeping the things about as incriminating evidence when the investigation by the detectives should begin. Every tramp that came to the door for a hand-out was a detective in disguise, and I would watch from the foot of the hill until he went across the Whaley bridge and over the next rise toward Jim Boyd's.

Eventually, we being very poor, it was up to some of us to wear out these garments of Thompson's. No men's clothing should ever be allowed to rot out in that house. It fell to my lot to wear the things, I being a long-legged, growing boy. Oh, how horrified I was to have the things on me! The stripes in them seemed to writhe. And I also had to wear that white shirt. But I made short shrift of it,

as I wore it corn-cutting, which whittles out a shirt in no time.

How glad I was to be rid of both the articles of wearing apparel.

"Kill a man and then appropriate his clothes," I used to mutter to myself. But strictly to myself. I never again ventured to mention the killing to any members of the family, and of course not to strangers. I had found, by my family's reception of the one mention, that it was a sore and unwelcome topic with them. Had there not been so many appalling silences in our house, so many "hushes" when one of us would speak, so many "stop that sniggerin's" when we would get to laughing, those reflections of mine on our crime might not have been so constant and so poignant.

Nobody knows better than I what are the thoughts and apprehensions and conscience twinges of an undiscovered murderer.

THIRTY years after Thompson disappeared, I happened to be traveling on a local train. Looking at the time card I noted that Frost was the next station. Yes, and it was Athens county, too! I slipped into my overcoat and ran forward while the train slowed down. A little, withered old man was loafing at the station, looking up at the coach windows.

"Did you ever know anybody around here named Charley Thompson?" I precipitately asked, while the baggageman began struggling with one trunk and the station agent waited with one milk-can on his truck.

"That's my name," he said.

"Did you ever work as a timber-looker for a Portsmouth spoke and rim company?"

"Yes, I bought many a cah for that company."

"Did you"—

"B-o-o-oard!" yelled the conductor.

I had to hop on to resume my journey without finding out what I'd always wanted to know: why Charley Thompson hadn't come back, where he was while his brother-in-law was hunting him, and everything.

But I felt a thousand pounds lighter. I knew now we hadn't murdered him; and for the first time in three decades I was absolutely at peace with the world. Of course common sense had asserted itself years before and I had known positively that there was no foundation for my childish and self-conscious obsession: that is, I had known it mentally. But a fear had lodged in my emotional system that had not, until that withered native had said "cah", been wholly absent from me.

In the February Issue of WEIRD TALES

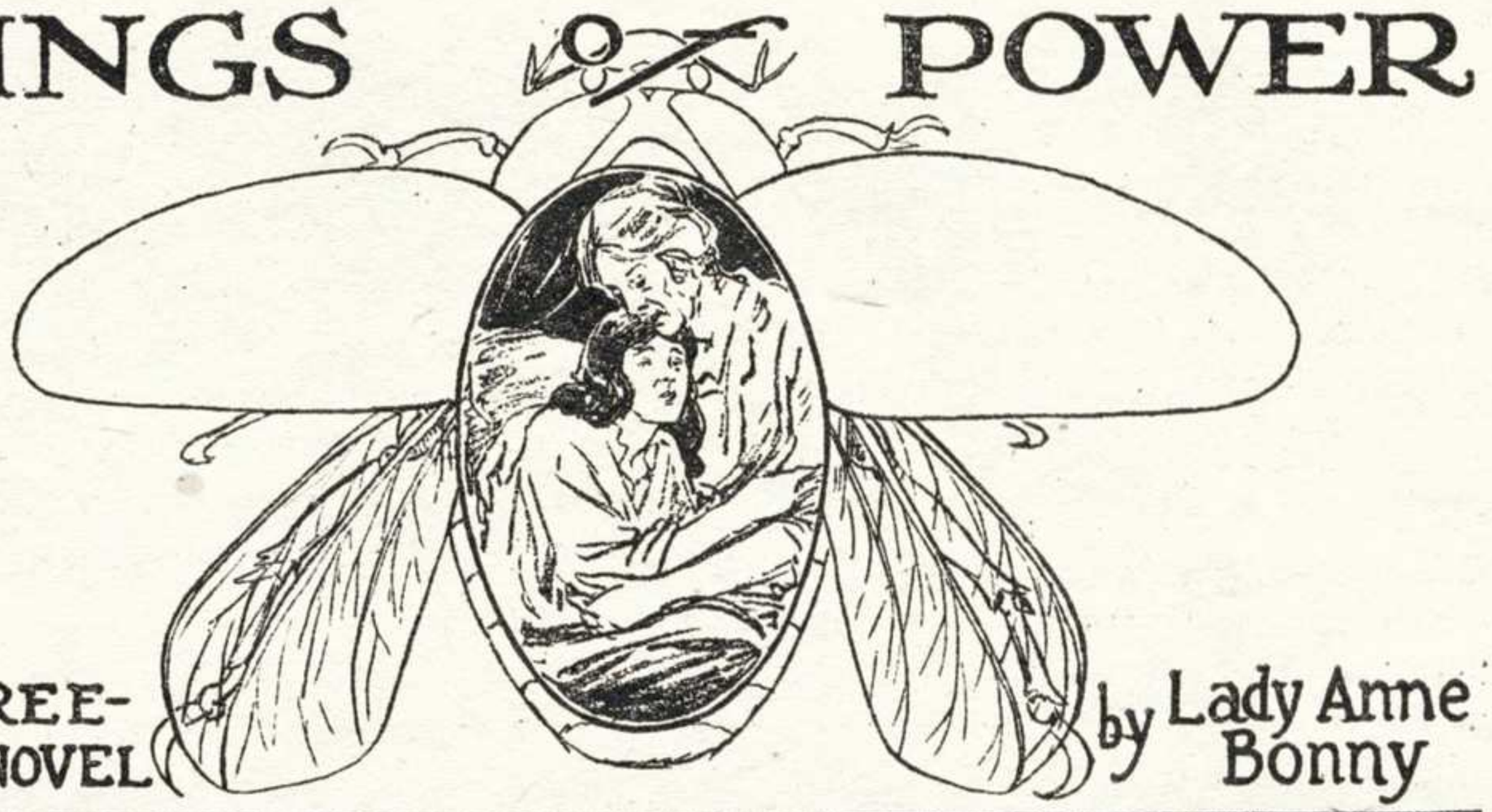
The WOLF *of the* CAMPAGNA

By HARRY BAILEY

A Tale of Cesare Borgia

ON SALE JANUARY FIRST

WINGS OF POWER



A THREE-PART NOVEL

by Lady Anne Bonny

THE moon's stealthy searchlight extended long, ghostly fingers into the darkened bedroom on the second floor of a fine old house that huddled between encroaching warehouses on a street that had known better days. They fell on a girl, asleep in her canopied bed. She stirred restlessly, then sat up among her pillows. Both slender hands pressed hard against her face. Her indrawn breath held suspended the scream that struggled to escape. The elfin face, framed by its dark hair, stared out in terror; the black eyes were haunted wells in its deathly pallor.

The girl looked down at her hands, and turned the strangely chased band on the third finger of one of them. In the shadow of the canopy, where the rays of moonlight did not penetrate, the ring gave off a faint phosphorescent radiance. The intricately chased wings that elongated themselves in the circlet of the ring glowed faintly, but the lump of greenish gold in the center, no less intricately chased, which, like a jewel, formed the beetle's body, shone with a strange and steady radiance. Desperately the girl tried to pull the ring from her finger, but as she worked it up over the first knuckle, some power seemed to be pulling against her, and she quickly slipped it back into place.

She crossed the room to look out upon the garden below. The lawn near the house was in shadow, across which lay two slanting oblongs of light. As the girl at the window caught sight of the blocks of orange on the grass, she shrank back in terror. They narrowed to the merest line, as she made her way back to the bed.

"It is he," she murmured, as if the whisper might somehow reach the man of whom she spoke. "It is he, at work again! What can there be about these strange activities in his laboratory to terrify me so?"

Then, as if some unseen hand had placed itself heavily on her shoulder, confronting her for an explanation of that whisper, the girl huddled fearfully against her pillows. She pressed against her eyes those pale hands, on the third finger of one of which the ring gave out its strange emanation.

At the same moment, Professor Kurt Maquarri turned from a window in the cellar of that house. In his long laboratory coat, the bearded hunchback needed only the peaked hat to make one think irresistibly of some malevolent alchemist of the middle ages. Dank hair hung in strands

across his forehead, under whose shadow the deep-set eyes glittered their guard against the world. The man's face was parchment yellow and dry, without a wrinkle. The beard hid the lines of his mouth, but it was unable to disguise the gnomelike contour of his face. Those glittering eyes that peered out of the parchment of his skin, strangely smooth for all his fifty-odd years, yet somehow, despite its lack of lines, never suggesting youth, compelled one's gaze. What ruthless design had in its inflexibility guarded the wrinkles of age from making their inroads on that parchment skin? A man utterly without conscience might have a mask like that; a man so fixed in one mad purpose as to be beyond good and evil.

Clouds of smoke hung in the air of the dim laboratory fitted up in the stone cellar of the house, smoke of a strange, bluish color and a faintly acrid, pungent odor. Professor Maquarri bent over a table on which stood a complicated machine. He brushed away a slight haze of smoke and pressed experimentally against one of the switches.

"It works," he muttered, after the fashion of a man much given to activities demanding solitude and discourse with himself; "it works, but the smoke—the after effects—must be eliminated."

Maquarri crossed to the window and cautiously fastened its bolts, making sure that the curtains shut in all light. With only one electric lamp near the machine, he bent over it, his gnome's face screwed up, as he carefully examined each part. Against the stone walls of the laboratory, the outlines of his shadow grotesquely flickered. Satisfied at last, the hunchback switched out the light, and the laboratory was in darkness.

There was a second of suspense. Then the liquid in the Crookes tubes took on an unearthly, crawling radiance, and from the machine bluish sparks leapt. They lit up the scene, disclosing Maquarri bending over a switch, intense concentration on his face. The ends of the wires attached to the metal caps on the three Crookes tubes that topped the machine gave off phosphorescent sparks which shot through the air for several feet before they were dissolved.

UPSTAIRS, the girl started from her pillows, shrieking out of the nightmare that had awakened her.

"Susan! Susan!"

The call ended in a moan as an angular Scotchwoman appeared. In a moment she had the girl huddled in her arms, the bedclothes pulled about the shivering form.

"It's a pairfect shame to see you this way, my bonny Joan," she muttered. "Nothing but dreams to frighten you near to death ever since your blessed mother passed away."

Joan sobbed, clinging to her nurse. "It's a different dream this time, Susan. Not the usual one about Mother's death."

She shivered, and brushed away at what seemed to be an imaginary swarm of insects about her head.

"Tell it to Susan, then, my wee lamb. Tell it to Susan, and you'll feel less frightened of it."

Once more Joan seemed to brush away a swarm of insects that hovered about her head.

"It's those yellow butterflies!" she gasped. "I used to love them once, but now they haunt me!"

She sat up in her excitement.

"Oh, Susan, you've no idea how real it all was, for a dream! We were back in the West Indies, and I was wandering through Uncle Hubert's garden in the old plantation. At a turn of the path I came upon two figures. They didn't see me, but I recognized Uncle Hubert in white linens. He was bending over a shrub, his collector's net in hand, trying to

catch a butterfly that had alighted there, but Professor Maquarri swooped down on it and captured it under Uncle's eyes.''

"Ay, as he swoops down on everything,'' muttered Susan.

"Neither of them saw me watching,'' the girl continued; "but the professor took out his microscope, and they examined the butterfly closely. As I looked, Professor Maquarri started to pull the wings from the body, explaining something about their structure to Uncle. I gave a little cry, and they both turned and saw me at once. 'Come here, Joan,' said Uncle, 'I want to tell you that Professor Maquarri is to marry your mother next week.' ''

Joan paused to look at Susan.

"That's just exactly how Uncle Hubert told me of Mother's marriage, Susan. Really, you know, just as it was in the dream. Now wait until you hear the rest. I gave a little cry of dismay, and stepped backwards. Professor Maquarri stood watching me, his net in hand, as if ready to spring, and then it seemed to me in the dream that I could feel myself getting smaller and smaller. Telescoping—like Alice in Wonderland, you know. I was still myself, but I was swiftly becoming diminutive, until I stood there in the garden path no more than three inches high. The professor watched me become smaller, and then with a horrible laugh he sprang forward and caught me in his butterfly net.''

Susan stroked the girl's trembling hands as she listened, but Joan was living again the terror of her dream.

"I struggled in the net, Susan, but Uncle Hubert and the professor both took out their magnifying glasses again and bent over me. I felt as though they were going to pull my legs and arms apart, to see how I was made, as they had done with the butterfly, but just at that moment Mother appeared in the path. She didn't look like herself at all, but sad, you know, the way she looked after—after her marriage to the professor.

" 'Let the child go!' she cried angrily, and my heart beat hopefully, but Professor Maquarri turned and glared sternly at her. He raised his magnifying glass, and as the sun's rays caught it, his eye glared through the lens, enormous and ferocious. Mother shrank back in terror. She turned away with a little moan. I tried to call out to Uncle Hubert, but he was absorbed with another butterfly he had caught in his own net, and there the dream fades.''

Joan, for all her nineteen years, looked up at Susan with a sense of relief. It was like telling to her nurse her fear of the bogy man in childhood. But Susan's eyes were hard and her lips tight in thought.

"Ay, much good it would do you to call out to Lord Hubert Charing at any time! Him so absorbed in his bugs and beetles he's no time for his kin!''

"I know,'' murmured Joan, lying back in her nurse's arms. "It's awful of me, Susan, but do you know, I sometimes think that if Uncle Hubert hadn't been such a famous entomologist, then the professor would never have come to Montserrat to see his collection, and Mother and all of us might be safely there now.''

Susan nodded in her forthright fashion. "Ay, right you are there, my bonny lamb. But it's done now, and there's no remedying it, though your mother was a changed woman after her marriage.''

Joan sighed and brushed back her hair. Susan's eye caught the gleam of gold on her finger, no longer phosphorescent now that the lamp beside the bed was lit, and her tone sharpened.

"That ring there,'' she said, pointing disapprovingly at the band on Joan's hand; "that heathenish design of the beetle with spreading wings, made by the professor himself out of

his wedding ring to your mother and that of your own father, to be worn by you as a symbol of the protective love he would give you—''

''I know, I know,'' murmured Joan, ''it wasn't like Mother, and yet she made me promise to wear it always. It's awful of me to feel as I do about the ring, but I can't care for it. It somehow terrifies me.''

Joan looked down at the band on her finger, and shivered. The golden wings and body, so intricately carved, so fragile, lay on her white finger much as a real beetle might have done, and her flesh crawled at the thought.

''Come, come, my lamb,'' murmured Susan, contrite. ''Try to sleep, and forget everything. Before long you'll be of age, and the professor no longer your guardian. Just think of that, now, and go back to sleep. We can go back to Montserrat then, my wee one.''

Soothed by her old nurse's words, Joan gradually relaxed, and after a little while Susan laid her carefully back among her pillows and stood watching her peaceful breathing.

DOWNSTAIRS in his laboratory, Professor Kurt Maquarri rubbed his hands with satisfaction.

''The greatest scientific discovery in the world,'' he gloated, muttering to himself after his usual habit; ''and I alone am its possessor!''

He frowned at a sudden thought.

''Unless—unless he somehow stumbles on the secret before I can get my father's notebooks and formulæ out of his grasp!''

A knock sounded through the thick oaken door of the laboratory, and Maquarri crossed softly to open it.

''Ah, Felix, at last,'' he muttered, bolting the door with his habitual caution. ''Tell me. what have you found out?''

''It is true, what the magazine article said, Maestro,'' replied Felix, lowering his voice to the mutter that matched Maquarri's tone. ''It is true. He is famous already among his many patients, this young Dr. Philip Olivier. All day the people file in and out of the office, seeking the miracles he is said to work.''

Maquarri listened intently, his eyes shifting over the countenance of the other man. Felix's face looked more than ever like a mask as he told his story, and again the professor congratulated himself on having found such an accomplice.

The older man reached across his desk to a magazine that lay face downward. Turning it over, he stared at the keen face that looked out from the left hand page. Across from the picture the article ran: ''Dr. Philip Olivier Experiments in Curing Mental Disease by Means of Zeta-Ray.'' And lower down, a sub-heading: ''Young Grandson of the Late Dr. Philip Maquarri, of Florence, Italy, Believes He Has Discovered Element Resembling Radium in its Properties which will Emanate Zeta-Rays.'' Once more Kurt Maquarri's envious eyes read the lines he already knew by heart, the lines telling how the young Dr. Olivier had given to the Society for Psychiatric Research his opinion that suggestion for curing mental diseases could be administered by means of a Zeta-ray emanating from an element of his own discovery, which would resemble radium in its properties, but the future limit of whose usefulness could be proved only by repeated experiment.

The hunchback looked up from the magazine and narrowed his eyes at Felix.

''He is a soul doctor, my father's grandson, who has inherited his secrets. He loves humanity, so let science wait.''

Maquarri said the words with a sneer, but in the next second his face set with unshakable purpose.

''Ay, let science wait, my pretty doctor, until Maquarri shall have wrested the secret from your grasp!''

His face took on a strange raptness.

"Until, possessed of unlimited wealth, secure and inviolable, he shali soar on the wings of power!" he added.

"But now Maestro has the secret," murmured Felix.

"I have it, yes, and I have developed its power beyond my father's dreams; but what good is it to me unless it remains a secret? What good if at any moment this young upstart doctor should stumble upon it? He has my father's notebooks, his experimental data, and already, in his notorious cures—his miracles—he has been working along the lines of suggestion. Only he is content to substitute the uncertain human touch for the surety of science!"

"But is it sure—your method?"

"As sure as six months of undefeated experiment can prove. I have the girl absolutely under my power now. She hates the winged ring, but she dare not take it off, and so long as she wears a piece of zodium on her person, I can hypnotize her mind to do my bidding."

The hunchback bent malevolently over the machine that stood before them on the table.

"The wishing machine," he muttered; "the wishing machine that shall send us soaring on the wings of power!"

He pressed a switch, intense concentration on his face, and as the bluish sparks leapt through the dim laboratory, his eyes glittered with satisfaction.

"Upstairs in her bed she dreams, and starts out of those dreams in terror at my bidding!" he muttered. "Afterward, she remembers nothing. Only the vague, formless dread that holds her in its grip—the reaction after the effect of the zodium rays."

"The wings of power," said Felix, forming the words deliberately. "How it would startle the world, and yet—is it stranger than the radio? There a machine receives the etheric vibrations carrying the sound waves. With zodium, the effect of the radio-active element hypnotizes the mind, making it passive to receive the thought waves sent on the rays of the zodium. It is a question of like seeking like, is it not, Maestro?"

Maquarri nodded, scarcely heeding the other's question. For a second he hung undecided. Then, switching out the one cloaked light in the laboratory, he bent once more over the wishing machine.

Upstairs in her bed, Joan stirred restlessly. After a moment she sat up, a strange raptness on her countenance. With the fingers of an automaton, she wrapped herself in her dressing-gown, and with the measured tread of a somnambulist she made her slow way across the room to the casement window through which the moonlight streamed. Her dark eyes stared straight in front of her, looking neither to the right nor to the left. For an instant she stood poised on the window ledge that hung over the dark garden below. Then, with the same trancelike movements, she edged herself sidewise on a coping not more than six inches wide that extended along the back wall of the house.

In the laboratory, hung with its haze of bluish smoke, Maquarri motioned Felix over to the window, keeping his own place at the switch of the machine, concentrated on projecting his brain and thought waves along the mysterious rays that emanated from it.

Felix gasped and held his breath as the figure of Joan made its way along the coping on a wing of the old house that ran at right angles to the laboratory in the basement. One slip, and she would be dashed to the ground, but at the sharp intake of the young West Indian's breath, Maquarri laughed evilly, still bending over his machine. Felix turned from the window, a protest on his lips, but Maquarri's concentration was imper-

vious to interruption, and he crouched as if in a vise.

THE girl faltered for a moment, where the coping turned another sharp corner of the building. Surely her foot would slip at that sharp, right-angled turn! But with the utmost precision she turned about and made her way in the same, steady-footed tread back to the window of her room, and climbed in.

Professor Kurt Maquarri laughed as he switched on the light in the laboratory.

"You need not have feared, my friend. I have other uses for the girl, and would not let her die!"

Felix looked at the wishing machine, and Maquarri's eyes gleamed triumphantly.

"Ay, I shall hypnotize her to do my bidding by means of the wishing machine. First she shall get the secrets that rightfully belong to me from this soul doctor, my father's grandson, and then to the West Indies and Lord Hubert's treasure—the luck of the Charings!"

He laughed slyly.

"Then shall we soar on the wings of power!"

Felix moistened his lips.

"You mean you will find out the whereabouts of this rumored treasure which the pirate, Blackbeard, left in care of the Charings, by means of the hypnotic power of the wishing machine?"

Maquarri nodded.

"That treasure, first, and then we shall see about others," he murmured. "It was lucky you chose that particular underground passage in which to hide the evidence of your—ah—folly, Felix, and that I happen to be a lean man who does not sleep much of nights, so that I found you there, eh?"

Felix cringed, but Maquarri clapped him reassuringly on the shoulder.

"Come, come, my boy, why this fear? Surely if I have kept your secret well for a year, you might begin to breathe easily."

He looked at the young half-caste Spaniard.

"Only, it is well to remind you at times of the fact that makes you so invaluable an assistant."

And Maquarri turned aside to hide his satisfaction as Felix blanched.

"We must work quickly now," he continued, fumbling among his papers. "The experiments have eaten up most of my capital."

Felix nodded.

"That last order of uranite from the Rumanian deposits cost a small fortune, it is true, but from it you succeeded in separating the zodium, the hypnotic element you have been looking for, did you not, Maestro?"

Maquarri's eyes blazed with triumph. He felt the desire to confide in someone, even in someone so much his tool as Felix d'Acosta. It is a desire that at some time comes to all human beings, but never so strongly as to those whose devious ways of life have sealed them to a more than human repression.

On an impulse, he bent forward and pressed a beetle's body carved in the scroll at the top of his desk. The scroll swung back, and out of the secret compartment which it revealed Professor Kurt Maquarri drew a faded photograph and a yellowed letter. For a second, he compared the photograph in his hand with the picture of young Dr. Philip Olivier which stared out at him from the page of the magazine. Then he looked up at Felix.

"My father, as you know, was a very great scientist, the greatest of his day. His theories and discoveries paved the way for the triumphs of Becquerel and the Curies, and he antedated many of the discoveries of Sir William Crookes."

Maquarri arrogantly tossed his grotesque head.

"And I inherited his genius! He recognized my capacities, and trained me himself, giving me access to his laboratory in Florence, and all his notebooks. He was on the verge of an important scientific discovery, and I was to carry on the torch if he died before—before he had achieved his purpose."

The hunchback brooded for a second. Then he continued. "Only we quarreled, and six months after I ran away, he died."

Felix looked at him impassively.

"And the quarrel?" he murmured.

"The Florentine girls were very beautiful," muttered Maquarri, and in his mouth the commonplace words sounded somehow ghoulish. "Tall and slender, but with a full curve of breast and hip that made them infinitely desirable."

For the space of a second, the eyes of master and servant met in a glitter of understanding that told of the buried streak of sensuality in both their natures.

"How well I remember that night—thirty years ago, it was. My father and I were together in his study in Florence. It was on the eve of my twenty-first birthday, and we had had a long talk. 'My son,' he said, 'I have given you the best of scientific trainings, and I shall depend on you to continue my work when I am gone.' I nodded, for this had been the subject of many previous conversations between us. 'I believe there is a natural element to be separated from either pitchblende, uranite or some other sort of volcanic lava that will prove of incalculable curative benefit to mankind,' he continued. 'A sort of concentrated sunshine.'

"I knew my father's theories," Maquarri mused, "and I agreed with them, but, as I say, I had inherited his genius, and I could make independent scientific hypotheses of my own. 'Could this not be used to hypnotize others to do our bidding?' I asked. My father shook his head, but after a little argument I had convinced him that there was something in my theories, after all."

Professor Kurt Maquarri cast a look of triumph at the wishing machine that after so many years had vindicated his early hazard. Then he turned once more to his memory, and Felix listened impassively.

"I remember there was a storm outside, and in a flare of lightning my father looked keenly at me. 'My research and my life's work have been to aid humanity, not to exploit it,' he said quietly. Before I could reassure him, we both turned, startled, to see a girl's white face pressed hard against the French windows of the study, down which the rain poured. At a flash of lightning, she huddled there, and my father sprang forward to open the window and let her in.

"A shiver went through me as I met the girl's look. I started toward her in instinctive menace, but my father's hand stopped me, and the girl poured out her story."

Felix just barely moistened his lips with his tongue, and Maquarri nodded.

"Lisa was beautiful, even for a Florentine," he muttered, "but she was scarcely worth what she cost me."

He looked reflective.

"There was no stopping the girl. She told my father everything. How I had made love to her out on the cliffs, and had finally made her let me hypnotize her, just as an experiment, you know.

"My father was furious and heartbroken at once, and accused me of having used his own secret theories.

"'Yes,' I answered defiantly, for here was the proof of the correctness of my theory, 'yes, I made a sort of magnet of the uranium, but it worked imperfectly. I could not have hypnotized Lisa unless she had been willing!'

"My father was pale with suppressed anger. He went over to his safe and took out a leather bag of gold and notes.

" 'Take this and go. I will send you a draft for more, and I will write to you at the Bank of Naples when I have made up my mind about you.' I went, of course. I had never seen him so wrathful."

Professor Kurt Maquarri leaned back and opened with careful fingers the letter the years had turned yellow and fragile.

"He sent me this letter to Naples a week later," he said quietly.

Maquarri watched Felix as he stared down at the old-fashioned script, clear and angular, that stood out from the yellowed sheet.

"Ah," he murmured, "I forgot for the moment that you do not know Italian. Well, come; I will translate it for you."

TOGETHER the two men bent over the letter.

"You see, it is dated September 11, 1893—thirty years ago, the year Philip Olivier was born. I regret that you do not read Italian, for a translation scarcely does it justice. The language is old-fashioned and sternly moral, but it says that the writer is so disappointed at the uses his son has made of the scientific training and heritage he had intended to hand on to him, he wishes to warn him that he is cut off from all his secrets and formulæ.

"See, here it is in exact translation. 'My secrets and formulæ are to be left under seal to the just-born son of my daughter, Eleonora, in America, one Philip Maquarri Olivier, for thirty years. I leave the bulk of my fortune in trust for him to obtain the best scientific and medical education which Europe can offer. Then, when he is thirty, and has already been practising medicine five years, he is to have these secrets handed on to him to use and perfect for the benefit of mankind.' "

Maquarri folded the letter and looked up at Felix.

"There follow some moral admonitions to me, with the promise of a modest bequest for life, and that is all."

He brooded again.

"How well I remember his will! And the furor it created when it was published at his death six months later! Old Professor Bertelli, of Pisa, was made one of the executors, and a German doctor at the University of Bonn, where he had studied, another."

"Ah, they were powerful, then, these secrets!" murmured Felix. "I see. The old doctor, your father, wished his grandson to be a man who had tried himself first, or who had been tried by the judgment of the executors."

"Exactly," answered Maquarri. "And for the past thirty years I have worked against time to discover, to perfect that secret first. For four months now he has been in possession of the notebooks and secret formulæ, but luck has been with me. By the time he was thirty, this young Dr. Philip Olivier had already acquired a large practise as a nerve specialist, a psychanalyst."

Thirty years of rancor, of suppressed bitterness, lay in Maquarri's tone. Unfathomable avarice, unlimited lust for gold, for power, weighted the words.

"The wings of power!" he muttered. "That was the idea in back of my fancy to shape the ring in the form of a beetle, with spreading wings."

His eyes glittered in a smile.

"Even we scientific men have our fancies."

For a few moments Maquarri's head was bent as he followed the maze of his plans. Then he rose wearily, and taking the signal from his master,

Felix said good-night and let himself out of the laboratory.

Maquarri shot back the bolts after his accomplice, and turned, candle in hand, to study the beetles and tropical butterflies that lay entombed in the coffin-shaped cases along the walls of his laboratory. It made a strange picture, that dimly lit grotto, its tables littered with retorts and other chemical apparatus, its walls lined with those coffin-shaped cases, and the figure of the hunchback, candle in hand, moving from one to another and peering into their contents.

Stooping under the weight, the professor lifted one case and carried it over to the table.

"The wings of power," he muttered; "the wings of power, my golden beauties! But for your lure I might never have gone to the island of Montserrat!"

A muffled tattoo sounded on a door at the top of a spiral staircase at the other end of the laboratory, leading to the main floor above. Maquarri leaned forward and pressed an electric button on his desk. Grinning craftily, he laid the golden butterfly carefully on the table as a tall, magnificently built quadroon came slowly down the stairs.

"Come, come, my tawny one," he said, his eyes traveling possessively over her. "I shall be ready to go in a few moments. But look, first, at this other golden beauty that I have just unmounted. From your own Montserrat, the rarest specimen on the island!"

The quadroon moved with a slow grace nearer the table, and cast an indolent, heavy glance upon the brown and golden butterfly. Then, settling herself in a chair, she spread her bright skirts and bared a magnificent set of teeth in a slow smile.

"I am sleepy," she said in a throaty tone, and looked away again, her lids drooping.

His skilled fingers betraying an unusual agitation, Maquarri put the butterfly back into its case, and switching off the light, he followed the quadroon up the circular staircase at the end of the laboratory to her housekeeper's quarters above.

2

IN THE waiting room outside the office of Dr. Philip Olivier, famous psychiatrist and specialist for mental troubles, a motley crowd was assembled. The lame and the halt were represented there; also those miserable ones in whose eyes burned a light bordering on the insane.

Miss Thompson, the doctor's middle-aged nurse, entered and the gathering looked up hopefully. She ushered in a little lame boy, his mother following tremulously behind, and the three vanished beyond the door leading to the doctor's inner sanctum.

Several of the patients who had come prepared to wait pulled their lunches out of bag or pocket, and sat calmly eating. A fat old Frenchwoman appeared in the doorway. Behind her came a butler, bearing a huge bowl of steaming soup, and behind him a maid with a tray full of smaller bowls, and a great platter of bread, piled high.

"Now, then," cried Mme. Franchard, the doctor's housekeeper, with a good-natured laugh, "how many of you that have to wait forgot to bring lunch?" And one by one the lame and the halt and the miserable filed up to receive their bowls of steaming soup, which they ate gratefully.

Five minutes passed, ten minutes, a half an hour, and then the door to the doctor's office opened. The little boy who had gone in on crutches came out now, walking without them. Behind him his mother followed, ready to catch him if he should fall. The boy waved her off and faced the hopeful gathering in the waiting room. "Watch me!" he cried. Then he

walked straight across the room, without aid, his face radiant, his eyes rapt.

Old Mme. Franchard bustled forward with some hot soup, while the others crowded about the boy, eager to hear his story of the miracle.

"Here now, *mon petit,*" said the old Frenchwoman, "eat the good hot broth and nourish yourself. It is not well to overdo things at first."

Miss Thompson stood in the doorway, watching the scene. She turned with a smile to Christopher C. Quinn, brilliant lawyer and devoted admirer of Dr. Olivier.

"The doctor isn't content to give all his time and strength to the people, but he must feed them also."

Quinn scarcely concealed his impatience, but the woman smiled indulgently.

"Oh, he doesn't spare himself ever," she said, and conducted him through the green baize door.

Dr. Philip Olivier looked up from his notes as his best friend appeared. At thirty, the hair just slightly graying at the temples gave the doctor's vital, alert face an air of distinction. Quinn was perhaps ten years older than his friend, and he took advantage of his age to berate him.

"You are the famous grandson of a famous grandfather, Olivier, on the verge of the greatest scientific discovery of the age, and yet you give the best of yourself to those people, and science must be content with the dregs!"

"What can I do, in the face of present need?" answered Dr. Olivier with his gentle smile.

Christopher Quinn walked into the laboratory adjoining the doctor's office. Olivier followed, and for a second the two men stood side by side. One end of the room was lined with books covering the entire range of science, and the rest of the laboratory was fitted for complicated experiments. Olivier silenced the impatient question on his friend's lips as they stood beside the laboratory table.

"I mean to give the rest of the afternoon to the experiment," he said, smilingly; "but first those people out there must be attended to."

As Quinn turned impatiently away, the doctor picked up some sheets from the table.

"Look, here are the proofs for a second article on the theories of induced suggestion which the *Journal of Psychiatric Research* asked me to write."

Quinn eagerly scanned the first paragraph.

"That's fine stuff, old man," he said approvingly; "but I can't stop now. Let me take these with me, and I'll look in again just before dinner to see how the experiment has progressed."

"Good!"

The doctor absently shook his friend's hand, and led him to the door as Miss Thompson appeared with the next patient.

FELIX D'ACOSTA bent forward and searched his master's eyes.

"But the girl, your stepdaughter," Felix spoke cautiously, fearful of betraying himself, "what is it exactly you wish to do with her now that you have her under your power?"

It was early afternoon, but the laboratory was dark, and the one cloaked light threw its circle around the two men.

"It is simple. With your help and hers, we shall get the secret from this Dr. Philip Olivier before he shall have discovered it to be a secret."

"You mean she is to get it from him?"

Maquarri nodded, a glint in his eye.

"You mean," Felix barely formed the words on his lips, but Maquarri accented them and gave them life, "you mean your stepdaughter is to—

to make him fall in love with her, and so gain his confidence?''

''That is my scheme,'' Maquarri agreed. ''Under the hypnotic influence of my wishing machine and the zodium rays, she shall go to him, as if for treatment. There has been some purpose, you see, in inspiring her with terrifying dreams. She shall consult this psychanalyst to unravel her dreams—her inspired dreams!''

Maquarri grinned in appreciation of his own joke.

''You are to shadow her from now on. She is not to be out of your sight for long. And when she is with him, you are to let me know. I shall control her thoughts, her utterances. She shall tell him only what I choose. If he is so clever, this soul doctor, let him find out what I do not choose she shall tell him.''

''And under your influence she is to steal the formulæ, the notebooks, the experimental data, Maestro?''

''It shall rest with time whether that task shall be yours or hers,'' said Maquarri inscrutably. ''Wait here, while I talk with my stepdaughter in the library upstairs. Then you shall see how my scheme works.''

Joan had dreaded the interview, when word came to her that the professor wanted to talk with her in the library, but if it was to be nothing worse than a lecture on nerves and insomnia, she could stand it.

''I know you have been troubled recently with strange and terrifying dreams,'' began the professor.

He held out a magazine, and she looked down into the sympathetic countenance of Dr. Philip Olivier.

''Perhaps, my child, you would care to consult this doctor. He is a psychanalyst, and can doubtless rid you of your troubling dreams.''

Joan settled to her magazine article with more interest than she had felt in months, and Professor Maquarri, well pleased, rejoined Felix in the laboratory underground.

''She shall go to him today. At 5.''

Maquarri prepared for his long vigil with the wishing machine.

''The late afternoon is the good time, *hein*, the mellow time, for first impressions? For love at first sight?''

The hunchback shot a shrewd glance at Felix, across the table, and the lines of his face settled into satisfaction at what he detected there.

''Go, wait outside, Felix,'' Marquarri muttered, ''and when you see her leave the house, follow at a distance and see that she enters Dr. Olivier's.''

Upstairs in the library, Joan read on to the end of her article with feverish interest. She looked up, as if held in a trance by one fixed idea.

''Yes,'' she muttered, ''I must go to him. At once! Today, if he will see me. But of course he will! He must! I could not stand another night of dreams!''

3

THE spring dusk had begun to settle over the city, but still Dr. Olivier worked on in his laboratory. Under the strong lights, engrossed in his experiment, the passage of time had no meaning for him. A knock sounded on the door, followed in a second by the head of Christopher C. Quinn. Still absorbed over his crucibles and his Crookes tubes, Olivier called out to his friend.

''Come in, come in, Chris, and forgive me if I don't for the moment attend to you. I have an interesting performance taking place under the lens, and I don't want to miss any of its transformations.''

Quinn came in softly. His wide, Irish-blue eyes sparkled with eagerness and anticipation. For a moment, hands in pockets, he stood watching his young friend. Then, irrepressible

as a child, he broke into eager questioning.

"What is it you think you have, my boy?"

Still bending over his microscope, Olivier felt for his words.

"Gad! I don't know, but I'm beginning to think my grandfather was on the right track, after all. There's an element in this mixture that acts suspiciously like radium, but I can't separate it as yet."

For a second he was busy at one of the retorts, mixing the chemicals and adding them to those already in transformation under the microscope.

"It acts like radium, yes—but it would be a thousand times more powerful. A sort of Zeta-ray, you know, as an emanation, and heaven alone can tell what it will accomplish!"

"Glory to all the saints, me boy, but you'll be more famous than the Curies if it's true!"

When under the stress of excitement, the cultured Irishman reverted to his early brogue.

"A sort of Zeta-ray, you think? Who knows but that it will cure cancer, then, where radium has not yet succeeded?"

"Cancer—and other things besides," muttered Olivier. "The poor old human race has had hard sledding since primeval days, and this element, this Zeta-ray thing, should, if I am correct, have in it all the curative, marvelous powers of concentrated sunshine. A sort of essence of vitality" (there was a pause as the doctor bent closer over his microscope) "for the gods—the men, if you will—who sit in the dusk."

A faint smile hung on Olivier's lips, but his eyes were still intent over the microscope.

"The dusk of the gods," he murmured, half to himself, "and to them we bring back the vanished light."

Jotting down formulæ as he spoke, the young doctor drew in his breath sharply, his being tense, ready to spring on the result he was working for if it should take form in the changing liquid under the slide of the microscope.

Scarcely less excited by contagion, Quinn turned impatiently to Miss Thompson as she came into the laboratory.

"Not this trial, worse luck," muttered Olivier, his voice edged with disappointment.

Then, still not looking up, he signified his knowledge of the nurse's presence.

"What is it, Miss Thompson?"

"I hated to interrupt you, doctor, but there's a patient outside—a young lady—who refuses to go away without seeing you."

Quinn cut in before his friend could answer.

"Tell her she can't, by all the saints!" he cried irascibly. "The doctor gives his mornings to patients and his afternoons to science!"

"I told her to come again in the morning, but she simply refuses to go away until she has seen the doctor. It seems to be a fixed idea with her, sir, a sort of monomania."

Miss Thompson, skilled of long service, supplied her facts without waiting for questions.

"A young woman, a girl, really, not past twenty, if she's that, dressed in deep mourning, and with a face as white as paper."

"Young, pale and in mourning," growled Quinn. "A widow, I suppose. Tell me, Miss Thompson, is she pretty?"

Dr. Olivier still bent over his microscope; he still jotted down his formulæ; but he had missed not one of Miss Thompson's words.

"Just explain to her, Miss Thompson, that I'm engaged on an important piece of experimental research, and can't be interrupted at the mo-

ment, but be sure to make an appointment for the morning."

Miss Thompson was out of the room on a murmur of approval from Quinn, and for the next two minutes Olivier worked feverishly over his experiment, now pouring in one mixture, now another, and after each time carefully scrutinizing the result under the microscope. Then, still not looking up, he said quietly to his friend, "Just ring the bell for Miss Thompson, will you, old chap?"

When the nurse reappeared, he put a brief question to her.

"She's still here," Miss Thompson answered. "Seems to be slightly hysterical in her determination to see you. Says she'll not go until she does."

"All right, then," answered the doctor, drawing the slide from under the microscope and emptying its contents before Quinn could stop him. "Tell her I'll come in a few moments."

Olivier smiled at his disgruntled friend. "The human reason is a strange thing, Quinn, and one night's delay is sometimes enough to throw it off its balance. I must see this girl, but why not stop and dine with me here? I've a number of new theories I'd like to talk over with you."

JOAN SUFFERN rose timorously as she faced Dr. Olivier's kind smile.

"I had to see you today," she murmured. Then, finding his grave eyes fixed on her, she continued. "I must apologize for my insistence. I can scarcely understand myself — but something here," and she put her hands to her forehead desperately, "something here seems to be impelling me."

Gently the doctor motioned her to a seat.

"I understand. Those mental impulsions often lead us to do things unaccountable to ourselves."

The girl's eyes searched his. Poor little thing, he thought, it is one of those cases of dissociated personality. One moment she is one person, and then she wishes to consult me, to be helped by me; in the next, everything in her tugs away from that idea.

"Suppose you tell me, first, something of yourself. Something of your life, so that I may know how to help you."

Dr. Olivier was famous for the confidence with which he invariably inspired his patients. Before his gentle understanding and kindly sympathy, the fiercest reserve could not hold out for long, but now the girl frowned inscrutably, and a curious, set expression contracted her face.

"There is nothing to tell you that would be of interest to you," she said.

"Then why have you come?"

"I am ill."

Joan's voice trembled slightly.

"I dream horrible things at night. I have hallucinations—about my mother—her death. I read of you in a magazine, and I had to come. Something inside me compelled it."

"Your mother died recently?"

"Two months ago."

"What is your name?" asked the doctor suddenly, as if to catch her off guard.

Joan threw a frightened glance at him.

"I cannot tell you," she half whispered. "Why must you know?"

She looked at him in terror.

"I do not wish to tell you my name."

Then her hands went up in despair to her forehead.

"Dr. Olivier," she cried, "I do not know my name! My own name! I cannot remember it! And yet a moment ago—"

"It is nothing, nothing, I assure you," said the doctor gently. "You are afraid that I may insist on your telling me, and your subconscious mind has thrown up the barrier of forgetfulness as a defense. Never mind," he smiled, "some other time you will tell me your name. It is unimportant, really. But these hallucinations, these dreams, suppose you tell me about them."

With relief, Olivier's practised eye noted that the girl did not shrink from his question.

"My mother's death—it haunts me constantly—almost every night I dream of it."

The girl shuddered, and pressed both slender hands against her aching forehead. A characteristic gesture that, the doctor noted mentally. What is it, I wonder, does she want to forget? But the girl was speaking again, and he bent all his faculties on her. They never told what one wanted to know, these mental patients. One had to fill in the gaps oneself.

"This dream, is it always the same?"

"Yes! Yes! Almost always! That is what frightens me so. I see myself standing beside my mother's bed. She is—she is dying. I gave her her medicine, sometimes. She liked to have me. And in the dream, I take up one of the bottles from the night table beside her bed."

The girl threw back her head and drew in her breath, her throat contracting at the memory. What an exquisite profile, thought the doctor, watching her, but how those great shadows under the eyes make a tragic mask of the face.

The girl turned her head and looked at him somberly.

"There was a sleeping potion on the table, marked 'Poison—Overdose Fatal.' One could not mistake it, but in my dream it is always the same. Just before I wake up—just before the dream fades—I find myself beside my mother, bending over her in anguish—she gasps out her dying breath, and it seems to me her eyes reproach me. I look down, and in my hands I hold the bottle marked 'Poison'."

A sob shook the girl's fragile body, and the doctor moved closer, in instinctive sympathy.

"Tell me, who else is present in the dream?"

"No one."

"Are you sure?"

Joan bent a puzzled frown on him. She seemed to be struggling with something in her own mind. Then her face set in that same tragic mask.

"No one else, I am sure."

Dr. Olivier was famous for combining the tenderest sympathy with an aloofness of manner that made a young demigod of him. For that reason, none of his female patients dared to fall in love with him, and he, on his side, was believed and believed himself to be impervious to the charms of women. But today he had a strange, unaccountable impulse, of which he was scarcely aware, to take this lovely young creature in his arms and comfort her. It softened the lines of his usually austere face as he bent forward to talk to Joan, but that keen intellect was still intent on its problem.

"Dreams, my dear child, are never to be taken literally, you must know. They are symbols, merely, symbols of some inner conflict, some inner distress."

He smiled at her gently.

"For that reason, we can be absolutely sure that if in the dream you killed your mother," deliberately Dr. Olivier spoke the words which the girl had avoided (the best way to lay a ghost was to confront it, he held) and the girl threw a startled glance at him, "if in the dream you killed your mother, in reality you did not.

The poison of the dream stands for something else, and it is for us to find out what.''

Joan looked at him steadily, her eyes somber.

''Rid me of the dream, it is all I ask,'' she muttered.

''My dear child, we never rid ourselves of a thing by suppressing it. We must explain it—understand it. And therefore you must tell me something of your life.''

For half an hour Dr. Olivier talked on in this strain, but whenever he tried to lift the veil of secrecy which Joan hung about herself, her face became a mask, and he could get her to reveal nothing. He was almost in despair, when suddenly her mood shifted.

''Let me come again tomorrow,'' she said pleadingly, reaching forward and taking his hands.

Ordinarily the young doctor would have been on his guard against such an advance from a woman patient, but this girl was simply a frightened child, who clung to him, depended on him. Gently, instead, he stroked her hands, but as his fingers came in contact with the strangely carved ring on her finger, he shivered and drew away.

''It is only with you that I feel safe,'' Joan murmured, lifting up her elfin white face. ''Oh, please, please let me come again!''

''Of course, of course, you must come tomorrow.'' The doctor looked thoughtful for a second. Then he added, ''Come at the same time. The great thing is that you should have confidence in me. Once you realize that I mean to help you, you will tell me everything.''

The girl smiled sadly, standing there pale and fragile, childlike and appealing, and again the doctor had the desire to take her in his arms and comfort her. Instead, he led her kindly to the door, and smiling reassuringly into her eyes, reminded her again of the next day's appointment.

IT WAS Christopher C. Quinn's boast that patience was a virtue he did not possess, and Olivier found him striding angrily up and down the laboratory.

''Well, it's good-bye for today to the experiment,'' he fumed, but Olivier's quiet, amused smile disarmed him.

''Sit down, Chris, sit down, and let the experiment be forgotten for the moment. I've an experiment in there,'' nodding toward his consulting room, ''that promises to be just as interesting. A human experiment.''

Thoughtfully he watched his friend's face.

''A curious case, a curious case, Chris, and one that baffles me, I admit it.''

''They never baffle you for long, my boy. You have a flair for handling the human soul, or mind, call it what you will.''

''Extraordinary, Chris, this business of the multiple personality. Plays the devil of a trick on me. To the lay observer that girl I just saw would be simply an unintelligent person with one fixed idea. Absolutely couldn't get her to talk of one other thing but the dream she came to consult me about. Refuses to tell me her name, her station in society—though it's plain to be seen she's a lady—or anything about her personal life.''

Olivier looked at his friend drolly.

''Thinks she murdered her mother,'' he said quietly.

The Irishman whistled with interest.

''And did she?''

Olivier laughed.

''Not a chance. Dreams go by opposites. They never tell the truth. It's for us psychanalysts to interpret

them, to bring back sanity to unbalanced minds."

He thought deeply for a moment.

"I tell you, Quinn, I've never in all my experience come across so strong a fixation. It crowds everything else out of the girl's mind. For the time being, it's the one thing she will think of or talk about, and I shall have my work cut out for me to shake that fixation."

"Oh, she comes again?" asked Quinn.

"Of course. Tomorrow—at the same time. The great thing, however, is that she trusts me. Absolute child-like dependence, in spite of her refusal to talk."

He bent forward tensely.

"God! I wish I could discover the secret my grandfather was convinced existed. The Zeta-ray would do the trick for the girl—that is, providing it contained all the magic properties my grandfather believed in. You see, Quinn, it's this way. Radium is an element separated from pitchblende, and its curative power is immense. But zodium, as my grandfather called his hypothetical element, could only be separated from certain kinds of volcanic lava."

His eyes burned with excited speculation.

"And its power would be just about ten million times as great as that of radium. In an entirely different sphere, of course, you understand. The volcanic lava comes up out of the bowels of the earth, where the creative fires are hot and burning. It contains all the concentrated magic of the sun, and if properly injected, by a sort of Zeta-ray, into a human being—a tired, nervously wornout human being—"

"Ah!" Quinn broke in excitedly. "I get you, my boy! It would renew wornout nerves—send vitality into anemic blood—make the organs function properly—give one a *joie de vivre*, eh?"

"More than that."

Olivier spoke positively, with the uncanny prevision of the scientific genius.

"I stand half way between the psychanalysts and the behaviorists, you know. My theory is that, full of the primeval strength and sunshine of early days, mental troubles vanish. Whoever heard of an insane Neolithic man, for example? The way the brain works is a matter of function. But give a human being a fresh infusion of life, fill him to the brim with the strength and sunshine of the youth of the world, and his mental balance is automatically restored. With a plenitude of health—vitality, rather—fear vanishes."

He smiled excitedly.

"And fear, my friend, as you know, is at the bottom of all mental troubles."

4

PROFESSOR KURT MAQUARRI rejoined Felix in the laboratory after dinner that night. As he entered, the young half-caste straightened up from the lever of the machine.

"It's all right," Maquarri told him. "While you concentrated at the wishing machine, I made my stepdaughter relate to me every word that had passed between her and the great Dr. Olivier. I questioned her skillfully."

Maquarri openly gloated.

"It works, my boy, it works! He is completely taken in, this great doctor. Wait, I will show you now how we shall work out our scheme."

The hunchback pushed his young accomplice to one side, and took up his position of concentration at the fiendish machine.

"Watch now, as my thought pictures are carried along the electrons

of the zodium. The ether waves will carry the electrons of zodium through limitless space until they find similar electrons of zodium somewhere else.''

He smiled.

''Where else but on the finger of Joan Suffern, my stepdaughter? Her mind is passive, under the ring's influence. Watch now, how this thought transference shall take place.''

He bent again over the wishing machine.

''See, picture it to yourself against the dark wall of this laboratory. Now she is with the doctor. She tells him of her dream. He is puzzled and tries to question her. But she knows nothing; my stepdaughter, except what I choose for her to know. When he tries to find out something about her personal life—her name, where she lives—she becomes once more the beautiful automaton.''

Maquarri looked up triumphantly into Felix's face. Then he bent forward again over the machine.

''But wait a moment, I must only hold one vision in mind to hypnotize her. Now I shall show you how I shall make her seem to be in love with him.''

He sneered.

''What man, what bachelor, could resist her? Especially such a young Sir Galahad as this soul doctor is reputed to be! What man could resist her—beautiful, young, in distress, dependent on him and innocently, unconsciously in love?''

Felix's eyes glimmered strangely as Maquarri sketched for him the picture of Joan making her innocent advances to Dr. Olivier. As the hunchback crouched over his machine, and made him visualize Joan in Olivier's arms, Felix started from his chair with clenched fists. But in a second he gained control of himself, and when Maquarri looked up from his intense concentration over the machine, he met his accomplice's usual impassive stare.

The quadroon, Mariquita, could be heard fumbling at the door at the head of the spiral staircase leading from the main floor above.

''Come, Mariquita, see the wonderful machine that shall bring us more gold for your ears.''

He fingered the gold circlets that lit up the ocher of her skin. Mariquita laughed lazily. Those quadroon beauties knew their day of glory to be brief. If the little hunchback could not give her gold enough, then she would go back to Charlotte Amalie, where ships came in from all the world. That port in the West Indies meant wealth to the woman clever enough to make use of her beauty.

As Professor Maquarri bent over the quadroon, fingering her gold earrings, Felix's brown hand darted forward. It closed over a key that lay beside Maquarri on the desk, and in the next second that key was slipped into his pocket, and he was bending speculatively over the wishing machine.

''Come, Felix, tonight we celebrate,'' cried the hunchback genially. ''Mariquita shall fetch us a bottle of wine, and we three shall drink to the wings of power, eh?''

But Felix betrayed no eagerness for the wine. He gulped it hurriedly, like a man eager to be done with it, and made his excuses to his master.

THE laboratory had been dark for a good two hours, and Mariquita and the hunchback had long since left it, when the sharp click of a key in the door at the farther end stabbed the silence. The door swung slowly on its hinges, and Felix stepped inside. Padding across the floor, he made sure that the laboratory window was shut, as usual, and then he just as cautiously unbolted the door that

led up to the main part of the house. The single ray of his dark lantern pierced the curtain of black that hung over the laboratory. It outlined the figure of Felix as he crouched in concentration at the wishing machine, and beyond its light the blue sparks of the zodium rays flashed.

Upstairs in her bed, Joan sat up, dark eyes staring out of a white face. With trancelike movements, she slipped on her dressing gown and made her noiseless way across the room.

Felix still crouched over the machine, but his being was tense, his ears strained, to catch the almost noiseless tread of approaching footsteps. As Joan appeared in the doorway of the laboratory, still staring unseeingly before her, his eyes narrowed in a glitter of triumph, but still he crouched at the wishing machine. Joan came forward a few steps, and then, impelled by the force outside herself, she went softly back and shot the bolts to the door. Felix's head, thrown back on his shoulders as he pressed against the switch of the machine, showed a face flooded with a repulsive, gloating triumph. Slowly Joan turned, approaching the figure that crouched over the machine.

She was within an inch of his hand when with a cry he released his hold on the switch, and grasped her in his arms. For a moment she lay there passive, unseeing, unknowing, while Felix gloated. Then, freed of the wishing machine's deadly power, consciousness flooded back in her. Consciousness and horror, for as her eyes took in the leering face so close to her own, she gave one shriek, and struggled out of his arms.

There was a thud of footsteps across the floor above the laboratory, and while Joan struggled, Felix's hand across the mouth that tried vainly to scream, Maquarri appeared in the laboratory. A glance told him the situation, and he trembled with fury as he confronted Felix. At the same moment, Susan's voice could be heard outside. Maquarri opened the door quickly, his agile mind already framing an excuse.

"Ah, Susan," he cried, "it is well you have come. Your young mistress' nightmares have taken a new turn, it seems. She has started to walk in her sleep."

Susan's arms were about the sobbing Joan, but her face told of her distrust in the professor's story.

"Felix and I were working late in the laboratory and she startled us by coming in through that door," Maquarri's glib tongue garnished the tale. "We tried not to awaken her, but some noise frightened her, evidently, for she screamed as she came to herself."

When Susan had led away the trembling girl, Maquarri turned to Felix.

"Fool!" he raged. "Fool and idiot!"

Felix looked sullen but said nothing.

"How dare you risk upsetting our plans now when we are on the verge of success?" cried the hunchback. Then, as Felix still did not answer, he continued, "Ah! I know, you are jealous of this doctor! I understand, you desire her yourself! I have known it for a long time, but you must have patience. Once the secrets and the treasure are in our grasp, you shall marry her!"

Felix's incredulous eyes sought his master's for confirmation of the story his lips told, and found it. Maquarri smiled evilly.

"I shall make her consent to marry you," he said, pointing to the laboratory table, "by means of the wishing machine!"

[TO BE CONTINUED]

OUT OF THE LONG AGO

by Seabury Quinn

Author of "Weird Crimes" and "The Phantom Farm House"

[Excerpts from the diary of Prof. Simeon Warrener, D. Sc., Ph. D.]

Sept. 20, 19—

TWO letters in the afternoon mail; both requiring answers. Most important, a note from Morgan Carew, inviting me to come to Wales and join in some excavations he plans making this fall. He has stumbled over a promising-looking mound near the village of Cag na Gith, not far from Chatsworth, and expects some interesting digging. There is a dolmen in a pretty fair state of preservation on one of the hills, and Carew thinks some instructive kitchen-middens will be found in the neighborhood.

The second is a favor from Alice Frasanet, asking me to tea at 4 tomorrow. I suppose I may curse Frank Seabring for that. Ever since he met the girl he's been dancing attendance on her, singing my praises when other conversational topics failed. There are several drawbacks to having an assistant of the impressionable age. If it were not for Frank and the fact that Frasanet, *père*, is a liberal contributor to the Society for Anthropological Research, I'd ignore the invitation. But the boy is genuinely fond of me, besides being an able and conscientious assistant, so I shall accept both invitations.

Sept. 21, 19—

TAKING it all in all, Alice's party was a success. During the few moments I was able to pry Frank away, I told him my project to join Carew, and asked him to get his traps together as quickly as possible, as I want to leave before the autumn storms set in. I am not a good sailor.

He seemed a little crestfallen at first, but a few minutes later came up all smiles, and assured me he'd not only be delighted to go on the expedition, but to stay at Cag na Gith long enough to dig to the center of the earth, or clear through, if I so desired. Frank is a good boy, but a little inclined to be flighty.

If ever there were a born flirt, Alice Frasanet is she. Before the guests had thinned out, she allowed herself to be teased into singing, and, with Dora Caruthers' accompaniment, rendered 'The Land of The Sky-Blue Water.'' I felt sorry for Frank. The little minx planted herself squarely in front of him, and sang as directly to him as any Broadway chorus girl tor-

turing some hapless victim in the audience.

The half-mythical story of some remote ancestor of Frank's who married a Mohawk woman in the days when Boston Common was a cow pasture is a standing joke among his friends, and Alice declared she was addressing the charming little ballade to the drop of redskin blood in him.

Certainly she succeeded in making him a temporary aborigin, for he was red as a boiled lobster from collar to hair before she brought the song to a close.

Another incident that helped me through the dreary rounds of weak tea and vapid conversation was a story Shela Tague told me, which directly concerned Cag na Gith. I chanced to mention my plan to go there with Frank to help Carew in his digging, and at the village's name she turned as white as though a chill had suddenly come on her.

Thinking she was sickened with the fetid air, I was about to fetch her a glass of water, when she begged me to sit with her and listen to an experience she had near the place three years before.

"I was stopping at a farmhouse, about half a mile from the railway station," she began, "doing some sketching at times; but mostly walking over the hills and moors about the village.

"One afternoon, near sunset, I had set up my easel a few hundred feet from the station platform, and was painting away industriously, trying to make my colors and the daylight come out even. I chanced to glance behind me, and saw a queer-looking man sitting on a luggage truck near the station, gazing intently at me.

"There aren't more than half a dozen houses in all Cag na Gith, you know; and anything in the shape of a stranger, even a tramp, is a sensation in the place. I thought I knew everyone, human and canine, in the village; but this loafer was new to me.

"I went on with my painting until the sun had gone behind the big hill where the dolmen is, and the air began to take on the twilight chill. Once or twice I glanced back out of the tail of my eye, to see what my companion was up to, and each time I saw him sitting in the same stiffly upright position, gazing fixedly at me.

"As I folded up my easel and camp stool, and started across the tracks for my boarding place, he rose and began to walk in the same direction.

"There was no hurry in his gait, Dr. Warrener, but I felt that he was all a-tremble, and terribly eager to overtake me. I began to hasten a little, and with two long strides—positively, they were like an athlete's standing leaps!—he lessened the distance between us by fifteen feet, and I saw he'd be abreast of me before I could pass the water pit lying on the farther side of the railway. I hadn't noticed him particularly, and couldn't see him very well in the gathering dusk, but there was something about that man that horrified me, though I couldn't say exactly what it was. He was tall, very tall, well over six feet, and startlingly thin, and seemed to be wearing a tight-fitting suit of shabby, fuzzy gray cloth. And though he walked directly on the gravel ballast of the roadbed, his feet made no sound.

"I hurried a few steps; then, when I saw I couldn't possibly shake him, I determined to brazen the thing out, and turned on him, asking angrily, 'What do you mean by following me?'

"Professor Warrener, if I live to be a hundred years old, I'll never be able to forget that face. It was small and narrow, and drawn to a point, almost like a dog's, and the teeth protruding from the great, wide mouth were long and yellow and hooked, like an animal's fangs. But the eyes were the most horrible part of it. They

glowed and glowered at me like two disks of phosphorus in the half-light, and I remembered thinking for one awful moment—absurd as it may seem to you—of a quotation from 'Red Riding Hood.' Do you remember where she asks the wolf, 'What great eyes you have, Grandmamma' and 'What great teeth you have, Grandmamma'? Those were the very words that popped into my mind, and their awful answers came running in their wake like the echo of a horror. I'll never be able to look at a book of fairy tales again without a shudder; for since that night the story of 'Red Riding Hood' is a frightful ghost story to me, and a real one, a terribly real one.

"What the monster—I can't think of him as a man—would have done if he'd gotten to me, I don't know, and I don't like to speculate on it; but what I saw a few seconds later wakes me up screaming at night, sometimes, even now.

"While he was still fifteen or twenty feet away, a silly, little gray rabbit popped out of its hole in the rocks beside the tracks and scudded between us. As it flew past, the thing caught sight of it, and, seeming to forget me, gave chase. You know how fast a frightened rabbit can run, Professor? I assure you the poor little bunny didn't have a chance with that tall, lean pursuer on its track. He ran it down before it had covered a hundred yards. I heard the poor thing scream as he crushed it in his long, bony fingers, and lifted it, still struggling, to his mouth, and tore it to bits with his teeth.

"I ran as I'd never run before to my cottage, and got there more dead than alive, for every drop of blood in my veins seemed to be running cold as a night-sweat. My landlady shook her head when I told her what I'd seen, and said, 'Don't ee go out o' nights nae mair, Missie; for there do be bogles in the hills, an' I've heard me gran'faither say they crave human meat a' times.'"

DESPITE Shela's earnestness, I could not forbear a grin.

"We'll be looking for dead rabbit hunters; not live ones," I told her. "What you saw was probably some poor, half-starved tramp; maybe a lunatic escaped from some asylum."

"No," she insisted, "it wasn't. Nothing human could have looked like that thing. Please, please, Professor Warrener, don't go to Cag na Gith; I know something terrible will happen if you do. Why, I wouldn't go there, not even at midday, for all the money in the Bank of England."

"Possibly," I assented, "but we're looking for something more valuable than money: we're digging for relics of a vanished civilization."

To my astonishment, the little Irishwoman suddenly crossed herself.

"Digging?" she almost shrieked. "Digging? And in those hills? Professor Warrener, you don't know what you're doing. The country people wouldn't put a spade in one of those mounds for anything. They say the body of a bugwolf is buried there, and to turn the sod would liberate its spirit."

"A bugwolf?" I echoed. "That accounts for the condition of the dolmen and mounds. Fear of the werewolf has probably kept the peasantry away. Carew told me that the excellent state of the land, archeologically speaking, puzzled him. Your friend, the werewolf—or, as the Welshmen will have it, the bugwolf—has performed a valuable service to science. I'll have to propose him for honorary membership in the Society for Anthropological Research."

"Ah, Dr. Warrener, don't make light," Shela begged. "You scientists who don't believe in God nor devil think you know everything; but you don't. These stories of ghosts and werewolves are as old as humanity it-

self; surely there must be some truth in them, or they wouldn't have persisted so long."

"Well," I replied, "if what you saw really was a wolf-man, he'd better lie low while we're about. Frank Seabring is part Mohawk, you know. An ancestress of his was a woman of the totem of the bear; and the tribes claiming descent from the great bear, and those who had the wolf for their manitou, were always at war. If I remember my pre-colonial history rightly, the bear people usually came out ahead, too."

Shela twitched her shoulders as she rose. for all the world like a spaniel shaking the water from its fur.

"You'll be sorry if you dig in those hills," she warned.

"I'll be sorrier if the society's board of governors learns that I knew about them and didn't dig there," I countered. "Scientists of today are like bricklayers or carpenters, you know. So many bricks laid and so many nails driven, so much wages; so many scientific discoveries a year, a new appropriation; no discoveries, no salary. It's so much for so much, you know; and I think I'd rather brave your Welsh werewolf than the gaunt gray wolf that accompanies an unpaid salary."

With which bit of homely philosophy, I bade Alice adieu, got my hat and stick, and left to pack for the trip.

Oct. 10, 19—

CAG NA GITH. And a dreary little hole it is. Six or eight sad-looking cottages cling with despondent tenacity to the hillsides rising from the shabby little railway station. A nervous little train fusses up to the platform twice a day, always threatening to deposit a stranger in our midst, and never doing it. Even the loafers at the public house wear an air of settled gloom. The only thing of interest in the neighborhood is the great dolmen that crowns the tallest hill. There it stands, foursquare with the compass, frowning disdainfully upon these degenerate offspring of the once mighty Britons like an ancestral portrait regarding the family spendthrift.

Carew has engaged a cottage a few minutes' walk from our digging grounds. A widow who boasts more wrinkles than I've ever seen in a human face lives a quarter-mile away, and, for a consideration, cooks our meals and otherwise ministers to our wants. The remains of an ancient stone-quarry lie about a hundred yards from the dolmen; here we have staked out a plot of promising ground. Tomorrow we commence digging.

Oct. 12, 19—

NOTHING remarkable. Our excavations have been more productive of disappointments than anything else. A few feet down we struck a stratum of coarse sand and gravel, and one or two bits of rough blue stone, clearly not indigenous to the neighborhood. After that, water. If nothing further develops in the next two or three days we shall move our operations to another hill.

Oct. 13, 19—

NO FURTHER discoveries of note. A few bones, apparently canine, came to light in the moist sand today.

The weather is perceptibly cooler, and brisk winds spring up at dusk. Last night the breeze was so strong it rattled the doors and windows in a most annoying manner; once or twice my lamp flickered and nearly went out.

There is a chill quality in the air, too, which baffles all the efforts of our little fire to keep the room comfortable. Several times the gusts of air played so about the door I could have been certain a dog was snuffing at the crack. Yet when I flung the door open there was nothing there.

Our house must be in the path of some air current shot down between the hills, for I chanced to look out the window while the panes were rattling, and the fir trees on the hilltop were perfectly quiet.

Frank has been very restless all day. Twice he left the work to go to the village, coming back each time with disappointment written large in his face. I suppose he has been expecting a letter from the Frasanet girl.

Oct. 14, 19—

IT IS really most extraordinary, the way the wind seems to have singled out our cottage for its pranks. Just before dawn I was awakened by the rattling of the casement. It shook and quivered till I thought someone was trying to force an entrance. Neither Carew nor Frank seemed disturbed by the noise, so I got up to investigate. Immediately I turned my flashlight on the window, the rattling ceased. The minute I left the window, the clatter recommenced; when I stood at the casement several minutes, the noise began at the back door. I hurried through the barren little kitchen, and heard it at the front of the house.

For several minutes I played a sort of crazy blind man's buff; finally I cursed myself for a fool and crawled back to bed. But the wind's sharp, furious stabs persisted some time, knocking at windows and doors, whining and whistling about the eaves and chimneys, and buffeting the walls. Almost as abruptly as it commenced, the racket ceased, and the absolute silence of the pre-dawn settled over the house.

Old Mrs. Jones was laying the tea things when I came in a few minutes before the others this afternoon.

"Be ye goin' to stop yer diggin' soon?" she asked, swathing the earthen pot in a tea-cozy.

"No," I answered, "we've just commenced."

"Ye'll not be diggin' by th' quarry, though?" she pursued. "Not much deeper?"

She avoided looking at me; but there was an almost feverish anxiety in her words.

"We haven't found much there," I conceded. "We'll try somewhere else if the luck doesn't turn in a few days."

The old woman busied herself with the toast and marmalade a moment, then, abruptly, "Did ye hear th' dargs last night?"

"Dogs?" I queried. "No; how do you mean?"

"Oh," she evaded, "they was howling at someat as was runnin' through the hills. Th' wind, p'aps."

"I certainly heard the wind," I assured her. "It raced round the house for an hour or more last night. Is it a habit of Welsh dogs to bark at the wind?"

" 'Tis a habit of all dargs to bay th' wind when there's evil in it," she answered seriously. "Sixty-five years, girl an' woman, I've lived in these parts, an' there's always trouble come to them as dug in th' hills. I'm not sayin' it's true; but me faither used to tell of a bogle his faither had seen beside that heathen grave on th' big mound. 'Tis some as says th' old dead warn't buried deep enough, and they walks at night when their graves is scratched; an' some says it's a bogle that watches beside th' quarry; but none round here would strike a pick in th' hills for love nor gold. When our dargs howls, we knows there's things abroad."

"You think the dogs can see what you can't, then?" I asked, amused at her earnestness.

"Aye," she answered simply, "th' darg sees what mortals' eyes can't, because there's no soul in him."

I fumbled in my jacket pocket for my pipe, bringing out a small, hard object along with the briar. It was one of the bits of blue stone we'd dug

from the quarry the day before. Tossing it on the mantel, I opened my tobacco pouch.

"Where'd ye come by that?"

Mrs. Jones was staring at the bit of blue rock as if she saw a specter hovering over it.

"Oh, that?" I replied. "Why, we dug it from the gravel the other day. Odd, isn't it? No stone like it anywhere about. Can't figure how it got here."

"Ye put it back—tonight!" she interrupted excitedly. "It's th' bugwolf stane. Man, man, ye don't know what ye did when ye took that bit o' rock from th' ground."

"The bugwolf stone?" I echoed. "What d'ye mean?"

She twisted the hem of her apron between her gnarled hands, and swallowed painfully.

"I'm a Christian woman, an' I don't set much store by th' old tales; but 'tis said a demon wolf used to roam th' hills; killin' all he met; an' when th' faithers kilt his body they buried it under a cairn o' them magic stanes, to hold his spirit in. Man, ye unstopped th' flask when ye took that stane from th' earth. He'll be runnin' loose again, a-pryin' at yer doors an' winders; and some time he'll get in, an' that'll be th' death o' ye."

I balanced the bit of rock in my palm a minute, then flipped it through the door.

"Let him come for his confounded stone," I said contemptuously, reaching for a blazing splinter to light my pipe.

The slamming of the door answered me. Mrs. Jones was scrambling down the path as fast as her old rheumatic legs would carry her.

Oct. 15, 19—

MRS. JONES has discharged us. Bribery, threats and entreaties are alike of no avail to bring her back. An offer to replace the blue stone mollified her temporarily; but when we went to look for it, the thing was nowhere to be found. I must have tossed it farther than I realized, yesterday.

Oct. 18, 19—

THERE are certain advantages in having an assistant of the impressionable age. Alice Frasanet arrived this morning, bag and baggage, including her Aunt Anna.

Frank has been of little practical use, anyway, and the small loss of his assistance is more than compensated by Alice's services. Like the practical little person she is, Alice has taken up our care where Mrs. Jones left off, and we have already been treated to a batch of biscuit, real biscuit, American biscuit. The ladies have obtained lodgings at the Jones cottage, and if all the guile I can exercise will keep them, there they shall remain till we've completed our excavations.

Oct. 19, 19—

OUR first real find was made today. Grubbing in a half-hearted way, I unearthed what appeared to be a human tibia; in a few more strokes we had an almost perfectly articulated skeleton out of the sand. Whoever possessed those bones in life must have been a human bean pole, for the limbs are disproportionately long. His hands and feet must have given him considerable trouble, too, for their bones are half again as long as those of any modern man's.

We laid the frame on a blanket beside the trench and searched about for the skull. Here the mystery began, for though we churned up the sand for yards round, we could find no head. Finally, after about an hour's search, we dug out a large dog's skull, which processed neatly upon the vertebræ. We shall pack these bones carefully, and hold them to compare with further discoveries. Is it possible we have stumbled on the remnant of an ancient dog-headed people, or did the old Druids have an unrecorded cus-

tom of burying the head of a dog with the malefactor in some instances of capital punishment? It is too early to indulge even in hypotheses, but the possibilities are fraught with interest.

"Maybe we've dug up Shela Tague's werewolf," Frank suggested as he and I packed the skeleton down the trail to our cottage.

"Maybe you're a fool!" I told him.

Oct. 20, 19—

SOMEONE is interfering with our work. When we arrived at the quarry this morning, we found sand scratched into our trench, stakes pulled up and several of our tools missing. Prints of large, naked feet in the earth showed that the miscreant had removed his boots in an effort to hide his identity, though why he should have done this is more than I can understand. One pair of village boots is exactly like another to me.

Toward evening it blew up a rain. Carew and I smoked endless pipes and played endless games of cribbage. Frank went to the Jones cottage. It was nearly midnight when he burst in, drenched and excited.

"I saw him!" he exclaimed, flinging his dripping waterproof over a chair. "I saw him; but he got away."

"Who?" Carew and I chorused.

"The fellow who's been jazzing up our work. When I left the Jones house, that mongrel pup of the old lady's set up an awful howling—you'd have thought his grandmother was dead from the noise he made—and I spied a suspicious-looking bird down the road. I kept my eye on him as I walked along, and when he left the trail and made for the quarry, I followed him. He went straight to our trench and got down on his all-fours, scratching sand into the hole like a dog.

"I let out a yell and rushed him; but he saw me coming and streaked it across the hill."

"What'd he look like?" asked Carew.

"Darned if I know," Frank admitted. "It was raining so hard I couldn't get a good look at him at first, and he made off so fast when I yelled that I didn't get much of a line on him then. All I can say for sure is that he's about a head taller than any of us, and thin as Job's turkey-hen. His clothes looked skintight on him, and he was wearing a cap, I think—something with a long peak that stuck out in front of his face—and man, oh, man, he surely could run."

"Which way did he go?" I asked.

"That's the funny part of it," Frank shook his head doubtfully. "I'd have sworn he ran right for our back door, but I lost sight of him by that little bunch of scrub down the path. Don't suppose either of you heard anything of him?"

We talked the mystery over for half an hour, then went to bed for want of something more exciting.

Oct. 21, 19—

CAREW is dead. Murdered.

It seems incredible that this horror should have come upon us; yet as I write, the poor fellow's body "lies by the wall"—what a beastly gruesome way of expressing themselves these Welsh have!

Last night, after supper, Frank departed for the Jones cottage as usual; and Carew and I settled ourselves for a quiet game and a smoke. The tobacco canister went empty before we'd dealt half a dozen hands, so we cut to see who should go to the village for a fresh supply. I drew an ace, Carew a ten spot.

"Be back in half an hour," he promised, pulling on his cap and jacket; "and if I catch that chap who's been meddling with our diggings it'll go hard with one of us."

Poor Carew! It certainly went hard with him.

Ten o'clock came. No sign of Carew. I played sullenly with my cold pipe and cursed his delay. Frank came in; midnight struck; still no Carew.

"Hanged if I can stand this any longer," I said irritably. "I'm going to see what's keeping him."

"I'll go with you," Frank volunteered. "This place is too all-fired spooky to stay in alone."

We set off briskly through the chilly moonlight, keeping a sharp lookout for any signs of Carew and our tobacco. Fifteen minutes' walk brought us to the village tavern, where the sleepy boniface paused long enough in ejecting a gin-soaked farmhand from the tap room to assure us Carew had not been there. Several interested spectators of the eviction proceedings corroborated him profanely. Here was a poser. Carew had been gone almost long enough to walk to Chatsworth, yet no one had seen him. Buying a couple of tins of tobacco, we hurried back along the trail.

Out in the hills, we gave several long halloos, and the barren mounds shouted back our calls mockingly.

"D'ye suppose he could have gone over to the works, and turned his ankle, or something?" Frank hazarded.

"H'm, not likely; but we'll have a look," I answered as we left the path and struck across the hill for the quarry.

"That's where I saw that fellow scratching in the sand." Frank indicated the head of white earth beside our trench. "He was down on his knees, making his hands go like a pair of—hello, what's that?"

He pointed to a dark object lying on the sand pile.

I broke into a run without answering, for I had a presentiment of what we'd find.

Carew sprawled upon his back, his outstretched hands clutching at the yielding sand, one knee slightly flexed, the other leg hanging limply over the lip of the trench. His throat and chest were horribly lacerated, as though he had been worried by some animal of incomparable ferocity. Across his cheeks and brow several hideous gashes wrote the story of his death-struggle. But the most appalling thing was the expression of unspeakable horror stamped on his features. It was as if he had looked one awful moment on the bareboned grisliness of death before the spirit was rent from his body.

"My God!" Frank shrank against me, shivering with panic terror. "His face, man; look at his face!"

I dropped my handkerchief over my poor friend's head. I had no wish to look again.

"We'd best notify the coroner," I said, half leading, half carrying Frank away. The boy was done in with fear; never have I seen a man's nerve fail him so completely.

The fussy, fat little coroner performed his duties with all the punctilio of a rural official today. Strangers in a strange land, we were more than half suspected of our friend's murder, and might have been held for the assizes but for a bit of evidence the post-mortem disclosed. Clinging to poor Carew's nails were a few small tufts of tawny-gray hair. These, together with the terrible mangling of his throat, influenced the jury to return their strange verdict: "That Morgan Carew came to his death at the hands or teeth of some person or animal to your jurors unknown."

The village undertaker has just left. Embalming is about as much a lost art here as it is in modern Egypt, so the coffin has been put in the unused kitchen, where no heat will hasten dissolution. There, beside the skeleton of the thing—man or devil—we dug from the sand last week, is all that is mortal of my old friend. Tomorrow they ship the remains to England for burial. Carew had no near relatives; Frank and I shall go with

the body and see it laid in the family vault at Mulbridge.

Oct. 22, 19—

WHAT I saw last night simply could not have happened. And yet it did.

Frank and I were sitting before the fire, watching the reflection from the coals fuse with the afternoon sunbeams on the hearth, each busy with his own thoughts, when a subdued clatter in the kitchen started us up together. The tiniest noises are magnified a hundredfold in the house of death.

The same thought was in both our minds as we made for the back room. The rats were at their devilish work.

Frank took up a carving knife, big as a half-grown cutlas, as I swung the door open. I smiled at the action in spite of myself. The reflexes of elemental psychology are as unreasoning today as when our ancestors slunk naked through the primeval forests. Nothing but a blind desire to kill led to the seizure of that knife; a second's reflection would have told him that a knife is well-nigh as useless against rats as a pointed finger.

We searched the little cell of a room quickly. Nothing living, save a cricket which set up its mournful "ka-cheek" from a cranny in the stones, was there. The chest with the dog-headed skeleton lay by the cold, gaping fireplace. Carew's coffin rested starkly under its black pall on a pair of saw-horses beside the wall. One of the candles sputtering at its head leaned a little in its socket. I straightened it, pressing the melting wax with my thumb to prevent its soiling the cloth. Frank half seated himself on the rough deal table, gouging at the wood with the point of his absurd knife.

A sudden current of air, icy cold, fluttered the candle flame and shook the hem of the coffin-robe. Instinctively, I felt another presence; some evil thing, that traveled in a chill of terror. Eyes seemed boring me from behind, and I gripped the candelabrum savagely to suppress the desire to turn.

Slowly, without moving my head, I turned my eyes on Frank. He was frowning morosely at the table, chipping bits of wood from it, as though intent on serious business.

"Rat, tat, tat!"

A sudden sharp clatter of knuckles against the window pane. I wheeled in my tracks, my breath gone hot and sulfurous with fear.

Staring through the glass was a great, shaggy-haired wolf. Yet it was not a wolf. About the lupine jaws and cheeks were lines hideously reminiscent of a human face, and the phosphorescent glow of those monstrous eyes never shone in anything carnal. As I looked, the monster raised its head, and strangling horror gripped me as I saw a human neck beneath it. Very long and thin it was, corded and sinewed like the neck of a thing long dead, and covered with thick, gray fur. Then a hand, hairy, like the throat, and slender as a woman's, fingers tipped with blood-red nails, struck the glass again. I went sick with fear as I speculated how long the fragile glass would withstand it.

The thing must have seen my terror, for the corners of its devilish eyes contracted in a malevolent smile, and a rim of scarlet tongue flicked its black muzzle.

A moan behind me told Frank's abject terror.

"Oh, my God!" he quavered. "That's the thing I saw the other night. That's the thing that killed Carew. Shela Tague was right. We dug up one of them, and the other has come for us."

I swallowed at the dryness in my throat. Words were beyond me.

"Professor—" Frank had crawled across the floor and seized me by the knees—"don't let it get in; for God's sake, don't let it in!"

I pressed the boy's shoulder, not so much to comfort him as to have the feel of something human under my hand. Then my fingers closed fiercely on him, as, high, and sweet, and very lovely, I heard Alice Frasanet's voice rising from the trail at the base of the hill. She had promised to look in on us before we left with Carew's body, and bring us a plate of biscuit. Now she was coming blindly to meet this waiting horror.

From the land of the sky-blue water
They brought a captive maid—

Perpetuating her old jest at Frank's Indian ancestry, she came singing up the path. The thing outside turned at the sound, its pointed ears cocked forward, the white of its teeth showing as its lips parted in anticipation of easy prey. Slowly, bending nearly double, it crept from the window, making for the clump of withered brush at the turn of the path, crouching to spring as Alice rounded the bend.

I looked, horror-frozen in my place, waiting the tragedy as the Christian martyrs must have watched the gratings lift from the lions' dens.

Balancing the tray daintily, Alice approached the knot of shrubs. Silently as a shadow the gray thing slipped into the path, barring her way with gaping jaws and red tongue lolling from its mouth. Slowly, jaws working with a horrible, chewing motion, it advanced its hellish face nearer and nearer her throat.

I tried to speak, to shriek my horror to the evening sky; but a paralyzing dust seemed to have gathered in my throat, and only a hoarse, inarticulate whisper came. Summoning all my strength, I took a step toward the window; next instant I went reeling against the wall as a dark object hurtled past me.

Dashing panes and sash to splinters, Frank took the window at a bound. The crash of falling glass was drowned in the yell he set up as he cleared the intervening distance with long, loose-limbed strides.

It was Frank who charged that gray horror; yet it was not Frank. As Jekyll metamorphosed to Hyde, so a subtile physical change was wrought in him. It was a man no one in ten generations had seen who rushed down the hillside. It was a cry no living white man had ever heard that he raised as he brandished his great knife.

"*Aie, aie, tehn-yoh-yeh-roh-noh!*"

Twice he repeated the blood-freezing yell, ending the second time with a crescendoed "*Aie, aie, YAH!*"

It was the Mohawk war whoop—the battle cry of the people of the bear.

IT WAS a miracle of heredity I beheld; an atavism, a throwback, a reversion to type. Sleeping, but never dead, the long-forgotten character of his redskin ancester had awakened in Frank Seabring at the challenge of danger to his beloved.

Before us lived and breathed the personality of a Mohawk sachem—some warrior of the totem of the bear, whose moving passion was a hatred of the wolf people.

"*Aie, yah! Aie, yah!*" the battle whoop rang out again.

There was something horribly comic in the wolf-thing's expression as it turned. Such a look of astonished rage the Evil One might give at defiance from a lost soul.

They sprang together, meeting in mid-air. The man-wolf struck swiftly, seeking to bury its fangs in Frank's throat. Frank's free hand sank in the coarse fur at the creature's gullet; the great knife described a half-circle, disappeared; rose and sank again, and again, and again. Stumbling, reeling, spewing blood, the bug-wolf staggered from the clinch, the light of battle fading in its eyes.

"Aie, tehn-yoh-yeh-roh-noh, YAH!"

The bear had tasted blood; but not his fill.

Again they closed; once more the wolf-thing sought to worry at Frank's throat. Again the huge knife rose and fell, blood dripping from its point and edge. And ever, as the murderous work went on, the war whoop of the Mohawk rent the mountain quiet.

Taller by a head than Frank, the wolf-thing began to sink. Slowly it went to its knees, to its side; to its back.

"Aie, aie, YAH!"

Like an executioner's simitar the great knife descended, traversing the bugwolf's throat, a dye of rusty-red staining the fur in its wake.

Once more the blade circled the man-brute's head, and Frank Seabring, product of effete New England, college man and instructor in anthropology, rose and contemplated the scalp of his slain foe.

Tucking the patch of fur in his belt, he seemed to notice Alice for the first time, where she stood ash-white, beside the path. An instant he regarded her wonderingly, then abruptly tore his Norfolk jacket apart, spreading the open edges between his outstretched hands. It was the blanket-holding, the age-old invitation of the Indian brave to his squaw.

And Alice Frasanet, fox-trotting, bridge-playing, tea-drinking Alice Frasanet, laid her fluffy, empty little head against his breast.

In the February WEIRD TALES

SEA-CHANGE

By

HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

Author of "The Fireplace"

He was a cretin, and unless he took his daily capsule of thyroid extract he would degenerate into an idiot, a beastly thing, horrible to see, and incapable of thought. Then he and his young wife were cast ashore on an island in the South Seas, where he could get no thyroid. This fascinating story tells what happened.

ON SALE EVERYWHERE JANUARY FIRST

A Wild Ride, with Death at the Wheel

ON THE HIGHWAY

By CARGRAY COOK

MY TWENTY-FIRST birthday. Today I have reached my majority. On this date, in accordance with my late father's will, I, Charles Claiborne, became the absolute master of six millions of money. As much more in cash, a great town house, and the magnificent estate of All-View, remained my mother's, to be mine at her death. And this, too, in accordance with my late father's will. But none of these things meant half as much to me on this wonderful September morning, as the new twelve thousand dollar racing car that had been presented to me the night before by my doting mother.

Think of it! A real Gordon-Rennet, the fastest model in the world, the only car of its kind in America—and mine.

This was Life.

Father had been very liberal, of course. Most fathers are. But with all my allowance he had never permitted me to own a speed car. No imagination, you see. Couldn't understand why a young fellow should want to tear along the highways at ninety miles an hour. No pep to Dad. Too busy making money, I guess.

But mother, now, she was different. She could understand. Anyway, she knew I had had my eyes on this racer for a long time, and for that reason had decided to anticipate my purchase by presenting it to me for my birthday.

And now I was out on the highway, creeping along at a mere warming up of sixty miles an hour. This part of the road was a bit rough yet, and as I slackened the pace I found time to swear at another racy-looking car ahead of me, as it swerved from side to side in the effort of its driver to avoid the outcropping boulders. A bit farther on, the new highway began, however; and with a sustained shriek from my electric horn, I stepped upon the accelerator, opened my exhaust, and tore past the other car with a grin of derision.

Seventy. Seventy-five. Eighty miles I made, and still I pressed upon the feed for more. A kick with my left heel, and the muffler closed, and the ensuing silence seemed to startle the perfect mechanism into a more velvety swiftness. Not a quiver, not a sway, to the wonderful machine, and the blood coursed through my veins with an exhilaration not to be described.

Think of it! Outside of the professional tracks, there was not a car in America that could touch me. On the highway I was king.

Luxuriating in the perfection of this matchless creation of the greatest automobile builders in the world, I softened the pressure on the pedal, thrilling with the consciousness of personal ownership, as the great machine noiselessly reduced its momentum.

"Some boat!" I exclaimed in sheer joy, as I shifted my back to a more upright position. And then I was almost shocked out of this posture by the appalling thunder of an open exhaust immediately behind me. Furiously I pressed upon the gas feed. I didn't turn to look. I felt in my

bones that it was the racy-looking car I had passed so exultingly, away back where the good road began. Well, all the better! If its driver had any sporting blood in him, I would show him a race that would test his gameness to the limit.

Like a thing unchained, the Gordon-Rennet responded to my touch. I smiled as I felt the rush of air and gave the car more gas. And then I ceased smiling and sank a bit lower in the seat. I was not losing the other. His open exhaust still thundered at my back. I was not gaining an inch.

Not really disturbed, yet a bit irritated at the ability of the unknown to keep pace with me, I pressed upon the gas pedal for a maximum feed to the carburetor, and narrowly watched the climb of the speedometer to eighty, eighty-five, ninety.

But despite the terrific speed with which I flew along the highway, there was no let-up to the thunderous roar of my pursuer's open muffler. I became really nervous then and swore aloud at the unbelievable possibility that the other's car might even *pass* my new Gordon-Rennet.

I WAS just turning to look behind in an angry effort to calculate the unknown racer's chances, when I heard a cry ahead. Like a flash I saw the situation. Two pedestrians had emerged from a wooded path directly upon the highway. They had no time to think. No time to move. No time to escape. They stood paralyzed with fright. And yet I seemed to have plenty of time to consider them and to consider the highway beside them. I realized instantly that it would be impossible for me to pass them on my right. I must swerve to the left, and yet I saw distinctly that this would be a tremendous risk, not alone because that side of the road was in a state of eruption, due to the work of a gas company's ditch digger, but because of the imminent danger of a collision with the racer coming from behind. I had not seen him, nor had I now time to raise a warning arm; but I knew he was there, for the clamor of his cut-out was at my very heels—I had not gained an inch.

And then I swerved!

There was a cry, a crash—and instinctively my right foot pressed the footbrake, while my left threw out the clutch.

I found myself upon the highway, and with footsteps light as air hastened back to where a racing car was overturned. Even yet one of the front wheels continued spinning, and curiously enough my first thought was a mental comment of approval upon the perfection of that wheel's noiseless bearings.

My foot struck a license tag upon the roadway and I gave an exclamation as I recognized it as my own. With that peculiar human attribute that causes us to touch a freshly painted post, I involuntarily turned to where I thought my own car stood, to see if my license plate was missing. Oddly enough, I did not see the car, and I kicked the license plate aside and approached the group made up of the two pedestrians and a silent form on the ground.

One of the pedestrians was kneeling beside the victim of the wreck, and I could not help giving vent to an exclamation as I saw him place his handkerchief over the face of the silent figure before him.

The other pedestrian was intent on the examination of a card-case, evidently taken from one of the pockets of the motorist.

"Is he dead?" I asked.

The man standing was too preoccupied to hear me, evidently, for he failed to answer me or to observe my presence; and even when I tapped him on the back he did not turn.

"Well, is he dead?" I inquired of the other pedestrian, as he arose from beside the prostrate body. But he, too, vouchsafed no answer.

I LOOKED at the form on the ground. There was something vaguely familiar about his clothing, and one sprawling hand showed a ring I recalled having seen before. I lifted the kerchief from his face, but the features were too mangled to afford recognition; and the dreadful angle of his head showed that the man's neck was broken.

Then I heard the man with the card-case speaking.

"It's that young fool, Claiborne," he said with an oath; and whether his anger was at his own narrow escape from the speeding car, or at this careless prodigality and waste of youth, I could not tell; but I turned to him impatiently.

"Don't be an ass," I cried. "I am Claiborne. This fellow was chasing me when he was wrecked."

But they didn't seem to hear me, and then the other one spoke.

"Yes, it's him, all right. It's a wonder he got out of our way at the speed he was traveling. Tearing along like a crazy man on the highway, with his muffler wide open, at a hundred miles an hour! You could understand it if he was racing now, but there wasn't another car in sight. Gee, and he was twenty-one today."

I cried out to them again, but they didn't seem to hear me and turned away. I then perceived another of the cards on the ground and picked it up. It was *my* card.

And then I cried out in fright, for now I knew why the dead man's clothing and the dead man's ring seemed so familiar.

They were mine!

Then it was true. There had been no other car. I had accidentally opened the muffler of my own car when shifting my seat, *and I had been racing against myself!*

This day I had reached my majority.

On this date I had become the absolute master of six millions of money.

Yet this was death.

I was the dead man.

Oh, my God, I *am* the dead man!

In Next Month's WEIRD TALES

The Crossed Lines

By ROBERT G. BOWIE and ROBINSON H. HARSH

What would you do if by some strange prank of fate your personality entered into the body of a stranger and his personality took your body for its own? Read what happened to two strangers in this unusual story.

ON SALE EVERYWHERE JANUARY FIRST

Author of "Death-Waters" and "The Desert Lich"

I HEARD Boucke beating with his bare fists upon the cabin door and the wind whistling under the cracks. I objected to both and I opened the door wide. Boucke came in then, with a fierce rush of wind. He was a curious little man, with the sea and sky in his eyes, and he spoke in pantomime. He pointed towards the door and ran his fingers savagely through his reddish hair, and I knew that something had nearly finished him—I mean finished him spiritually, damaged his soul, his outlook.

I didn't know whether to be pleased or horrified. Boucke seemed more human with his queer, vivid gestures and flaming eyes, but I couldn't imagine what he had seen up on deck. Of course I found out soon enough.

The men were sitting about in idiotic groups of twos and threes and no one saluted me when I stepped out from the shadows of twisted cordage into a luminous stripe of moonlight.

"Where's the boatswain?" I asked.

Several of the men heard my question, and they turned and stared at me, and deliberately tittered.

"It took the boatswain!" said Oscar.

Oscar seldom spoke to anyone. He was tall and lean and his jaundiced scalp was fringed by yellow hair. I distinctly recall his dark, hungry eyes and his fringe of hair glistening in the moonlight. But the rest of Oscar I can no longer visualize. He has faded into an indefinite ghost of memory. It is curious, though, how clearly I remember every other shape and incident of that amazing night.

Oscar was standing by my elbow, and I turned suddenly and gripped his arm. It reassured me to grip his strong, muscular arm. But I knew that I had hurt him, for his shoulder jerked and he looked at me reproachfully. I presume Oscar wanted me to stand upon my own feet. But he made a sweeping motion with his arm to assure me that it didn't matter. The wind whistled about our ears and the tattered sails flaffed and wheezed. Sails can speak, you know. I have heard sails protest in chorus, each sail with a slightly different accent. You get to understand their conversation in time. On still mornings it is wonderful to come up on deck and hear the sails whispering among themselves. They make gestures, too, and when they are tired they sway pathetically against the sky.

I took a turn about the deck and bawled out the men and told them to

go to the devil. Then I got my pipe out and blew grotesque yellow effigies into the cold air. They danced in the moonlight and made the situation irredeemable. I came back to Oscar eventually and asked him pointblank what he meant by "it." But Oscar didn't answer me. He simply turned, and pointed.

Something white and gelatinous oozed over the rail and ran or slid for several feet along the deck. Then a larger bulk seethed out of the darkness and stood poised above the black stern-post. A second object descended upon the deck, coming down with a thud and running at a tangent with the first over the smooth, polished boards. I saw two of the men get quickly to their feet, with wildish, jerky motions, and I heard Oscar shout out a curt command.

The thing upon the deck spread out and became broader at its base. It reared into the air a livid appendage encircled with monstrous pink suckers. We could see the suckers loathsomely at work in the moonlight, opening and closing and opening again. We were affected by a queer aromatic stench and we felt an overpowering sense of physical nausea. I saw one of the men reel backward and collapse upon the boards. Then a second idiot keeled over, and a third—a third actually advanced toward the loathsome object on his hands and knees, as if fascinated.

At that moment the moon seemed to draw nearer, to actually careen down the sky and hang above the cordage. Then suddenly the amorphous tentacles shot forward, like released hawsers, and struck against the nearest mast, and I heard a splintering, and a noise like thunder. The arms quivered and seemed to fly in all directions. Then they flopped back over the side.

I fastened my eyes upon our black topsail mastheads, and questioned Oscar in a very low voice. "Did *that* take the boatswain?"

Oscar nodded and shuffled his feet. The men on the deck whispered among themselves, and I knew intuitively that a spirit of rebellion was rife among them. And yet even Oscar exonerated me!

"Where would we have been if you hadn't brought us in here? A-drifting, probably—rudderless and sailless. Our sails may look like the skin on a water-logged corpse, but we can use 'em—when we can get the masts into shape. The lagoon looked innocent enough, and most of us were for coming in here. But now they whine like yellow puppies—and blame it on you. The idiots! If you just say the word—"

I stopped him, for I didn't want the men to take his proposal seriously, and he spoke loud enough for them to hear. The men, I felt, were scarcely to blame—under the circumstances!

"How many times has the *thing* crawled over the sides?" I asked.

"Eight times!" said Oscar. "It took the boatswain on the third trip. He shrieked and threw up his arms, and turned yellow! It twined itself about his leg, and set its great pink suckers to work on him; and the rest of us could do nothing—nothing! We tried to get him away, but you cannot imagine the sheer pull of that white arm. It oozed slime all over him, and all over the deck. Then it flopped back into the water, and carried him with it!

"After that we were more careful. I told the men to go below, but they only glowered at me. The thing fascinates them. They sit there and deliberately wait for it to return. You saw what happened just now. The thing can strike like a cobra, and it sticks closer than a lamprey; but the idiots won't be warned. And when I think of those quivering pink suckers I feel sorry for them—and for myself! He didn't utter a sound, you

understand, but he turned livid under the gills and his tongue stuck out horribly, and just before he disappeared over the side I noticed that his lips were all black and swollen. But as I told you, he was immersed in yellowish slime, in ooze, and the life must have gone out of him almost at once. I'm sure that he didn't really suffer. With God's help, it's we who have to suffer!"

"Oscar," I said, "I want you to be quite frank, and if necessary, even brutal. Do you think that you can explain that thing? I don't want any wretched theories, Oscar. I want you to fashion a prop for me, Oscar, something for me to lean upon. I'm so very tired, and I haven't much authority here. Oh, yes, I'm supposed to be in command, but when there is nothing to go upon, Oscar, what can I say to them? How can I get them down into the cabin? I pity them so. What do you think it is, my friend?"

"The thing is obviously a cephalopod," said Oscar, quite simply, but there was a look of shame and horror in his eyes, which I didn't like.

"An octopus, Oscar?"

"Perhaps. Or a monstrous squid! Or some hideous unclassified species!"

A FABRIC of greenish cloud covered the face of the moon, and I saw one of the men crawling on his hands and knees along the deck. Then he gave a sudden, defiant scream, ran to the rail and held out his arms. A white exudation ran the entire length of the rail. It rose up and quivered amidst illimitable shadows, and then it poured in an abominable stream over the scuppers and enveloped the hectic form of the wretch, and it made no sound. The poor fool tried to get away. He screamed, made shocking grimaces, fell down upon the deck and tried to draw himself along by his hands. He pawed at the smooth slippery surface, but the thing had wound its tenebrous tentacles about his leg, and it pulled him. It pulled him slowly and hideously.

His head struck against the scuppers, and a crimson stream, no wider than a hawser rope, ran down the deck and formed a miniature pool at Oscar's feet. A sucker fastened upon his right temple, and another got in under his shirt and set to work upon his bare chest. I tried to get to him, but Oscar held fast to my arm, and would not tell me why. The body became white, slimy, changed before our eyes. And not one man stepped forward to prevent it. Suddenly, while we watched, the dead man, whose eyes had already glazed, was jerked forcefully toward the scuppers, again and again.

But he wouldn't go through. His head was soon pounded into an unimaginable resemblance of something we didn't care to think about, and we became deadly sick. But we watched, strangely fascinated, even perhaps more than a little resentful. We were watching something brutal and incredibly alive, and we beheld it in an unrestrained exercise of all its faculties. There, under a shrouded moon, in the phosphorescent wilderness of exotic waters, we saw the law of man outraged by something mute, misshapen, blasphemous, and we saw industrious retching matter, brainless and self-sufficient, obeying a law older than man, older than morality, older than sin. Here was life absorbing another life, and doing it forcefully, and without conscience, and becoming stronger and more exultant through the doing of it.

But it couldn't get the body through the scuppers. It pulled and pulled, and finally let go. The wind had gone down, and oddly enough, as it let go and fell back into the dead calm of water, we heard an ominous splash. We rushed forward, and surrounded the body. It seemed to swim in a river of white jelly. Oscar called for something which had become nec-

essary, and we wrapped it up decently and threw it overboard. But Oscar repeated a few words mechanically out of the little black prayer-book, which he imagined were appropriate. I stood and stared at the dark opening in the forecastle.

I don't know to this day how I got the men through that dark opening. But I did it—with Oscar's aid. I can see Oscar standing with his glistening head against a voiceless wilderness of stars. I can see him shaking his fists at the slinking cowards on the deck, and shrieking out commands. Or were they insults? I know that I stepped forward and helped him, and I think I must have used my fists, for later on I discovered that my knuckles were bruised and discolored, and Oscar had to bandage them. It is queer how Oscar has faded in my memory, for I thought a great deal of him, in spite of his queer ways, and his large hungry eyes, and his fringe of yellow hair. He helped me get the men into the forecastle, and so did Boucke. Boucke, with perfectly horrified face, and with lips quivering and struggling with a vicious inarticulateness!

We drove them in like sheep, but sheep often rebel and are troublesome. But we got them in, and then we turned and looked back at the gaunt masts, swaying soullessly against the lifeless, somber regularity of calm sea and sky, at the hanging ropes and frizzled sails, and at the long, moon-washed rails, and the encrimsoned scuppers. We heard Boucke inside, blubbering idiotically to the men. Then something made a dreadful guggling sound in the water, and we heard a loud splash.

"It's risen again," said Oscar, in a tone of despair.

2

I SAT in my cabin, reading a book. Oscar had bandaged up my hands, and left, and he had promised not to disturb me.

I endeavored to follow the little printed signs on the white page before me, but they called up no images, stimulated me to no response. The words did not take shape in my mind, and I did not know whether the stupid phrases that I sought to understand formed part of an essay or a short-story. The title of the book itself I cannot now recall, although I think that it had something to do with ships and the sea, and derelicts, and the pitfalls of over-imaginative skippers. I fancied that I could hear the water lapping against the side of the ship, and now and then a great splash.

But I knew that a portion of my brain hotly repudiated both the lapping and the splash, and I assured myself that the nervous excitement under which I labored was but physical and momentary, and in no sense psychic or due to outside causes. My senses had been appalled, and I now suffered a natural reaction from the shock; but no new danger threatened me.

Something pounded upon the door. I got quickly to my feet, and it did not occur to me at that moment that Oscar had promised that no one should disturb me.

"What is it you want?" I asked.

There was no direct or satisfactory answer, but a queer guggling noise came to me through the door, and I fancied that I could hear a quick intake of breath. A horrible, intense fear took grim possession of me.

I looked at the door in white horror. It shook like broadyards in a gale. It bent inward under a terrific impact.

Thud followed thud, as if some monstrous body had hurled itself forward only to withdraw and to come back with additional momentum. I quelled an impulse to cry out, and I opened my mouth and shut it, and opened it again. I ran forward to assure myself that I had really bolted the door. I fingered the bolt caress-

ingly, and then I retreated until my back was against an opposite beam.

The door bulged inward hideously, and immediately afterwards there followed a great crash, and a splintering and a sundering of wood and a retching of hinges. The door gave, fell inward and was lifted up on the back of something white and unspeakable. Then the panel was hurled violently against the wall, and the thing under it rolled forward, with terrible and increasing velocity. It was a long, gelatinous arm, an amorphous tentacle with pink suckers that slid or oozed towards me across the smooth floor.

I stood with my back pressed against the beam, with only my harsh, stertorous breathing to keep it at bay. I could see that it did not fear me, that arm, and I could do nothing. It was long and white and it *slid* towards me. Can I make you understand? And Oscar had bandaged my hands, and they were but feeble, fumbling instruments. And that thing was utterly intent upon its purpose, and it did not need eyes to guide it across the floor.

An ungodly, aromatic odor had entered the cabin with the thing, and it overpowered me almost before the tentacles seized upon me. I endeavored to slough off the great, loathsome folds with my bandaged hands, but my crippled fingers sank into the jellylike tissue as in soft mud. It was palpitating, living tissue, but it seemed to lack substantial body, and it gave horribly. It *gave!* My hands went right through it, and yet when it gripped me it was elastic and it could tighten its grip. It strangled me. I felt that I could not breathe. I bent and twisted but it had wound itself about me, and it held me, and I could do nothing.

I remember that I called for Oscar. I shouted myself hoarse, and then I think I was dragged ruthlessly across the floor, through the smashed-in door, and up the stairs. I remember now how my head pounded upon the stairs as we ascended, I and the thing, and I think that my scalp bled, and I know that I lost three teeth. I received dreadful blows, cuffs, from the corners of stairs, from the edges of doors, and from the smooth, hard boards of the deck itself.

THE thing dragged me out across the deck, and I remember that I saw the moon through folds upon folds of obscenely bloating jelly. I was buried deep down within fatty, obscene folds that shivered and shook and palpitated in the moonlight!

I no longer felt any desire to protest or to cry out, and the thought of Oscar and a possible rescue did not fill me with elation. I began to experience sensations of pleasure. How am I to describe them? A peculiar warmth pulsed through me; my limbs quivered with a weird expectancy. I saw through the folds of animate jelly a great reddish sucker, or disk, lined with silver teeth. I saw it descend rapidly through the folds. It fastened upon my chest, and a momentary revulsion made me claw ludicrously at the nauseous tissue surrounding me. There was a kind of cruelty in the refusal of the flimsy stuff to offer any resistance. One could go on that way forever, clawing and tearing at the fatty folds, and feeling them give, and yet knowing that nothing could possibly come of it. For one thing, it was utterly impossible to get a hold on the stuff, to get it between your hands and squeeze it. It simply flipped away from you and then it rushed back and solidified. It could condense and dilate at will.

My feeling of horror and antipathy disappeared, and a new tide of exaltation, of warmth, of vigor surged over me. I could have wept or screamed with pleasure and genuine ecstasy.

I knew that the monster was actually drawing up my blood through

its fumbling, convulsive suckers. I knew that in a moment I should be drained as dry as a grilled carbonado, but I actually welcomed my inevitable dissolution. I made no effort to conceal my glee. I was frankly hilarious, although it seemed unjust to me that Oscar should have to explain to the men. Poor Oscar! He tied up the loosened ends of things, smoothed over vulgar and disagreeable realities, made the raw, ungarnished facts almost acceptable, almost romantic. He was a precious stoic, and gloriously self-reliant. That I knew, and I pitied him. I distinctly recalled my last conversation with him. He was slouching along the docks, with his hands in his pockets, and a cigarette between his teeth. "Oscar," I said, "I didn't really suffer when that thing fastened upon me! I didn't, really. I enjoyed it!" He scowled, and scratched his ridiculous fringe of hair. "Then I saved you from yourself!" he cried. His eyes blazed, and I saw that he wanted to knock me down. That was the last I saw of Oscar. He faded into the shadows after that, but had I kept him with me I might have been wiser.

The jelly about me seemed to increase in volume. It must have been three feet thick about my head, and I am sure that I saw the moon and the swaying mastheads through a prism of varying colors. Waves of blue and scarlet and purple would pass before my eyes, and a taste of salt came into my mouth. For a moment I thought, not without a certain resentment and hurt pride, that the thing had really absorbed me, that I was a portion and parcel of that quivering, gelatinous mass—and then I saw Oscar!

I saw him looming above my obscene prison-house with a lighted torch in his hand. The torch, viewed through the magnifying folds of jelly, was a thing of flawless beauty. The flames shot out and appeared to cover the entire deck, and to go flying up against the darkness. The cordage and the luminous rails seemed afire, and a red and ravening serpent lengthened parallel with the scuppers. I saw Oscar clearly, and I saw the great spiral of smoke that streamed from the tails of flame, and I saw the swaying, encrimsoned masts, and the black sinister opening in the forecastle. The darkness seemed to part to let Oscar through with his torch and his stoicism. He swayed in the darkness above me, that silent, quixotic man, and I knew that Oscar could be trusted to put an end to things. I had no clear idea of what Oscar would do, but I knew that he would make some sort of brilliant and satisfying end.

I was not disappointed, and when I saw Oscar bend and touch the folds of jelly with his great, flaming torch I wanted to sing or shout. The folds quivered, and changed color. A maddening kaleidoscope of color passed before my eyes—flaming scarlet and yellow and silver and green and gold. The sucker released its hold upon my chest and shot upward through the voluminous folds. A terrific stench assailed my nostrils. The odor was unbearable: I threw out my arms and fought savagely to break through to reach the air and light and Oscar.

Then I felt the heat of Oscar's torch upon my cheek, and I knew that the tissue about me was falling away and burning to shreds. I saw that it was dissolving also, turning into oil, into grease, and I felt it hotly trickling down my knees and arms and thighs. I closed my lips tight to keep from swallowing large quantities of the nauseous fluid, and I turned my face to the deck to protect my eyes from the falling fragments of sizzling tissue. The creature was literally being burnt alive, and in my heart of hearts I pitied it!

When Oscar at length helped me to

my feet I saw the last of the thing disappear over the side. Its arms were horribly charred and the suckers were gone, and I caught a momentary glimpse of dangling, frayed ends and reddish knobs and bulging protuberances. Then we heard a splash and a queer guggling sound. We looked at the deck, and saw that it was covered with greenish oil, and here and there great solid chunks of burnt tissue swam in the hideous porridge. Oscar bent and picked up one of the fragments. He turned it right side up in his hand, so that the moonlight fell upon it. It contained in its five-inch expanse a four-inch sucker. And the sucker opened and closed while Oscar held the thing in his hand. It fell from Oscar's hand like a leaden weight and bounded into the air. Oscar kicked it overboard and looked at me. I looked away towards the black topsail masthead.

Two Crows

By FRANCIS HARD

Two crows flapped over dismally
(So wearily, so drearily)
To the blackened limb of a blasted tree;
The shells flew screaming overhead,
And the field was covered thick with dead—
The earth reeked with its dead.

One crow lamented to his mate
(So wearily, so drearily):
"How long, how long must we now wait
For the taste of food that was so good
Before the shrapnel shattered the wood
And loaded the ground with dead?

"The odor sweet of dying men"
(Lamented he so drearily),
"How strangely pleasant was it when
I sensed it first with ravished breath!
But I am sated, and sick to death,
And would fain lie yon with the dead."

A shell came moaning through the air
(So drearily, so eerily)
And burst where the crows were plaining there;
It shivered the wreck of the blasted tree,
And bits of crow fell bloodily
Among the tangled dead.

FOG

by C. Fraklin Miller

Author of "His Family," "The Ghost of Silent Smith," etc.

SOME men are like the throb of a kettledrum. Moisell was like that—high-strung, vivid, mysterious. His every word and gesture disclosed a certain emotion, a certain tensity, that his friends found highly fascinating. Into the life of the club he came and went like a flash of color, radiating all the glamor of those silent, far-away places he inhabited. Short, lithe, well-groomed, he sparkled for a day or two and then dropped out of sight for months.

No one ever knew his destination. It was always a matter for conjecture. Occasionally we received hazy reports of his work in Africa, or Alaska, or innermost China. At other times we read brief newspaper extracts describing the bones, or eggs, or other fossilized deposits he had unearthed in Mexico, or Central America. And then, quite unexpectedly, he himself would bob up at the club and deliver a broadside of questions anent our own gray lives.

That was like Moisell. He was as talkative as any of the boys; but never about himself. Whenever the conversation drifted into the field of paleontology with its fantastic flying-lizards, dinosaurs and other prehistoric monsters, as our conversation invariably did when Moisell was around, he always managed to steer it into other channels. . . . Imagine talking stocks and bonds and real estate with a man like that!

But five years ago—no, it was nearer six, I believe—Moisell let us have our way. He couldn't help it. At that time he was hobnobbing a lot with a fat, good-natured chap by the name of Bonner. Bonner was a botanist with quite a reputation and liked to talk "shop" almost as much as Moisell avoided it.

Young Donaldson, "Long Jim" Haney and myself were boring each other over a couple of highballs down in the grill of the Bachelors' Club, when Moisell and Bonner wandered in. Donaldson pounced upon the two immediately and dragged them across to our table. Their orders were taken and we all got settled comfortably. Moisell's face was beaming.

"This is—life!" he exclaimed with all the enthusiasm of a boy. "Friendship—talk—a bit to drink! Somehow or other, I don't get half as much of this sort of thing as I'd like to."

"You would soon tire of it," sighed "Long Jim." "Besides, you couldn't stand it. You're too much of a gipsy."

Moisell laughed.

"Even a gipsy has his band, Long Jim; some one he can talk to—some one he can smoke with—some one to clap him on the back and remind him of the sun. . . . Life without that would be—madness."

Moisell had a way of saying such things that made you wonder at his laughter.

"Just the same," put in the irrepressible Donaldson, tapping his glass, "I'll bet you get more kick out of a dead dinosaur than you could out of a dozen of these."

"Humph!" snorted Bonner disdainfully. "*Dead* ones, indeed!"

He glanced hurriedly around the room with an elaborate air of mystery and then leaned across the table as if about to divulge some momentous secret.

"How about the kick of a *live* one?" he whispered.

We all looked incredulous—all except Moisell.

"You mean a live—dinosaur?" inquired Donaldson, doubtfully.

"Maybe! Maybe something else; but it must be alive. Tell you better in—possibly a year from now."

"But—say! What's it all about?"

By this time young Donaldson was fairly radiating eagerness. Even "Long Jim" had straightened up.

"Down in Patagonia—on the upper plateau! Cold climate—hills—unexplored caves—peculiar flora—and all that!"

Bonner's voice was grave, but his eyes were twinkling.

"Tell them all about it, Moisell!"

Moisell pulled out a cigar and carefully clipped the end.

"Why—er—yes! Just so!"

He hesitated. Then he turned and smiled faintly upon Bonner—much like a tolerant father upon his son.

"Bonner and I have been planning a trip. The highlands of Patagonia abound in a peculiar vegetation which Bonner wants to take a look at, while I—"

He paused and lit his cigar. Then he laughed a bit.

"It does seem absurd to think about it here where everything is so modern and cocksure; but I've got a theory that prehistoric life is not wholly extinct. That unexplored section of Patagonia is a likely place to look for it."

"You mean," ejaculated Donaldson, "that some of those high-soaring woppers are still flapping around down there?"

Moisell smiled faintly at this, but immediately grew serious.

"Dr. Johnson of Columbia says so," with a conclusive flirt of his hand. "In fact, he has written a thesis on the subject. Many other scientists hold to the same belief. We know nothing to the contrary."

Young Donaldson whistled softly.

"And you expect to camp right in their back yard!" with wholesouled admiration.

Moisell reddened under his tan at the frankness of this hero-worship and shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

"If I thought Moisell were right, I'd never leave New York," laughed Bonner frankly. "But it's hard to believe—and besides, there's that peculiar vegetation. I've been wanting to poke around down there for years."

"Just what kind of life have you in mind?" I inquired of Moisell. Surely, if he entertained the idea, there must be something to it.

"Dinosaurs," was Moisell's prompt reply and his earnestness was profound. He studied his cigar for a moment before continuing. "Perhaps it were better to say the descendants of those mammoth reptiles. You must remember that the reconstructions in our museums represent life as it existed millions of years ago. It is reasonable to suppose that that

life has been modified to some extent by the change in surface and atmospheric conditions of the earth."

"I should think," reflected "Long Jim," "that the very change you speak of would tend to wipe out all such life."

"And so it has," nodded Moisell, "in most portions of the globe. But in certain unexplored sections there still exists that strange vegetation which—as even our friend Bonner will admit—many botanists trace back to the reptilian age. The inference is that animal life has survived in those sections along with their native vegetation."

"Then you are liable to encounter almost—anything," exploded "Long Jim" eagerly. "Perhaps something we never dreamed of. Surely, our knowledge does not cover all the queer life of that era."

A strange, haunted gleam entered Moisell's eyes.

"It does not," he agreed, with passionate conviction. "I've thought about it often. One runs across some mighty peculiar things—out there."

The sweep of his arm was all-embracive.

"In the Gobi desert I've examined tracks that no living animal I know of could possibly make. Along the upper Amazon I've heard the most unearthly roar imaginable. Down in the African jungle I've touched a spongy, quivering mass that looked like—a rock."

He paused suddenly and looked around as if to apologize for his lengthy outburst.

"Good Lord!" gasped young Donaldson.

And we all fell silent.

One could almost see the mountain and the stars when he gazed upon Moisell. For a minute or two he puffed slowly on his weed, immersed in thought. Then he lifted his eyes and the spell was broken.

"I know I'm only boring you with my fancies," he smiled. "What say you to another little drink?"

Poor chap! As if we flabby stay-at-homes preferred a drink to talk like that! But nothing more could be gotten out of Moisell that night.

An hour later he was gone.

2

A YEAR elapsed and my business interests took me to Buenos Aires. On the return trip, I booked passage on the steamer *Southern Star*, bound for Panama. The first night at sea we ran into a heavy mist that slowed our progress and set the foghorn booming dismally. Then it was that I again laid eyes on my friend, Moisell.

I was groping my way through the wetness of the upper deck toward my cabin, when a blurry figure darted by and sent me reeling. Somewhere along the passage a door banged shut. Mentally I cursed the fellow for an idiot and stumbled along.

I remembered that my own stateroom was located about halfway down the passage, and presently paused. I found a knob and flung the door wide open. A flood of light poured out and with it came a cry of horror—a hoarse, throaty cry that set my blood a-tingling.

With a queer sense of impending tragedy I blinked into the sudden glare and discovered my error. The room was not my own. I started to back away when my eyes lighted on the strange figure of a man cowering in a far corner. He was alone and plainly terror-stricken. His eyes were wild and sunken, his cheeks and lips bloodless. I could see him trembling in the greatcoat that enveloped him. Even as I stared, he uttered a piercing scream, which trailed off into a moan.

Something about the cowering creature made me think of Moisell. I

quickly stepped inside and locked the door.

"Moisell!" I cried.

He shrank farther into the corner. His fingers were playing nervously at his throat, while from his lips there came a blubbering, incoherent sound. His face was unshaven—probably had been for weeks; but I recognized my friend, Moisell.

"This is Hunter," said I, trying to hide my amazement.

"Hunter?" he quavered. And again: "Hunter?"

Some of the wildness left his eyes. He stared at me as if gazing upon some long-forgotten dream; but he refused to come out to greet me.

I moved toward him.

"Surely, this is no way to receive an old-time friend," I chided with the best of intention. "Moisell, you *do* remember Hunter—from the club!"

Gently I took his arm and pulled him erect. The action seemed to stir his memory. For a moment he stared into my eyes and then uttered a cry of recognition. I led him to a chair across the room and he sank weakly between its arms, sobbing like a child.

My heart ached at the sight. I had always thought of Moisell as a bar of well-tempered steel—flexible, but unbreakable. And I found him a bundle of shattered nerves—a pitiable wreck. The thing was staggering, unbelievable.

Suddenly he raised his head and his fear-haunted eyes glared past me.

"Moisell, what is it?" I asked. "Are you in danger?"

He raised a quivering hand and pointed wildly.

"There," he whispered. "See! It breathes. It lives. It's crawling—in. . . ."

With a moan he huddled behind the crook of his arm as if to shut out some maddening sight. The man was in dire agony.

I turned and found nothing but an open porthole through which could be seen the gray swirl of the fog. This I closed and adjusted the curtain. Moisell was breathing rapidly behind me.

I made him swallow some whisky from the ever ready flask I carried and gave him a cigar. His eyes took on a greater sanity as I settled down before him on the bed.

"Forgive me—Hunter," he stammered. "I—I'm not—myself."

"Moisell, what is it?" I insisted.

His answer came in a queer, low-pitched, jerky tone.

"Fog!"

The revelation was dumfounding. I stared at him. His overcoat was gaping open and for the first time I noticed that he was still in working togs—a soft-collared shirt, corduroy suit and high-laced boots. Here and there a peculiar, grayish substance clung to his garments—smeared on like grease.

Suddenly his body jerked and a weary sort of sob escaped him.

"I tried to—fight it, Hunter," said he in the same low tone. "Up on the deck. It almost smothered me. . . . Sometimes I think I'm going—mad!"

I struck a match and lit his cigar. He inhaled the smoke in deep, quivering waves and seemed to grow calmer.

"Suppose you tell me all about it," I suggested gently. "Maybe I can help."

He gave me a quick, searching look The glint in his eyes was unfathomable. For a time he puffed fitfully on his weed, now and then casting a furtive glance around the cabin. The booming of the vessel's fog-horn up above seemed to play upon his nerves.

"The door, Hunter," he murmured uneasily. "It is—locked?"

I crossed the room and tried the knob to reassure him. His eyes followed closely my every movement. I returned to the bed and for a moment

or two he smoked rapidly, eyes half-closed like one trying to piece together stray bits of thought. Finally, in a low, tense voice, he started speaking.

"I FELT the breath of the foggy beast, but Bonner only laughed. Now Bonner is—dead. . . ."

He shuddered.

"A very brave man was Bonner. He cut the rope. . . . No one else saw it. No one else knows. But Bonner and I found life. Damnable life! A hideous survival of those ancient times when life first oozed up from the bottom of the sea.

"It was right at the other end of the cavern. A swift current ran straight through the mountain. Bonner wanted to explore the place and I agreed. . . ."

Moisell paused and nursed his cigar into a glow. Then he continued and the words seemed to flow more freely.

"The place was dark. So we tied a rope around our waists with about five yards of it between us—much like Alpine climbers. We carried only our rifles, knives and pocket-torches. A fine mist was falling when we entered the cavern and we soon lost sight of the opening.

"It was like stepping into some vast cathedral. The air was damp and chilly. Except for the soft purr of the stream and our own footsteps, the place was silent. Our torches did not penetrate very far in the gloom, so we hugged the stream closely. It was our only guide.

"We had not gone very far in the darkness when I became conscious of a strange, nauseating odor. It grew more obnoxious as we advanced and at times was almost unbearable. I could liken it to nothing I had ever experienced before excepting, possibly, the evil-smelling scum over a sun-baked mud-hole.

"I was trying to account for the sickening odor when Bonner in front paused suddenly. 'Hello!' he exclaimed. His voice fell with a hollow, echoing sound upon my ears. 'Some one has been here before us. Take a look at this, Moisell.'

"I stepped forward. Within the glowing circle of his torch lay a man's dead body—part skeleton and part flesh, but still clothed. I believe it was a white man. The body was entirely covered by a sort of gray mold. I touched the stuff. It was moist and sticky and undoubtedly the source of that acrid stench. 'Now what do you make of that?' mused Bonner. I had no explanation to offer—unless . . ."

Moisell's voice trailed away and for a moment he gazed thoughtfully across the cabin. The talk seemed to have a soothing effect on him. More closely I examined the gray daubs on his own garments and wondered; but I made no comment. He continued, slowly:

"Somewhere in the African jungle I once saw a gray, spongelike mass that lived and might have spewed such a substance. I told Bonner so. He only chuckled. 'Moisell,' said he, 'you travel too much alone. It's probably nothing more than some unknown fungus, much like the moss we are familiar with. See—there is more of it! And he swept his torch around. The ground, as far as we could see, was spread with the stuff. We were treading in it.

"I let Bonner have his way and we set out again. But the discovery had kindled new thoughts. I strained my ears and gradually became conscious of a steadily swishing sound behind us. At first it was scarcely perceptible, but as I listened the sound increased—like some unwieldy body laboring along in the stream. I stopped and Bonner in front brought up with a jerk. 'What now?' he boomed.

"Without answering I flashed my torch to the rear and peered into the

gloom. The swishing sound ceased; but the dead silence that ensued was even more ominous than the sound itself. About thirty yards away I thought I detected a stealthy movement along the bank.

"'See anything?' asked Bonner. coming back. Even as he spoke a blast of icy air struck us and froze its way in to the bone. Bonner gasped and clutched my arm like a vise.

"As if paralyzed we stood staring into the darkness. My flesh was creeping at the thought of our utter helplessness. 'Do you see it, Bonner?' I whispered. 'Along the bank?'

"And Bonner laughed. . . . God! I can hear him yet. It was forced. 'Imagination, Moisell! The place is getting on your nerves. Let's go!'

"We did—and again came that swishing sound — cumbersome, stealthy, insistent—like some enormous beast stalking its prey. Bonner must have heard it too, for he quickened his pace. But we could not shake it off. It stopped when we stopped, and when we got going again it came swishing out of the darkness with maddening persistency. It clung to our heels with almost human intelligence—and gained steadily. I could feel its cold breath on my neck.

"Then, with startling abruptness, a tremendous long-drawn hiss swelled through the cavern. All about us there fell an icy spray. In the light of our torches it descended like fog and settled without dissolution. From it arose a pungent, fishlike stench that was almost overpowering.

"THAT settled all doubts. Our retreat was cut off and the realization unnerved me. If I could only see! Trailed in the darkness by some inconceivable monster and unable to fight back was too much for the human brain. For a moment I believe I went—mad. Without reasoning I stopped long enough to empty my rifle into the gloom, and then we stumbled along like drunken men.

"The enraged thing behind us hissed and spewed its suffocating fog until the light of our torches was only a blur. I could feel my senses swimming as I gasped for air. Once I tottered on the very edge of the stream and would have gone over had it not been for the rope around me. Bonner shouted something; but I could not see him.

"Hunter, it's the mysteries of life that drive men mad. The hidden things! I was trembling like a child. That hissing monster was almost upon us. I could feel its colossal presence —and it was cold—cold. In a frenzy of terror I dragged myself along. Bonner was at my side. I could feel his life-giving clutch on my arm.

"How we ever found the outlet I do not know; but suddenly we emerged into something bordering more on sanity. A heavy fog had descended and things were only dimly visible. We could faintly trace the winding course of the stream and the yawning mouth of the cavern. Beyond that hung the fog, like a curtain of gray.

"Bonner was for laughing it all away. A nightmare, he called it. A weird product of the imagination. But I was as sure as I am now that we had come in contact with primeval life—in some form."

Moisell paused and eyed me steadily for a moment. His face was haggard and drawn as if, with the telling, he were reliving the terrifying experience; but I thought I detected in his manner a flash of his former self.

"The death of Bonner is my proof," he added simply. "Even as Bonner laughed at my assertion, an enormous shadow loomed in the mouth of the cavern. Gray, shapeless and scarcely definable, it seemed a part of the fog itself. Like a huge puff of smoke it came rolling out of its lair

and spread. I could hear the water churn with its motion. Before we could think it was upon us.

"We made a frantic effort to evade its spread. It was useless. Its power of expansion and contraction seemed tremendous. With an unearthly hiss it swirled about us and held us, struggling madly, in its icy embrace.

"As if in a cloud I could still make out Bonner's form. He was moving slowly, laboriously, as one does under water—or in a dream. He shouted something that sounded strangely like 'quicksand' and seemed to be making a desperate effort to wield his knife. . . . I believe Bonner was mad. . . . That stifling ooze around us seemed to be pulling him down—down—and me with him. I could feel the rope which bound us digging in at my waist.

"With a last, merciful effort Bonner's knife found the rope and severed it. He sank quickly. For a moment his hand only was visible. I tried with all my strength to reach him; but the next second—he was gone. . . . I never saw Bonner again.

"Alone in the clutch of that nameless thing, I struggled madly for freedom. I could feel it pulling and pressing all about me, slowly working me downward—the way that Bonner had gone. Almost blinded and scarcely able to breathe, I hacked away with my knife, trying to dig a way through the pasty mass. I was like one fighting in delirium. For one agonizing moment I was conscious of a dull roar in my ears and then—

"I must have fainted. With the coming of light I was lying face downward on the ground half way up the slope. My arms were wrapped tightly around the trunk of a tree. A fine rain was falling.

"In a daze I fled without a backward glance and stopped only when I fell exhausted. How I managed to make the coast—I do not know . . . I—I—"

Wearily Moisell passed a hand across his eyes as if to brush away a memory and slumped motionless in his chair. Up above, the fog-horn was still booming its dismal warning. I gazed upon his tragic figure, and it seemed like a living proof of the statement that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy.

Still, there was Bonner's last word—and Moisell had seen him sink.

"There may have been a quicksand bed," I suggested thoughtfully.

Moisell did not move.

"Imagination and fog may have done the rest," I added.

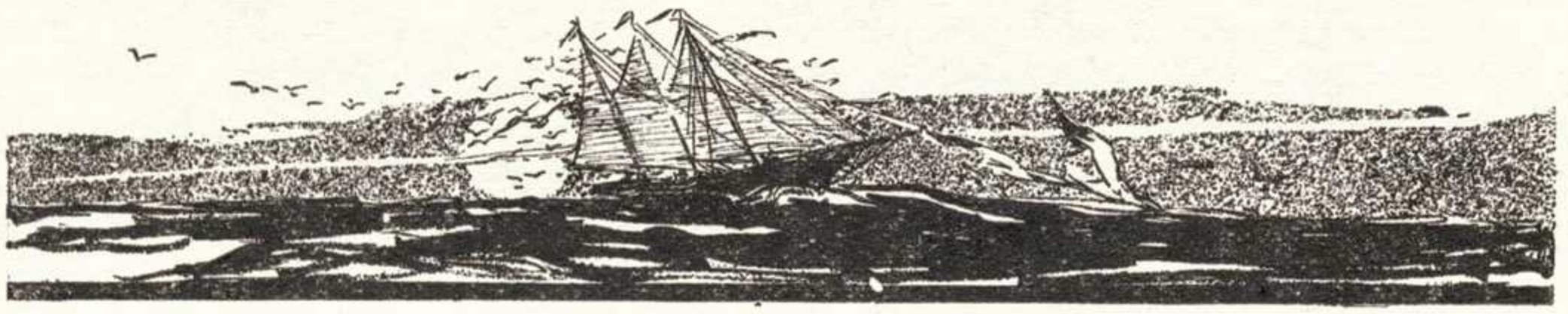
At this Moisell sprang to his feet with such ferocity that I recoiled before him. His eyes were blazing; his body trembled.

"I told you Bonner went mad," he rasped.

Then he laughed—a weird, cackling laugh.

"Imagination?" he croaked. "Then where did I get—this?" triumphantly.

From a pocket he hauled a small, oblong box and threw it on the bed. I opened it and stared at the contents with sinking heart. Moisell, my friend, was mad. On the bottom lay a lump of putty!



LUISMA'S RETURN

by Arthur J. Burks
(Estil Critchie)

Author of "Voodoo" and "Thus Spake the Prophetess"

CHRISTOPHE, who called himself Henri I, Emperor of Northern Haiti, was the greatest monster in all history. He killed for the love of killing. He murdered innocent people who dared to gaze upon his face without permission. To question his orders and commands was to give oneself to the executioner. This black monster of the Haitian hills took whatever pleased him, be it lands, movable property, or women. His word was law, as immutable as that of the Medes and Persians, and his hand was quick to punish.

None knew this better than did General Luisma Llansal, the greatest soldier in the pay of the emperor. Luisma was a little man as to body; but his arms hung below his knees as he walked, like those of a giant anthropoid ape. His mind was slow to thought, and mental pictures came sluggishly. Even so, he could look into the near future and picture what Christophe would say and do to him when he should return to report failure in the mission which Christophe had assigned him, out there in the Haitian wilderness. He had tried with all his power to succeed, as evidenced by his dragging gait as he walked up the streets of Cap Haitien—proof that he was tired to exhaustion. Only the knowledge that his little black sweetheart awaited him at the end of the street kept him on his leaden feet.

The girl's mother met him at the door of the hut, and he read in her dry eyes and expression of utter hopelessness that something terrible had happened. His lips trembled a bit as he asked for Madeleine.

"Have you not heard then, Luisma?" asked the old woman, hopelessly.

"Have I heard what, old woman?" demanded Luisma. "I have asked for the little sweetheart. Where is she?"

"Alas!" cried the old woman. "Henri has taken her!"

"But—Henri! I do not understand. What could he want with the girl?"

"Henri does not explain his actions to common people," replied the old woman. "I only know that the soldiers from the citadel came for her and that she has gone. Who knows? The queen is very old and very fat. Perhaps Henri craves the freshness of youth."

"Hush, aged one, do not speak thus of the emperor's consort! Dost wish to be hurled from the cliff at sunrise?"

"What matters it? As well be hurled tomorrow morning as a week hence. Age does not breed pity in the heart of Christophe, and one is as apt to go as another when it moves the soul of Henri."

"Hush, the very stones in the street have ears with which to listen for the emperor!"

"So be it, Luisma; I am very old, and I am ready."

"But," cried Luisma, "have our friends done nothing to save the beloved demoiselle from the hands of Christophe? Surely they have known of this!"

"It was told in the market place after you had left for the wilderness, Luisma. They pitied you, knowing that Henri had sent you so that you might not spoil his plans, though what you could have done no one knows. For who has ever stood against the might of the emperor?"

"None has ever done it—and lived," replied Luisma. "Yet mark what I say, aged one, Luisma will do it and live to tell how he avenged the dishonor of his loved one."

General Luisma turned about and left the hut. His fatigue was forgotten because of the terrible weight of his great misfortune. He would be avenged. He had promised himself that it should come to pass. Anger flashed from his black eyes as he entered the jungle, en route to the citadel.

Luisma was admitted because he was a general in the service of the monster. But even the keeper of the gate looked at him with pity in his eyes.

"Where is she, baron?" questioned Luisma.

"She rests in the arms of his Excellency, on the bench beneath the council tree," replied the baron hurriedly.

He feared Henri more than he pitied Luisma. The emperor had made him a gatekeeper, with the title of baron, just as he had made dukes of black stevedores on the wharves of St. Marc; but the emperor was fickle and he made vacancies in the royal family just for the pleasure it afforded his vanity—while the deposed dukes and barons left their bones to whiten on the rocks a thousand feet below the citadel. It was best to guard one's speech.

Luisma hurried away, walking erect and unafraid. The baron gazed after him and shook his head. Already he could hear the death shriek of a general as he plunged to the foot of the cliff.

LUISMA stood erect before his emperor. The latter, half reclining on the stone bench beneath the great tree which still remains as one of the monuments to Christophe, raised himself on his elbow to glance at this man, bravest of his generals. Luisma affected not to notice the dusky demoiselle who snuggled against the emperor and complacently allowed him to stroke her bare arm with his disengaged hand.

"What is it, Luisma? We give you permission to speak."

"I have failed, Excellency," replied Luisma, "as you very well knew that I would. Why did you bother to send me away, when you might have taken my loved one without? Why steal her away by stealth?"

"Steal her away, Luisma? I did not steal her. She came of her own free will, because Henri the Emperor desired her. Tell him, child, that the master speaks the truth."

The black girl, who had held the heart of Luisma in her keeping for many months, looked into the eyes of Luisma as she answered.

"I want none of thee, filthy one!" she replied. "Thou needest a bath, Luisma!"

She said it in a sing-song fashion, as if it were a lesson she had committed to memory.

"Dost see, Luisma?" demanded the emperor. "There is no more to be said, man. Tomorrow you take command of our guard. You will put them through their paces well, for in a few days an envoy comes from Boyer, and it is our wish to impress the fellow with our might. Go!"

Luisma turned and left the royal presence.

Out of sight of Christophe, Luisma met the baron who had admitted him to the palace.

"Luisma!" cried the baron in a husky whisper. "Have you taken leave of your senses, man? Do you not recall that you looked upon the face of Christophe without permission, forfeiting your life?"

"But I am still alive, baron," replied Luisma bitterly. "I shall continue to live until I am avenged of Christophe!"

"Say on, fool," replied the baron; "you cannot make your position worse after gazing without permission on the face of the mighty Christophe!"

"So be it, baron!"

The next day Luisma's one-time sweetheart was not to be seen. Luisma knew that she was in the palace, a plaything of the monster. Yet he could do nothing. He was slow of thought like all his kind, with the fatalist's belief that all things are foreordained and that his own time must come in the end. In the meantime he marched and countermarched the troops of Christophe until they moved at his word of command like a bit of well-oiled machinery. And ever, suggestively near, yawned the edge of the cliff upon which the castle stood. Christophe came daily to watch the drilling of his crack troops.

"That one, the blackest one in the rear rank, Luisma," the monster would say, with a judicial air, "he does not seem to keep step with his mates, exactly. If he were hurled over the cliff we believe that it would improve the appearance of the guard!"

Luisma would bow at this and tell off two men for the task. The offending one would be led to the edge and pushed over—well over, so that he might not, perchance, have an opportunity to grasp at something and save himself.

With his shriek of terror dying away as he plunged downward like a plummet to land with a crunching sound as his bones became as jelly on the rocks below, ringing in their ears as they commenced to drill again, is it any wonder that those who remained made an even more perfect machine than before? Yet ever the critical Henri found fault with the drilling. The guard had dwindled noticeably when the emperor would finally yawn, opening his thick lips to their widest extent, and leave the narrow parade to find rest in the arms of Luisma's sweetheart-that-might-have-been. Luisma was left to wonder why both himself and Christophe still lived.

TWO days later came word that Boyer's ambassador was at the gate of the citadel. Christophe commanded that the fellow be brought into his presence at once. He received the dignitary beneath the great council tree, where the two great men talked largely of affairs of state.

"We are told, Excellency," said the envoy at length, "that in all Haiti there is no man who has such authority over his people as does Henri the Emperor."

"My authority is absolute!" replied Christophe calmly, forgetting for a moment the imperial "we."

Christophe clapped his hands and an attendant crawled into the royal presence on hands and knees, eyes turned steadfastly toward the stones of the courtyard.

"Tell Luisma Llansal to march on his soldiers!"

The attendant crawled away. The soldiers marched into view and began their well-oiled evolutions at the command of Luisma. It was beautifully done and the envoy clapped his hands by way of applause when Luisma had finished.

"But there are many generals who can cause their men to do this!" cried the envoy. "Your Excellency has not proved yet that his discipline is any stronger than that of Boyer!"

"Luisma," said the emperor softly, "place yourself at the head of your troops. As I give the commands you will lead in the execution."

Luisma obeyed, taking his place at the head and standing stiffly at attention.

"Forward, march!"

As one man the entire guard moved forward.

"God in Heaven!" thought Luisma. "Does the fool not see that we are headed directly for the edge of the precipice?"

But, never faltering, Luisma held the step. There came no command to halt or for a column movement to right or left. The edge of the precipice was but a few strides away. Even the envoy turned a dirty gray when he read the intention of the emperor. He sprang to his feet.

"Not that, Excellency!" he cried. "Not that! I believe! I believe!"

"You demanded proof, sire," replied Christophe calmly. "I am giving it!"

Luisma was the first man over. He stepped off into eternity without faltering. There was the awesome sensation of falling. Sickening pain as his legs struck nubs of rock which protruded from the face of the thousand foot cliff. He struck with such force that he was turned over in mid-air. His head struck next, filling his brain with molten fire. His hand struck something then—and held on! The crushed body of the erstwhile general swung there in space, unknowing that it swung, holding on by instinct because the brain could not command. Luisma was a man with great strength in his arms. His other hand, without command, moved up and over, clawing, grasping, holding.

A glimmering of sense came back to the brain of the broken general. His eyes turned downward. He pondered dully as, far below, he caught glimpses of ragged bundles that bounced from rock to rock, shapeless things that had once been peerless soldiers, coming to rest in huddled heaps. He looked up and saw them still stepping over into space, wondering why they, like himself, did not catch on and hold. He saw them strike bits of rock above him, felt warm splashes on his cheeks—but whether the blood was theirs or his own, he could not tell. When the last one had stepped over, fallen, bounced, and finally lay still in a huddled heap far, far below, Luisma began to climb, dragging his useless legs behind him up the face of the precipice. He was glad of the strength in his arms and he had always been sure that his time had not come to die.

MEANWHILE, as if nothing had happened out of the ordinary, Henri the Emperor talked calmly ahead with the trembling envoy. He seemed absolutely unmoved over what he had done. The envoy was shaken to the very core. Such a monster could not be human! He might even forget the dignity of Boyer's own envoy! That worthy shuddered as he

saw himself, in his mind's eye, a crumpled and bloody heap at the foot of the precipice. Ever and anon his eyes wandered, against their will, to the place where, to a man, the guard of Christophe had stepped off into space.

"Excellency!" he shouted, springing to his feet and pointing a trembling finger. "Look!"

Slowly Christophe swerved his gaze and fixed it intently on the gruesome thing that the envoy had seen. At the precise moment that he looked, a single black hand came into view above the edge of the precipice—clawing fingers clutched here and there for a grasping place. Another hand came up and placed itself beside the first. A straining of muscles and a face such as neither had ever seen came up above the edge. The face, which could not be recognized as such except for the shape, weirdly resembling that of a man, looked more like a smear of blood. Even the hands were smeared with red, and with something else that they had found when, during the upward climb, they had grasped at the protuberances where the heads of the falling soldiers had touched.

Slowly, like a great black serpent with a broken back, the red-visaged apparition slithered up and over the edge. Its ghastly eyes were staring fixedly at the face of the emperor. Atop the precipice at last, the jelly-like creature slithered toward Christophe and the envoy, leaving a snaky red trail in its wake, dragging the crushed legs, dangling red things, behind.

"I have come back, monster," babbled the thing. "Surely dost know that Luisma could not die unavenged!"

The envoy fled, nor stopped his mad flight until he reached Port au Prince and told his wild tale to Boyer himself. Boyer, knowing that his envoy's mind had gone, placed him in an asylum, where he spent the rest of his days, happy because he knew that crawling things could never get through the bars to haunt him!

Christophe looked at Luisma as the latter, groveling before the emperor only because he could not rise to his feet, looked up into his face with all his savage hate easily readable in the flashing eyes.

"I have come back, Christophe! Ridiculous puppy that calls himself Henri I, Emperor of the North! I am stronger than you! I have cheated death itself! Even you cannot do that!"

"Baron!" called Christophe softly. "Take this fellow and hurl him over once more. He has disobeyed me! He climbed back instead of falling, as ordered!"

The thing leered up into his master's face.

"Stay, monster! I shall go back of my own accord. I only came back to tell you that, even though I fall to the rocks this time, I shall yet be avenged for your cruelties!"

Luisma turned, like a snake with a broken back, and slithered to the precipice edge and over—out of sight! Had Henri followed and looked over, that which followed might never have been.

Why, when all his life he had never felt a tremor of fear, did the great emperor suddenly get a fit of the ague and tremble so that his very knees knocked together? He wiped the fine dew from his forehead, and wondered. He entered the citadel and tried to forget the whole incident.

THIS night was the one during which the great Christophe killed himself with a silver bullet, because he believed that no baser metal should touch that brain of his! No one really knows why he did it. Some say

it was because he had failed to make himself emperor of all Haiti. Many stories are told. One does not know what to believe.

Only the dishonored sweetheart of Luisma heard the last words of Christophe just before that monster blew out his brains. She was awakened in the dead of night by his wild ravings.

"Go back, Luisma! Go back! Go back to your dead body at the foot of the precipice! How dare you leave splotches of blood on the floor of my bedchamber with your dragging limbs! Turn about so that I may not see those hate-filled eyes of yours!"

There followed the sounds of a scuffle, as if the emperor fought with invisible devils, there in the darkness. The girl cowered beneath her covers, leaving only her widening eyes exposed. In the flash of Christophe's pistols she saw the thing! She babbled her story the next day, but people thought her demented because she had spent the night in the chamber with the dead emperor—and did not believe her.

There are many stories of the death of Christophe. Many of them are queer. Many are horrible.

Nor are any of them as queer or horrible as that told by the aged idiot who dragged himself about Cap Haitien like a snake with a broken back, begging for pennies, telling his story to all who would listen. They never believed, of course, for people whom Christophe cast over the cliff never came back, they said. When he told them that his name was Luisma Llansal, they only laughed. For he looked not at all like the Luisma they remembered.

He died a few years ago, in Cap Haitien, insisting, even on his deathbed, that his story was true!

STRANGE TALES *from* SANTO DOMINGO

By ARTHUR J. BURKS
(*Estil Critchie*)

The author of "Luisma's Return" and "Thus Spake the Prophetess" has written a powerful series of short stories for the readers of this magazine. The first of these, "A Broken Glass Chimney," appears in WEIRD TALES next month.

ON SALE EVERYWHERE JANUARY FIRST

A CHANGELING SOUL

FLORA, hesitant, whispered:

"It is—impossible."

"You need say nothing more," returned Folke, grimly. "You do not care—had I any right to hope you would?"

She half raised appealing hands to him. The mute gesture halted even his bitterness.

"I cannot help it," she pleaded. "I know you for the soul of honor, but—I cannot help it. If—"

"If I were Philip Kingswell?"

The man's brows knit into a stern, ugly frown. Flora's gaze was unseeingly intent on the grass. Vague and indistinct though her face was in the shadows, Folke knew that it flushed in hesitant assent. He fancied even more. Leaning forward, one tense hand gripping the back of her chair, he almost screamed a question:

"Do you—do you love Kingswell?"

No answer came. The cripple's grip tightened till it seemed that the wood must fairly splinter.

"Do you?"

"Yes." Almost inaudible her whisper.

"My God! Flora!"

"I know." She did not look up.

He stared moodily at her, as one who sees his world engulfed in pitiless destruction.

"I'd rather have died a thousand deaths—"

"Oh, I know." Her lips quivered. "I—I know it all. I cannot help it. You—surely you will spare me—"

Her voice broke into a sob. Instantly, dropping to his knees, he humbly kissed her hand. She snatched it from him in sudden horror, as from a thing contaminate.

"Forgive me," he muttered, chokingly.

It was all a blur on his memory when he reached the street; he saw nothing clearly save her pale face with its downcast eyes; felt nothing, save the choking heartbreak that came when she snatched away her hand. The arc lights far behind threw his shadow on the pavement, ludicrously long; his fancy accentuated the distorted shoulder and filled in the cruel, scarred lines of the face.

He had come involuntarily to Sandry's door before he recollected their appointment. The friendship of old times unconsciously drew him to Sandry; Sandry, with his quaint love of the bizarre and the hideous that led him to pet toads and lizards and to

open his heart to the ugly youth at college. The soothing, sympathetic touch of the Orient spoke to him of Sandry as Alkazim, the Egyptian servant, with a silence that was part of the strange place, ushered Folke into the Egyptologist's study.

About the visitor all things breathed the sensuous beauty of the East. The rugs under foot were soft, the hanging of exquisite silks, and on all sides magnificent mirrors tossed back to one another the glitter of a myriad of lights. A subtle perfume soothed him. And then, crossing the threshold, he came face to face with Philip Kingswell.

In an instant the scarred countenance was livid, as there rose before the cripple's mind the scene in Flora's garden. Yet, mingling with Folke's hate, was admiration. This was a man whom women could not help but love; even those keen-visioned women who, beneath his handsome outer showing, gazed into the repellent depths of the soul.

"Hello, Jack, old boy!" cried Kingswell, cheerily, stretching forth his hand. "Didn't expect to see me in Pharaoh's cage, did you?"

His laugh was like music. Folke took the hand clammily. His soul burned with envy of the man who could greet even a discarded rival as a friend.

"Hurry up, Pharaoh," added Kingswell, turning toward an inner door. "I've an appointment for 10 o'clock."

"Very well, Phil," responded a soft voice, from the adjoining room; and a moment later the orientalist crossed the rug toward them. There was the hint of another world in his quiet step, his soft tones, the unchanging fixity of his dark eyes.

"Alas, I am still Pharaoh to you, Phil," he murmured, sinking into a chair. "When will you learn respect for wisdom?"

"When I wed," laughed Kingswell.

"Which is never—eh?"

"Nay—very soon."

Folke's hand, viselike in its grip, closed on the edge of the table. The eyes that stared into the mirror opposite saw only the scarred face and the distorted shoulder.

"I may, therefore, congratulate you, Phil," murmured the scholar, gently, "but—not the woman."

Kingswell's laugh was even more cheery.

"Let's postpone the sermon," he urged, "and dig right down to business, my Lord of the Pyramids."

Sandry smiled inscrutably.

"When I invited you here, my friends," he said, "I spoke of an important experiment. You are to be the subjects. Be not alarmed—I offer you an honor, not a peril."

His soft, cooing tone had grown and surged into zealous enthusiasm.

"My experiment concerns the soul," he pursued. "What is the soul? Whence comes it? Whither does it go? Or is there, as skeptics tell us, no such thing? If we answer these questions, we answer all questions. You both know," he added hesitantly, as though apologizing for such discussion with men of intelligence, "that old fable of Pythagoras, concerning the transmigration of souls. I met that belief often among the Eastern races, particularly among the Hindoos. Certain archeologists to the contrary, the ancient Egyptians, at least in some degree, shared the Hindoo belief—possibly originated it. I have studied many ancient writings. These ancient writings convince me of the existence of a soul, that it can depart from man for a time and later return to him, and that this, befalling in sleep, causes those strange soul journeys which we call dreams."

All the while he spoke, the strange, tense gaze of his dark eyes, aglow with enthusiasm, never left the faces of the two spellbound auditors.

"So, my friends," concluded Sandry, solemnly, "we shall now prove or disprove for all time the existence of a soul."

Kingswell's careless laugh rang out. Folke involuntarily shivered. Sandry, noticing the tremor, smiled reassuringly.

"You have nothing to fear, my friends," he urged. "You will sleep—that is all. While sleeping, you may visit strange scenes. When you wake, I may not be here; if so, write what you have seen and heard while sleeping, and leave the writing with Alkazim. You must tell no one—no, not one—what has befallen you, till I give the word. Are you willing?"

Folke nodded. He scarcely seemed to understand; oppressing his mind was the memory of that evening in Flora's garden. Kingswell's careless laugh jarred upon his soul.

Sandry still spoke, but to Folke the words came indistinctly. The voice faded into a whisper, as though, still discoursing but in tones that every moment grew softer and softer, the orientalist were gradually vanishing into unutterable distance.

LONG hours afterward, John Folke, rousing himself, sat sharply up in his chair. The lights were turned low. Sandry was gone. Alkazim, the silent servitor, stood immobile at the sleeper's elbow, as though he had been long waiting.

"Where am I?" demanded Folke, the sensation still fresh upon him of a long yet unwearying journey. "Where is Sandry—and where is—?"

"Gone," returned the servant, with an expressive shake of the head. "Here," he commanded. "Write."

He motioned toward a little table close by, and silently placed a chair. In mute, unquestioning obedience Folke sat before the table, and, taking up a pen, wrote unceasingly for more than half an hour. With each added word the story of his soul journey unfolded itself more and more clearly. At length he laid down the pen.

Alkazim, without a word, brought his hat and coat, and helped him put them on; then, still in the same strange, unmoved silence, followed to the door, closing it softly after him.

The street was deserted. Folke knew that the hour must be late. His mind still surged with the memory of his strange experience. The talk with Flora, the cruelly significant snatching away of her hand, seemed to have befallen dim centuries ago. But as he hurried homeward, weariness came. The clear outlines which rose before his mind while he wrote at Sandry's table gradually faded. All in a maze at last, Folke entered his rooms, and, too tired even to turn on the lights, tumbled sleepily upon the bed.

He woke next morning with a raging headache. He could not think. He knew only that a hideous nightmare of some kind had left him stifling. Gasping, he staggered toward the stair, where he clung to the balustrade as he descended.

The woman of the house gazed queerly at him.

"What do you want here?" she demanded, sharply.

But Folke did not answer. A moment later he staggered into the street.

The fresh morning air revived him. By degrees, as he hurried blindly along, his head grew clearer. A vague consciousness of utter dishevelment haunted him. His mind was too dulled to reason. The fresh air must first finish its beneficent work.

He had traversed four blocks when he came upon a little group of people. In the center was an excited, almost frantic man, talking incoherently. Folke looked thrice before he recognized Sandry—Sandry, usually so calm, now strangely agitated, with horror written on every line of his face. At sight of Folke his eyes grew staring.

"That queer, ugly little hump-back?" muttered a man in the group. "Who'd have thought it?"

Folke shrank away, but Sandry ran to him. In his hand he gripped a morning paper.

"Kingswell!" he gasped.

"What's the matter?" demanded Folke. His very voice startled him, so strangely resonant was it.

"Haven't you heard?" cried Sandry. "I'm on my way now to the poor fellow's rooms. I can't believe it. There must be a mistake—a horrible mistake. And only last night—oh, this is awful!"

"What—what is awful?" fairly yelled Folke, his whole frame filled with sickening suspense. "What is it, man?"

"Here," answered Sandry.

He spread the paper before the other's eyes, as he did so pointing to an item on the front page; a brief item, but under flaring headlines. Folke caught the paper from Sandry's trembling fingers. His eyes widened with terror and anger as he read:

PROMINENT CITIZEN KILLED IN LOW GAMBLING JOINT

Shot Down by Opponent in Poker Game, Victim Is Identified As John Folke—Assailant Makes Escape—Startling Developments Promised.

The item itself was little more than a repetition of the headlines. At an early hour that morning a man had been shot down in a gambling den on Brush Street during a quarrel over a poker game. His slayer had escaped, but the police had the murderer's description and were hot upon the trail. Through papers found in his pockets the victim had been identified as John M. Folke, a graduate of the state university and a well known scholar, residing in rooms at 279 Forest Avenue. Though a trifle eccentric, Folke had hitherto borne an excellent reputation. A disappointment in love was thought to have started him on his downward course. Startling developments—

Sharply checking his reading, the man with a sudden, violent movement tore the paper in twain, and cast the fragments from him.

"You are right, Sandry," he cried, fiercely. "There is a mistake—a mistake for which some one will pay dearly."

In sudden alarm, Sandry gripped his sleeve.

"Don't do anything rash, Kingswell," he urged.

"Kingswell!"

The name leapt involuntarily from Folke's lips.

"Kingswell," he muttered, thickly. Why—?"

The words he was about to utter died on his lips. Swinging half round as he spoke, the terrified questioner saw, mirrored in the bright window of the corner drug store, the handsome face and debonair figure of Philip Kingswell.

The street seemed whirling. Tottering, the man felt the supporting strength of Sandry's arm.

"Why, man," cried the orientalist, sympathetically, "you're ill."

"No," came the answer, in a shaky voice. "But, in God's name, tell me *—who am I?*"

Sandry stared as one amazed; then his amazement merged in a compassion that was tenderly silent. But the oriental scholar did not need to speak. Intuitively, in the same moment that he voiced the frantic question, the truth forced itself compellingly upon the questioner. Without an answering word from Sandry, he knew that when, the night before, Philip Kingswell's soul returned from its journey, it had, through some terrible mischance, found refuge in the earthly body of John Folke. He knew that he who had hitherto been John Folke

must henceforth dwell in the body of Philip Kingswell. The body that had been his, responsive to the mastery of Kingswell's soul, had, after leaving Sandry's rooms, gone to the Brush Street den in pursuance of a previous appointment, to play out its low game to the sudden, tragic end. Had that body lived, the two might, with Sandry's aid, have once more exchanged; dead, there could be no changing.

THE man's face was deathly white as he gazed at his new image mirrored in the window.

Sandry still watched him compassionately.

"Come, Kingswell," he urged, "don't take it so to heart. Maybe it's all a mistake. It must be a mistake. Folke would never have gone to a place like that."

He smiled, grimly.

"He was not your kind, Phil. It's all a mistake—a mistake."

The man's soul seethed with mad, impotent revolt as he listened to Sandry's attempted consolation. To die, to have the name of dying in such ways as that—he was disgraced, unutterably and forever. And Flora—what would Flora think? Individuality still struggled, keenly resenting the bitter shame of it.

"Come, come," urged Sandry, consolingly, "I'm sure it isn't true."

Then, suddenly, light burst upon the man; he knew that all he longed for in the world was his. Henceforth, if he must be Philip Kingswell, the new Philip Kingswell would be worthy. And what the soul of John Folke, the distorted cripple, in the old days must have hopelessly longed for, that blessing the same soul, new clothed, could have for the asking.

Heedless of Sandry's astonished stare and wild questionings, the new Philip Kingswell caught a passing car, bound for the West End—bound for Flora.

Announcement

the
February Number
of

WEIRD TALES

The Unique Magazine

Contains an eldritch devil-tale of Verdun, the World War, and the gruesome specters that haunt the tunnels under Fort Vaux.

Whispering Tunnels

A Complete Novelette

***By* STEPHEN BAGBY**

"When the tunnels whisper," said the French soldiers at Fort Vaux, "someone will die." Though the Great War was over, yet the whisper always foretold death. And then one night, the friend of the man who had been proscribed as a traitor to France came to grips with the Thing—and a terrible visit was made to the devil-ridden shambles that lay beneath the fort. The incredible things that took place there, the malignant entities loosed by the medieval devil-worshipers, and the gruesome horror that fought for its life, are told in this utterly strange novelette.

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The SPECTER PRIESTESS OF WRIGHTSTONE

by Herman F. Wright

THE ruins of historic old Wrightstone Castle still rear their crumbling towers above the dreary Hampton Bog, near Manchester, a fast decaying but fitting memorial to the foul deeds and fiendish proceedings that have taken place within its bleak walls. The counts of Wrightstone and their families have long since removed to more favorable London, abandoning the old ancestral home to gloomy memories.

The following tale was told me by old Sir Mandeville Wright, forty-seventh count of Wrightstone, as it was related to him by his father, and thus came the legend down through the centuries from early days in England's history.

Previous to, and in the early reign of James I, many strange and weird stories were told among the peasants of the castle and its aristocratic owners, then residing at the court. The villagers told of how a specter horse bearing a figure in flashing armor pranced before the raised drawbridge. Then came the news of Count Charles' death at the court by an emissary of the king. Then the priestess—the Specter Priestess of Wrightstone, as the apparition was termed—appeared, claiming as her victim a poor peasant found wandering near the edge of the bog after dark.

After the death of his father, the late Count Charles, the eldest son, young Count Richard of Wrightstone, decided to leave the fashionable court and pay a visit to his ancestral home, which he had never seen. After making his intentions known, the young nobleman was astonished by the peculiar actions of his father's old and trusted servants. Young Richard, on several occasions, had found them conversing together in low tones and caught his name mingled with that of a "priestess" in their mysterious conversations. They tried in various ways to dissuade him from going, and when questioned as to their peculiar actions they became quite sullen and silent.

Richard, not to be dictated to by the servants, determined to see Castle Wrightstone. Finally the day arrived when he was to leave for the home of his ancestors. Seated inside the coach with Scrooge, the old family butler, while the other servants perched on the front and rear outer seats, the young man started for the castle.

AFTER several hours of weary travel in silence, old Scrooge suddenly demanded, "Master Robert, have you by any chance ever heard of the druid priestess of Wrightstone castle?"

Upon the young man's negative answer, Scrooge cleared his throat, as was his custom when preparing for a lengthy oration, and began: "It was always the wish of Count Charles, your father, to keep from you the gloomy secret of his old home. He made me promise never to let you hear of the priestess, but since you have decided to visit Wrightstone I must tell you for your own welfare. You have been told that your grandfather, Sir William, was murdered in the castle, but how or why he was murdered you never knew. Did you ever reflect upon that? The secret is, Master Richard, and I like not to tell you, but there is a curse upon Wrightstone.

"Sir William was found lying on the floor of his study, his heart torn from his body—the work of the priestess. The apparition is evidently a druid priestess, for she carried a druidical sacrificial knife in her hand, with which she pierces her victims and tears out their living hearts. The fiend has haunted the castle for generations, and an old legend tells that the specter can never be laid until two of the heads of the ruling family of Wrightstone have sacrificed their throbbing hearts to her gleaming scalpel. When or how the legend originated none can tell; suffice it to say that in my time your grandfather and three peasants have died by her fiendish hand.

"It is for this reason, Master Richard, that I and the servants implored you to forbear from visiting the haunted castle. I am old, and age brings queer prognostications; I fear I may live to see a second lord of Wrightstone meet his end thus. God forbid!"

With these words Scrooge lapsed into silence, and no amount of questioning from Richard could make the old man speak further. By the time the party arrived at the castle Richard fully decided to investigate the hauntings of the druid priestess. True, he had heard a few strange tales of his father's castle, but of the priestess he had never been told.

Though its crude, gray exterior betokened gloom, the bleak walls of Wrightstone hid richly furnished rooms, crackling fires on the large hearths, and cozy corners hidden by velvet tapestries. The first few weeks were devoted to making the great rooms habitable for the reception of the guests, and the incident of the specter and her weird slayings were forgotten by the young count for the while.

LATE one evening several weeks after his arrival at the castle, Richard was reading over several old and musty manuscripts in the study, in which room the dead body of old Sir William had been found. The blazing logs on the hearth had dwindled to mere glowing embers, and the candles in the massive bronze candelabra were sputtering and burning low.

A strange silence brooded over the aged structure, and a choking stuffiness seemed to pervade the room. Richard, annoyed by the choking atmosphere, laid aside the manuscript he was perusing and prepared to rise, when his eye caught the flashing reflection of the candle light on a polished surface before him. Looking up, he was horrified to behold the specter priestess of the castle standing before him.

His horror gave way to wonder as he gazed upon the beautiful figure that smiled down upon him. A young girl was the priestess, her golden tresses falling over her shoulders, which were draped in a long, flowing, white robe. Her lips were slightly parted in a smile, and her blue eyes seemed to convey a message of fiendish triumph; nevertheless they were entrancing and held the young man spellbound. In her right hand was grasped a gleaming, crescent-shaped

knife, while the other hand was concealed in the folds of her robe.

The young count's tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and he sank back in the chair exhausted and helpless. Unconsciousness began to numb his senses. He heard a clear, bell-like voice that seemed to come from far away: "Death comes; prepare!"

Richard awoke just as the first rays of the rising sun streamed across the floor of the study. The fire had gone out, and despite the sunny cheerfulness, the peculiar coldness that reminds one of death hung about the room.

The young man recalled vividly the dreadful experience of the night before—but was it a reality, or merely a dream caused by a creative and wandering imagination? Which was the truth the count could not say, for it seemed so vivid, yet so fantastic. He would tell Scrooge and get the old butler's advice on the matter.

There came a gentle tap on the door and Scrooge entered, bearing a breakfast tray.

"Good morning, Master Richard," began the butler. "How—why, what is the matter? Are you ill?" he asked in a startled tone when he beheld the count's features.

"I merely had a rather peculiar dream, Scrooge. I shall be all right in a few minutes."

"A dream? Not the—the priestess, Master Richard?" demanded the old man in a startled tone, his ruddy face becoming suddenly white.

"Yes, Scrooge, the priestess," replied the count with a peculiar absent look in his eyes. "I dreamed—or she really told me, I don't know which—to prepare for death."

"My God!" gasped the terrified Scrooge, dropping the tray. "You are marked for death within twenty-four-hours. Come, we shall leave for the palace at once. Leave this accursed place, Master Richard!"

"No," answered the nobleman, slowly shaking his head. "I *must* stay here—to see her again. Her eyes—they have charmed me, so filled with passion. Scrooge, I love the priestess and I would die to see her again."

"You are bewitched by the fiend!" declared the butler, begging the count to leave the castle.

After vainly pleading with him, the old man finally left Richard.

Gathering the other servants, Scrooge told them of the apparition's appearance (for he knew it to be no dream) to their young master and stationed them near the study in a vain attempt to thwart the curse of impending death he believed must come.

Richard finally consented to Scrooge's staying in the study with him that evening, although he knew nothing of the platoon of armed servants without the doors.

As the night gradually wore on, both men began to doze. Once Scrooge awakened to find Count Richard softly snoring in the great leather chair by the table. Then Scrooge, too, began to snore.

The old butler was awakened by the rays of the sun shining in his face. Yawning and stretching, he arose from his cramped position and walked toward the window. Suddenly he stopped, his arms outstretched in astonished fear and horror. At his feet lay the cold body of Count Richard, his heart torn from his breast. The butler gave a cry and fainted beside his dead master. The frightened servants, hearing the cry, rushed into the room and stood horrified about the pair.

The next day the body of Count Richard was interred in the family vault of the counts of Wrightstone by the village priest. The servants with Scrooge closed up the haunted castle and departed for London.

The curse of Castle Wrightstone was ended. The specter priestess was seen no more, but the descendants of

Count Richard's brother, into whose hands the castle passed, never dared take up their abode within its dreary walls.

FINISHING his story, Sir Mandeville drew from his pocket a clipping of the *Times* of March 24, 1878, and handed it to me. It was a short article and the paper was yellow with age. To the living heir of Wrightstone it conveyed the proof of the curse of his ancient ancestors:

Manchester, March 24.—While removing stones from the ancient ruined structure known as Wrightstone Castle, near here, to be used for building purposes in this city, several workmen found the skeleton of a young woman.

The skeleton was draped in a few strands of a decayed white robe. Clutched in the bony fingers of one hand was an ancient druidical sacrificial knife. The body was turned over to Sir Ernest Greystoke, of the British Museum, who is of the opinion that the skeleton is that of a druid priestess, no doubt interred alive in the old castle walls.

Strewn around the body and grasped in one hand were found several bits of dried flesh, claimed by several physicians of this city, who examined them, to be human hearts. Dried blood was also spattered about near the body.

There has been a revival of the old superstition of the "Specter Priestess of Wrightstone" among the villagers of this vicinity, and many are of the opinion that the skeleton recently unearthed is that of the specter priestess, who murdered her victims by tearing out their hearts. Two of the Counts of Wrightstone were supposed to have met their deaths at the hands of the apparition early in the reign of James I. The present Count Wrightstone, Sir Mandeville Wright, is now residing at London.

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THE VALLEY OF TEEHEEMEN

A TWO-PART SERIAL

by Arthur Thatcher

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

DRIVEN many hundreds of miles from its course by a Caribbean storm, the super-airplane carrying Benton, Van Otter, Holton and Virginia Hart to Cuban waters crashes down into the Valley of Teeheemen in South America. The valley is a huge volcanic crater from which there is but one exit, known only to the high priest of Teeheemen. The party of Americans rescue several natives who are offered by the inhabitants as sacrifices to the two tremendous animals known as the teeheemen, and kill one of them. Then they join the forces of Duros, who attempts to overthrow King Urlus and Walum the high priest. After a successful battle, in which the firearms of the invaders are used to good advantage, it is learned that Virginia and Holton have been captured by the forces of the high priest.

13

WHEN Benton realized that Virginia and Holton had disappeared, he thought quickly of the best course to pursue.

"They have probably left to seek a place of safety," he remarked to Otter.

A warrior of the Duros forces approached the three.

"The men of the high priest have seized the white gods' friends," he explained. "I was on my way to join the forces of Duros in the arena, when I saw a company of the warriors of the temple with Walum the high priest. I hid in the entryway to the arena and saw them capture the white woman, Gala of Teeheemen, and the white man."

"The priest has probably taken them to the temple," said Gomo. "He will place the white man in the temple prison, and the white woman and Gala may be taken to wife in the temple."

Benton studied for a moment.

"There's only one course for us to follow now, Otter," he said. "We must ally ourselves with Duros and his fighters in the arena there. If we can defeat the forces of the king and high priest, then we shall have a chance to invade the temple and the prison and release Holton and Virginia."

"You're right," Otter agreed.

"Let's go, then," said Benton, filling the magazine of his rifle.

"The forces of Duros are being driven back," announced Gomo, who had been studying the progress of the battle in the arena.

Benton and Otter turned toward the battle and saw that what Gomo had said was true. Though fighting bravely, Duros and his men were outnumbered and were retreating to the south side of the arena.

"We can pick off a bunch of those birds from here," Otter suggested; "and not run much chance of their getting at us with their spears."

Suiting the action to the words, Otter began firing into a crowd of warriors designated by Gomo as followers of Urlus. Benton imitated his action, and the two rifles began working havoc among the Urlus warriors.

At sound of the reports from the rifles, the Duros fighters took new courage and began a terrific counter attack upon the followers of Urlus. The latter saw dozens of their most powerful warriors falling without spear wounds every time the thunder noise came from the gallery where the two white gods were stationed.

Panic began to seize the forces of Urlus, and the warriors, noting how far the white gods could kill, began to retreat. Duros and his men followed, and the slaughter became terrible as the men of Urlus went down by hundreds.

In fifteen minutes from the time that the men of Urlus began their retreat, the forces of Duros had cleared the arena and its large galleries.

"The arena is a very valuable place for an army to possess," Gomo explained to Benton and Otter. "It has high outer walls like a small city, and an army could hold it for months with sufficient food supplies. Young Duros will hold it with his men. They will drive hundreds of cattle into the arena and bring feed to keep them here so that they can withstand a long siege and not know hunger. It was part of the plans of Duros to seize the arena first. That would give him a mighty fortification in the heart of the city."

The statement of Gomo was rapidly fulfilled. Guards from the forces that had been battling in the arena quickly began to patrol the walls of the place. Additional forces began entering and, later, droves of wild-appearing cattle and sheep were driven into the arena. In the chambers under the galleries the soldiers of Duros established their quarters.

An hour later a messenger from Duros approached Benton.

"The king-to-be would speak with the white gods," the man announced.

"Show us the way," Benton replied, and the warrior started across the arena.

Benton and Otter followed with Gomo. Across the arena, strewn with hundreds of dead, they proceeded to a room in one of the apartments under the stands. The three entered and the warrior remained at the entryway. Duros was seated on a bench, surrounded by several of his chieftains, among whom was Bolga.

As the white men entered, Duros arose and advanced toward them with extended hands.

"Duros greets the white gods as brothers," the chieftain exclaimed.

"The white gods are friends of Duros," Benton returned. "They are ready to help him win the city of Teeheemen from Urlus."

"Duros believes that such is the case," the chief returned. "Where is the other white man—and the woman?"

"They were captured by the warriors of the high priest and have been taken away," Benton explained.

Duros was silent for a few moments.

"They have probably been returned to the prison or the temple. It is to those places that we must send our spies to learn how we may best capture them. The king's palace is another place that Duros desires to capture. With the temple, prison and palace in his possession also, Duros

will have little trouble in being proclaimed king."

"We will help you," Benton assured him. "We are very anxious to rescue our friends from the temple or wherever they may be. There is only one thing that the white men ask in return for their services, and that is that they be permitted to leave the valley of Teeheemen in peace through the passageway of the mountains known only to the high priest."

"There is the great difficulty," said Duros. "The passageway secret is known to none other than the high priest. If, when we capture the city from the high priest and Urlus, the passageway can be found, then the white gods shall depart through it into the land of the hereafter. I have said that I need spies. Gomo is a crafty man and would make a good spy. Will Gomo go to learn the secrets of the temple and its fortifications?"

"I will go," Gomo replied.

"And I will go with him," asserted Benton. "I must find the place where the white woman and white man have been taken."

Duros smiled with pleasure at Benton's announcement.

"The white man will be successful, I know," he asserted confidently.

"You must count me in on that deal, too," Otter asserted. "I want to get a crack at that guy they call Walum."

"Three of my men have also volunteered," Duros continued. "Tonight they start. The white brothers must change their color. Duros will send for some of the stain of the damrock. It is the color of the men of Teeheemen. They can put the stain on their faces and dress in the same kinds of skins as the men of Teeheemen."

"That's a good suggestion," said Benton, "for it solves a problem that I have been trying to determine. In disguise, as you have suggested, we ought to be able to get to the temple, and probably into it. We will leave our rifles and other weapons here, for to attempt to carry them would arouse suspicion at once."

BENTON and Otter turned their rifles over to Duros, who in turn handed them to two of his men with instructions that they should not leave the thunder sticks until their owners called for them. A warrior was dispatched to bring the damrock stain for the white men.

Benton and Otter seated themselves. With Gomo they began planning their campaign for the coming night.

"The temple of Teeheemen," Gomo informed them, "is guarded by a company of the best warriors of the city. They are allowed only in the outer courts. Only the high priest and his guards have access to the inner shrines and the sacrificial room. There are six maidens of the sacrificial shrine who wait upon the priest. They are the ones you saw carrying the statues of the teeheemen on the pedestals, when we were called before the king upon our arrival here."

"How may we obtain access to the outer courts?" Benton asked. "If the temple has sliding doors such as the other public buildings, we shall have a difficult time getting inside. Our chief object must be to find Virginia and Holton and release them from their captivity. How are the doors operated, Gomo?"

"That is a secret known only to the adherents of the temple."

"We must find out the secret of their operation, if possible. I believe that we can gain entrance to the temple by prying the grating from one of the roof windows, of which there must be a large number. We can let ourselves into the place with a rope or leather thong. I wonder what Duros will take as his next move toward dethroning Urlus. The latter still must retain a powerful hold on the city. Duros possesses, as I understand, one of the chief places of refuge for of-

fensive and defensive purposes: the arena where we now are."

"Duros will spy for some time upon Urlus," said Gomo. "When he is ready to strike he will do so with great swiftness. Urlus has been defeated in battle, and for a time at least he will remain in safety behind the great walls of his castle on the side of the city where the sun rises."

"Will not many of Urlus' followers desert him and come to Duros, since the latter has been victorious in the first encounter?" Benton queried.

"Many have done so this day," Gomo replied.

The afternoon passed and late in the evening the messenger returned bearing the damrock stain and two trappings fashioned from the skins of animals such as the other warriors of Teeheemen wore. Benton and Otter immediately began putting on their disguises.

In half an hour they were ready for the night adventure that confronted them. Duros expressed himself well pleased with their disguise.

"You will deceive any of the guards," he assured them; "and since you speak our language so well, you can obtain a lot of information that Duros needs. Before you go, let us eat."

A warrior was sent for food, and returned shortly with a quantity sufficient for the party. The men ate in silence, Benton and Otter thinking what course to pursue but unable to plan definitely, for they little knew what dangers they were to encounter before the sun should rise again.

14

WHEN the door closed on the retiring form of the wrathful high priest of Teeheemen, Virginia turned to Gala.

"We must get out of this place," she said. "I am certain that unless we make our escape some terrible fate is in store for us."

"We shall be offered in the Temple of Teeheemen as sacrifices upon the altar," Gala averred stoically. "Walum is angered. He will sprinkle our life blood upon the images of the beasts engraved on the face of the altar and pour it also upon the waters of the river of the temple where it departs from the valley into the base of the mountain, near the sacrifice room. The white sister of Gala can save herself in only one manner and that is by yielding to the desires of the priest."

"Then I will gladly die," Virginia asserted with determination.

Night came and passed, and no food was brought to the prisoners. The two young women spent much of the time in speculation on the outcome of the battle in the arena.

"If the forces of Duros were victorious," Gala asserted, "there is some hope of being rescued from Walum."

Morning came again, and the restless slumber into which they had fallen was disturbed by the rolling aside of the stone door. Virginia shrank as she beheld the powerful form of Banrup, the guard. The latter's face showed unmistakable signs of the rough treatment it had received at the hands of Otter during the battle in the arena. Two of the warriors from the temple accompanied Banrup.

"The white woman and Gala will come with Banrup," he commanded. "The high priest has ordered that you shall view the morning sacrifice in the temple of Teeheemen. Then perhaps the white woman will consent to become the wife of Walum."

Virginia and Gala followed the giant, rather than offer resistance. The white girl dreaded the thought of his hands being placed upon her. The two warriors followed after the three to frustrate any effort of the two girls to escape.

In the main court of the prison the party was joined by three more warriors, who were accompanying Holton. The latter was still bound and his wrists were swollen where the cords cut into the flesh.

The procession moved from the main court into an adjacent corridor and proceeded for several hundred yards until it halted before a wall. Baurup rapped against the obstruction, and in a few seconds a panel in the masonry slid to one side. The advance then continued into an adjoining corridor, which was followed for another fifty yards before it opened into an immense chamber.

As the procession entered the latter place, Virginia and Holton detected the continuous roar of water as it fell, apparently to a great depth. In the faint light that filtered through the overhead gratings, Virginia and Holton glanced about them.

"The sacrificial room of the temple of Teeheemen," Gala explained.

Virginia and Holton, as their eyes became accustomed to the faint light, began to distinguish the objects around them. At the opposite side of the room was constructed a large altar fashioned from stone of snowy whiteness. On the front of the altar were engraved three images of the beasts teeheemen.

To the left of the altar, the wall of the sacrifice room opened to the outer world and the two discovered the source of the continuous roar that filled the place. The river of Teeheemen touched the walls of the temple on the open side with its waters. At a point some twenty steps from the altar the river entered the base of the mountain, falling with a roar like Niagara into the abyss that led to its subterranean exit from the Valley of Teeheemen.

"The priest Walum sprinkles blood upon the waters each day," said Gala; "and into the river the bodies of the victims are thrown after they are offered upon the altar to the beasts."

THE blast of a trumpet sounded from an adjoining corridor. In a short time the royal procession of King Urlus entered the chamber.

"The king always attends the sacrificial ceremonies," said Gala.

Several warriors entered shortly from the corridor through which Virginia and Holton had come from the prison. They were pulling and half carrying a young girl with them.

"She is to be offered to Teeheemen on the altar," explained Gala.

"Is there no way we can save her?" Virginia pleaded, turning to Holton.

Holton shook his head.

The six maidens who were carriers of the pedestals of teeheemen then took the victim. They seized her and immediately began stripping the trappings from her body. While they were so engaged, the high priest and Baurup entered. A woman, old and bent, accompanied them.

"She is the head wife of the temple," Gala informed, indicating the bent old hag. "She has been in the temple during the reign of many high priests. She taps the bodies of the victims and draws their blood while the high priest catches it in a vessel and pours it over the images of teeheemen engraved on the face of the altar."

The maiden who had been selected for the sacrifice was disrobed by the six young women of the temple. Still struggling, she was carried to the top of the altar by them and securely fastened. Several bands connected to the top of the structure were strapped around each of her limbs. Another passed just above the hips and another at a point below the breasts. A heavy band strapped about the neck held the head almost motionless.

The high priest picked up the stone bowl indicated by Gala for gathering the blood of the victim. The hag drew from her clothing a long knife with a needlelike point. She made an

incision first in the thigh of the victim and the high priest caught the blood. The hag, as Walum was thus occupied, placed her hand over the mouth of the girl on the altar to muffle her screams.

Walum sprinkled blood from the bowl over the faces of the images of the beasts on the front of the altar. Then he advanced to the edge of the river where it emptied into the abyss.

"Eternal river of Teeheemen," Walum chanted, "bear upon thy waters to the spirits of our departed brothers in the land of the hereafter the warm life blood of one of our beings. May this offering appease the wrath of the beasts of Teeheemen and may they not destroy the lives of our warriors who go forth to hunt in the forests."

At the conclusion of his appeal to the stream, Walum poured the remaining blood upon the water at his feet. The hag removed her hands from the victim and made a second incision in one of the arms. The third and fatal one was made in the large vein of the neck.

At the repetition of the terrible sight Virginia felt her senses leaving her. She remembered hearing Holton call to Gala to support her, and then all became darkness.

When she regained consciousness, she was back in the chamber in the prison. Gala was still with her.

"I must have fainted," she said. "How horrible it all was! What a hideous nightmare!"

"It was terrible," Gala admitted. "Can you blame our more enlightened people for rebelling against such a horrible practise? Better to have no god than one who demands such horrible tributes! The girl they sacrificed was one of the disbelievers in the Teeheemen gods. She was sacrificed in the temple, as she preferred to meet death there rather than be taken to the woods where the animals live."

The door of the chamber opened slowly. Banrup entered and stood before the two women.

"I come," he stated, "as a messenger from the high priest. One more offer Walum makes to the white woman to become his wife. If she refuses she shall suffer the fate of the girl you saw offered to Teeheemen on the altar of the temple this morning. What is your answer?"

Virginia was stoical as she answered calmly, "I may die, but the hands of Walum shall never defile my body. Tell Walum that if I die he shall die at the same time."

As Virginia gave her answer she recalled the revolver still resting in the holster attached to the belt about her waist. The high priest's men had taken her rifle when they seized her in the gallery of the arena but had not investigated the holster attached to her belt.

"Then the white woman must die on the altar of the temple of Teeheemen in the morning," Banrup announced. Without further conversation he withdrew from the chamber, and once more the stone door slid across the opening.

"If I am to die in the morning," Virginia soliloquized, "I must shoot Walum before his maidens seize me to prepare my body for sacrifice. Once my revolver is wrested from me then I am helpless, and if I must slay a man, then Walum shall be the one to die."

15

A FULL moon was rising above the city of Teeheemen when Otter, Benton and Gomo, accompanied by the three spies of the followers of Duros, left the arena and walked through the streets toward the district where the palace of King Urlus and the temple of Teeheemen with its attending prison were situated.

"We must enter the temple tonight," said Benton. "At least a couple of us should remain with the outer

guards and there learn the place where Holton and Virginia are confined."

"The temple is yonder," Gomo indicated, pointing to a high wall with several towers projecting toward the moonlit sky.

A warning was sounded by the three spies of Duros, who were in the lead. The conversation ceased, and soon the six encountered a number of the warriors of Urlus.

The latter addressed the members of the party and made inquiry as to whether they had battled against the Duros forces in the arena during the afternoon conflict.

The spies, to avoid any unnecessary conversation, denied that they had been anywhere near the arena during the time of the battle.

The warriors seemed satisfied, for they began moving on. What they apparently were searching for was someone who had taken part in the conflict following the games.

"The best side of the place to mount the wall will be the one where the sun sets," Gomo advised. "The shadow of the wall will protect us."

The suggestion was followed and the six men halted on the western side of the temple of Teeheemen.

The three warriors began forming a human pyramid in an effort to scale the wall. Benton was told to climb upon them, and when he had done so he could touch with his hands the lower corner of the stone cornice of the building.

With a great effort he pulled himself up and got upon the roof. Otter followed, and then came Gomo. The other three remained at the base of the wall.

The three on the roof proceeded at once to investigate their surroundings.

"Be careful," Gomo advised. "Generally a guard is kept on the roof of the temple, and it is possible that there are several keeping watch here tonight."

Gomo's warning was timely. The three had crouched low in the shadow of one of the towers when a gigantic warrior approached from the opposite side of the temple. The three flattened themselves on the roof.

"We must dispose of this fellow if we expect to get into the temple from the roof," said Benton. "Let him approach, and we can down him before he can give warning of our presence."

The warrior walked toward the place where the three lay. He halted for a time near the outer edge of the wall. Gomo, as noiseless as a gigantic snake, began wriggling his way across the roof toward the spot where the guard stood.

Benton and Otter saw their big companion suddenly leap from his position and bear the guard to the roof. A muffled outcry escaped the throttled warrior; and then all was silence, for Gomo had driven his knife deep into the heart of his adversary.

Benton and Otter crawled toward Gomo.

"We must look for a window grating and get into the temple," said Benton.

"There is one near the body of the guard," said Gomo, and he crawled toward the designated spot, with Otter and Benton following.

At the grating the three peered into the darkness below.

"What do you suppose is under us?" Benton queried in a whisper.

"I would say that it is one of the outer courts of the temple used and occupied by the warriors," Otter suggested.

"We must get into it," Benton continued, "while the night is here."

Gomo began digging and cutting at the grating with his knife. After constant sawing for half an hour, one of the bars holding the main part of the grating in position was cut through. The three men, with their

combined strength, then lifted the grating and bent it back from the opening which it covered.

"Hist," Gomo warned, and the three paused, breathless.

A warrior bearing a torch entered the chamber below and passed through. The three on the roof got a glimpse of the room.

"It is the armor room of the temple," said Gomo. "In there the high priest keeps his arms and extra weapons for the warriors of the temple."

"Let us drop in there at once," Benton suggested.

Gomo produced a strip of leather rope some twenty feet in length. He lowered the line into the chamber below and fastened the end to the bent grating.

"The chances are that the line will not be discovered for some time," said Benton. "We can get into the place and mingle with the other warriors of the guard."

THE three slid down the rope into the darkness of the chamber. They began groping their way about in the darkness, keeping close together.

Otter struck a match at the risk of detection on the part of anyone who might be in the armory. The place was empty with the exception of stacks of spears and other weapons. The light of the flickering match revealed a corridor leading from the place.

"Take a spear," Gomo advised. "Then we can better fool the warriors of the temple. Our task will be easy tonight, but tomorrow it will be difficult to avoid detection."

The three armed themselves from the piles of weapons, and then advanced to the exit. They followed the corridor and soon detected the flickering light of a torch in the near distance. The sound of many voices reached their ears.

"One of the main rooms occupied by the warriors," Benton speculated.

Gomo nodded in the darkness, but remained silent.

The three advanced cautiously, with Gomo leading. They passed unnoticed into the room ahead, which was occupied by some hundred warriors. Keeping together they sat down in a dark corner, where they might listen and still have a good chance of avoiding detection.

The conversation among the guards was mostly regarding the battle in the arena. Only a few of them had participated in the conflict. One of the chiefs was doing a lot of loud boasting and the attention of the three was attracted to his words.

"Had Vedos been in the battle, the forces of Urlus would have been victorious," he boasted. "Has not Vedos been made chief of the forces of the warriors of the temple of Teeheemen because of his ability to fight?"

"But the white gods spread terror and death among the men of Urlus," interposed a lesser chieftain near the boasting Vedos. "They used their thunder sticks, say the men who battled there, and killed with them at a distance completely across the arena."

Vedos was flabbergasted for a moment by the statement of his fellow; then he proceeded.

"Why did not the men of Urlus capture the two white gods? Walum and part of our guardsmen took the white woman and the other white man. They are but flesh and blood, just like us. Tomorrow Walum will draw the blood from the veins of one of the captive maidens in the prison of Teeheemen. He will show the white man and woman how it is done. He will give the white woman her choice. She shall either become a wife of the temple, or else Walum will draw her blood to be poured upon the sacred images of the head of teeheemen."

Benton shuddered.

"We must save her," he whispered to Otter, "even if it takes our own lives. Gomo must make his escape

from the temple through the armor room and tell Duros."

"If Duros and a thousand of his men can come tomorrow night they can enter the temple, just as we have done, and overpower the guards and the men in here and rescue Virginia and Holton. Once we destroy the high priest and his close followers, then there is little danger of Holton and Virginia meeting death in the prison until we can enter and take them out," said Benton.

"Gomo will go and report to Duros and tell him of the plan and how best to enter the temple," the native announced in a low tone.

He rose to his feet and left the large chamber. The big fellow followed the passageway leading toward the armory. Once in the latter room he located the rope by the moonlight streaming into the place.

Gomo listened intently before beginning his climb to the outside. Then he began to draw himself hand over hand toward the upper window. A half dozen feet separated him from the opening and he paused a moment to rest. With a final effort he proceeded and gained the opening. Grasping the grating he began emerging on to the roof.

As Gomo made his exit from the arsenal room on to the roof, a half dozen waiting warriors leapt from the shadows of a tower near by.

A terrific battle ensued. Gomo threw one of his antagonists bodily over the wall to the street below. The other five leapt upon him and bore him, battling bravely, to the roof. In a short time they had bound him and carried him away to become a prisoner in the temple prison.

16

BENTON and Otter spent the night in the main room with the other warriors of the temple. When the morning came they were careful not to mingle too closely with the others, and they engaged in no conversation. Their appearance excited no comment on the part of the warriors of the temple, for there were at least five hundred men quartered in the various outer rooms of the place, and new recruits must have been added every day to replace the ones killed in battle or in the service of the temple in the forests of the valley.

The two men tried to explore the various corridors and courts whenever opportunity would permit. A large number of warriors passed through one of the rooms, and they fell into line with them. The company marched along one of the corridors until a wall was reached. It was at this point that Benton and Otter saw two men leave the ranks.

Two panels were removed, and one man entered each opening. Then the panels were replaced.

The obstruction in the pathway of the company began slowly sliding aside, and the men passed on to one of the larger outer rooms, where they remained quartered for the remainder of the day and the following night.

"We have at least solved the mystery of the sliding stone doors," Benton remarked to Otter when they were seated in a corner of the room they had just entered.

"Yes," Otter agreed. "A man in the walls, which are hollow at the doorways, pushes or pulls the doors shut and open. I believe that we might get into one of those walls and open an outside door if we just could find the location."

Several warriors for a time excited the fears of the two that they had been detected. They glanced toward Otter and Benton a number of times and then passed on to the other side of the room.

"I was afraid those galoots were going to spot us," whispered Otter.

"Our disguise is mighty good, though," Benton assured him. "In another three hours the forces of Duros should be marching toward this

place—if Gomo has been successful in making his return trip."

Darkness began to fill the chamber again. Torches were lighted, and Otter and Benton ate with the other warriors of the place. The meal had scarcely been completed when Vedos, the commander in chief of the temple forces, entered. His announcement was a blow to the plans of Otter and Benton.

"Guards of the temple of Teeheemen," he announced in a loud voice that echoed through the adjoining corridors, "there are spies about the temple of Teeheemen. One of them was captured last night as he attempted to leave the temple through the window in the roof of the armory. Be on your guard lest the forces of Duros be upon us. In the morning all are to march to the inner shrine of the sacrificial chamber. The high priest has proclaimed that all in his temple shall view the sacrifice of the coming morning. The white woman has refused to wive with the high priest, and in the morning he will draw her blood with his own hands and pour it upon the altar and the sacred heads of teeheemen, so that all within his temple may see that the white faces are not greater than the gods of teeheemen."

The announcement of Vedos struck Benton with dismay.

"Gomo has failed," he said to Otter in an undertone. "We are virtually prisoners in this place, and Duros has not been notified of our plan."

"It looks like a bad situation," Otter admitted. "These birds will be on the watch for anything out of the way here, since they captured Gomo leaving their armory."

"Yes, we will have to be careful. I have made up my mind to get the high priest if it's the last thing I ever do on earth."

"You'll have a fat chance," said Otter. "You haven't even got your revolver with you."

"We couldn't carry them without at once attracting attention. I don't know how good I may prove to be with a spear, but I'm going to make it a point, if I get into the inner shrine of this place, to get close enough to the high priest to knock him for a goal."

17

THE night passed, and at dawn the company ate again. The hour for marching to the sacrificial shrine arrived. The company fell into line and marched from the room. Through what seemed a quarter of a mile of corridors they tramped before the detachment finally halted before the sliding door covering the entrance into the temple. The men of the vanguard rapped on the panels at the sides. The big stone door slid aside, exposing to their view the great auditorium of the inner shrine of the temple with its sacrificial altar, and bearing to the ears of the men the roaring of the water leaving through the subterranean exit.

The company was the first to enter the inner shrine. A short time elapsed before another band of the temple warriors entered. These were followed in turn by other companies, until Benton estimated that there must be five hundred or more in the place.

Benton and Otter crowded toward the altar with the members of the company with whom they had entered. The trumpet of the king's retinue sounded in the corridor from which the different detachments had entered the inner shrine. The royal party entered shortly, and Benton and Otter watched them closely as they came into the shrine and assumed their positions close to the altar of Teeheemen.

While the scenes in the inner shrine were being enacted, Virginia Hart and Gala in the prison were waiting the arrival of the guards who would lead them to the temple. Virginia

hoped that something might occur to delay the carrying out of the plans of Walum and that through the delay she might yet be saved.

Her last hopes were soon doomed to disappointment. The doorway of the prison chamber opened and three warriors of the temple entered.

"The time for sacrificing to teeheemen is at hand," one of them announced. "Will the white woman walk, or must the warriors of the high priest carry her?"

"I'll walk," Virginia replied bravely. "Let not the warriors of the high priest Walum lay their hands upon the white woman, or they will surely die."

"Gala shall witness the death of her friend on the altar," one of the warriors announced, turning to the native girl. "Come."

The party proceeded from the prison chamber and passed through the corridor until the main court of the prison was reached. Here they were joined by Holton, who by decree of the head of the temple had been ordered to view the death of Virginia. Holton's arms were pinioned behind his back with leather thongs, and two guards were stationed at either hand.

"I am powerless to help," Holton spoke. "I will gladly die in your stead, Virginia. Why not marry the high priest for the time being and save yourself from this miserable death?"

"I would prefer to die than suffer such indignities," replied the girl, and Holton was amazed at her calmness.

The command was given to move forward and the party left the main court and entered the corridor leading toward the temple. The wall of the latter place was reached and the stone door rolled aside.

In the sacrificial room Virginia viewed the ranks of warriors lined up about the altar. They gazed with intense interest at the young woman.

"The maidens of the temple will prepare the sacrifice for the altar," Walum commanded, fixing his eyes upon Virginia. "The high priest will draw the blood of the sacrifice himself. Banrup is this day named to succeed Walum when the latter dies as priest of the temple of Teeheemen. Banrup will hold the bowl and gather the blood of the sacrifice."

The six maidens of the temple seized Virginia before she could draw her revolver from its holster. They began removing her clothing and tore the belt with its accompanying holster from her body.

Holton strained at his bonds but realized that he was physically unable to render any aid.

"Let the white man die in the place of the white woman," he urged, addressing Walum.

Walum gazed craftily for a moment at Holton as he sharpened the point of the sacrificial knife.

"The white man is brave," Walum admitted, "but the gods of Teeheemen must be appeased. The white man has found favor, however, in the sight of the teeheemen. He shall be offered also on the altar instead of in the woods to the beasts themselves."

"That must be a lot of consolation," Otter muttered to Benton as the latter gradually made his way to where Holton was standing.

Otter little surmised what action Benton was intending to take.

The disrobing of Virginia had about been completed. The girl offered no resistance to the action of the maidens of the temple in removing her clothing, as she seemed stupefied by the fact that she was face to face with a horrible death.

"Place the sacrifice upon the altar," Walum commanded.

The six maidens lifted Virginia and strapped her into position. Walum with his sacrificial knife advanced to the altar. He prepared to make the first incision in the girl's thigh.

"Had you not insulted the gods of Teeheemen by refusing to live in the temple with their priest," Walum spoke before making the incision, "you might have lived in happiness for thousands of suns. As it is, you now must cover the images of the gods of Teeheemen with your life blood."

Walum drew back the sacrificial knife.

As the priest spoke, Benton stepped quickly to the rear of Holton. Otter then realized the object of his action. He saw Benton reach for Holton's holster and draw the police positive. The arm of Walum never made its forward thrust. The report of the thirty-eight broke the deathlike stillness.

Benton's aim was unerring. Walum fell before the altar, his brain pierced by the bullet. His life blood spattered upon the faces of the images graven upon the front of the altar. Banrup, holding the blood bowl, reached for the knife in the hands of Walum but fell with a bullet through his brain from the same gun.

Confusion reigned for a time and Otter and Benton took quick advantage of it. Otter cut Holton's bonds and the latter rushed to the side of the altar and took the weapons of Banrup from his body. Benton rushed to the altar and cut the thongs that held Virginia to the top of the structure, and cast the robe of the dead high priest about her. Virginia recovered her clothing and took the revolver from the belt in her holster.

The panic in the temple among the warriors quickly changed as the commanding voice of Vedos rang out.

"Overpower the white faces!" he ordered.

The three men fought off their antagonists for several minutes. Benton emptied into the charging mob the revolver he had taken from Holton, while Otter and Holton gave a good account of themselves with their primitive weapons. Virginia crouched, with the robe of the high priest about her naked shoulders, and viewed with terror the scene enacted before her. In imitation of Benton she emptied her revolver into the horde rushing upon them.

By sheer force of numbers the warriors of the temple overpowered the three men and bound them. Vedos advanced to the altar and addressed the company.

"The high priest of the temple is dead," he said, "and Banrup the mighty has fallen. Vedos is next in command and by the laws of Teeheemen is the logical successor to the position of high priest of the temple of Teeheemen. What say the warriors of the temple? Let all who wish Vedos for high priest of Teeheemen raise their spears."

Hundreds of spears went into the air.

"The warriors of the temple have spoken," Vedos announced. "From now on Vedos shall pass judgment greater than that of the king of Teeheemen. No more will he battle at the head of his warriors. Vedos calls for vengeance for the death of Walum and Banrup. It is his order that the white faces be taken to the airless chamber and placed therein until they are dead. Let them be taken at once from the sacred shrine of Teeheemen and placed in the smother chamber of the temple."

A score of warriors moved forward and seized the three white men. Virginia gathered her clothing under her arm as the warriors moved toward her. Still garbed in the long robe of the high priest, she was led with her three companions from the shrine along a corridor leading through intense darkness.

THE party halted after some hundred yards of the corridor had been traversed. In the darkness they could hear a door sliding away. They were led into a chamber, and then the warriors withdrew. The four listened and heard the door closing upon them.

"The smother chamber," said Benton. "Do you realize what we are up against?"

Holton answered, "A regular black hole of Calcutta on a small scale. We can live in here until the air is exhausted; then we shall all die of suffocation."

"There is one consolation, if such a thing is to be found under such circumstances," said Virginia; "and that is that I shall die with my friends. I must release you, since they neglected to bind me."

Virginia with some difficulty released Benton, and the two in turn unbound Holton and Otter.

"If we had a light in here we might guess what we are to do," said Benton.

"I have a dozen or more matches with me," Otter informed them. "I carried them with me to use in the temple when I changed to this skin outfit."

"Light one and let us see where we are," Benton commanded.

As the small light flared up, the four got a glimpse of their surroundings. The chamber was apparently an air-tight vault hewn in the side of the granite of the mountain. In size it resembled a continuation of the corridor through which they had entered, and it receded for about a hundred feet. At a distance of fifty feet from the entrance it made an abrupt curve almost at a right angle.

Holton leaned over and picked an object from the floor as Otter's match went out.

"An old piece of a torch," he said, passing his hands over the object. "It was probably placed in here at one time to hasten the destruction of the oxygen of the chamber for other victims of royal wrath."

"We can use it," said Benton.

"Doing so means a shorter time to live," Holton argued.

"But we must use it," Benton insisted. "We must find a place in one of the walls to place an explosive. When I changed my costume to this disguise I slipped a couple of my patent bombs into the folds of the skin shirt. I have carried them with me ever since we left the plane in the forest. Until now I have never found a place where I was perfectly willing to try them. It is the last chance, and if you are all willing I am now ready to attempt to blast our way from this place."

"Better to die in an explosion than for want of air," Otter remarked.

"This corridor has a sharp turn in it," Benton continued. "I will place the bomb if I can find a desirable crevice. You can all get back of the turn in the chamber and be protected from the back-fire of the explosive. The action of the explosive used in the construction of the bomb is against the object of impact."

"It is our only chance," Holton agreed, and Virginia also expressed her willingness for Benton to make the attempt.

"Light a match, Otter," Benton commanded, "and we will get busy, for time is precious."

Otter lighted the partially burned torch. Benton began studying the walls.

"This has the appearance of masonry here," Virginia called.

The men rushed to her and found that she was correct, for pieces of mortar in several places were crumbling. They broke off a piece of the torch, and with it Benton dug persistently in an effort to remove more of the mortar and fashion a place for planting his bomb. Virginia stood at his side and held the torch.

"It is our last chance," she said. "One in a thousand."

Benton glanced at her for a moment. She had donned her clothing in the darkness before the torch had been lighted, but still carried the robe of the high priest about her shoulders. He noted how she had changed during the past few days. Her face was care-

worn from the terrible experiences through which she had recently passed. She noted his glance and smiled encouragingly.

"Gamest of women," Benton soliloquized to himself, "changed from a girl to a woman in a few weeks."

Holton, glacing about the floor of the chamber, found a round stone.

"A real find," he called. "Here's a hammer for you, Benton."

The latter seized the stone and beat at the masonry before him. A sense of drowziness began to seize upon the members of the party.

"The air is becoming foul," said Holton. "What we do must be done hurriedly."

"All of you retire to a place beyond the curve of the chamber," Benton ordered. "I must place the bomb soon."

With a last blow from the stone he chipped a large piece from the spot at which he had been working.

"Give me the torch, Virginia."

The girl handed him the light, and with Holton and Otter retired behind the curve in the chamber.

Benton placed the bomb in the hole he had fashioned in the masonry. He adjusted the trigger and set it to explode in thirty seconds. He released the safety and rushed back through the chamber until he was around the curve where his three companions were waiting.

For a second Benton crouched. Virginia placed her hand upon his shoulder and then a stunning report that seemed to drive the air in the chamber through their brains crashed in the place. Then all was blank.

Huge pieces of masonry were hurtled into the air surrounding the temple of Teeheemen. A horde of Duros' warriors besieging the outside of the walls of the temple were thrown from their feet and scores were injured by a shower of small stones falling upon their heads. They saw a portion of the outer walls of the temple that ran into the base of the adjoining granite of the mountain blown to pieces, and a huge rent appeared in the wall.

Duros was near the place at the time and witnessed what to him was a strange phenomenon. He was quick to interpret its meaning.

"A breach!" he called to his followers. "A breach! The white gods have destroyed the walls of the temple of Teeheemen."

A thousand warriors rushed toward the breach and began making their way through the corridors leading about within the great structure of the temple of Teeheemen. Terrific battles ensued for possession of the various courts, and Duros and his men were victorious. Gradually they cleared the temple and captured its many chambers and shrines.

18

THE first thing that Benton recalled was the odor of fresh air—delicious fresh air, perfumed with the odor of green vegetation. His mind began to function slowly, and then he began recalling the events of the past few days. He wondered if it were not all a dream. Finally everything came back to him. From the spot where he was lying he could look into the distance through the corridor and see the sunshine and feel the fresh air.

"The bomb worked," he mused to himself. "It stunned me and the others—"

He turned his head to one side and recognized Otter. The latter was still breathing and so was Holton.

"And Virginia," he wondered; "is she dead?"

He turned around and saw the face of the girl close to his own on the floor of the chamber. Her stillness alarmed him.

"She must be dead," he said.

With an effort he raised himself on one arm and touched her brow. A noise attracted his attention. There

in the entryway created by the explosion stood a gigantic warrior. It was Vedos. A hideous smile played across his features.

"The white gods are dead!" he laughed. "All but one—and Vedos will kill him. The white gods have helped overthrow the forces of the temple of Teeheemen. Duros has captured the temple and Vedos must flee. He will go to the land of the hereafter, but before he goes he will see that the last of the white gods dies."

Vedos raised his spear and started forward. Benton attempted to raise himself, but failed. Vedos laughed.

"The white god is weak," he taunted.

As the laughter of the Teeheemen chieftain sounded in his ears, Benton saw a familiar figure suddenly rush behind Vedos and spring like a great cat upon his shoulders. It was Gomo. The old warrior had been released by the forces of Duros from the prison and had started in search of his friends. He had learned while in prison that the four had been committed to the smother chamber and had come to the place to learn of their fate.

Vedos was a large man with great natural brute strength. He was many years younger than Gomo. He dropped his spear and grappled with the latter. The two fought, and by degrees Vedos began to gain the ascendancy. Benton's strength rallied as he saw his old friend's danger. Straining every nerve, he rose to his feet and grasped the fallen spear of Vedos. The latter hurled Gomo with a great effort to the floor, but Gomo clung to him with a powerful grip and carried Vedos down on top of him.

Benton launched forward with the spear and caught Vedos back of the ear. The blow was enough to daze the warrior for a moment. Gomo reached into Vedos' belt and drew the chieftain's knife. With a powerful thrust he drove the blade of the weapon into the heart of the chief of the warriors of the temple.

Gomo raised himself to his feet. Benton pointed to the rear of the smother chamber and explained to Gomo what had been done. He told the latter to get water and bring it to the three.

Gomo rushed into the temple and later returned with several warriors of the Duros forces. They carried the unconscious Otter and Holton with Virginia into one of the smaller chambers of the temple. Benton told them to bring his pack from the arena, and when it had been brought took some of the first aid material that the kit contained. He attempted to pour some of the stimulants from a bottle down the throats of the three.

Otter regained consciousness, and later Holton. Virginia alone remained as if dead. Benton bathed her face with cold water, and after a few minutes he thought that he felt the weakened pulse quicken. A half hour later she moved her lips, and her eyelids opened.

"It is I, Virginia," he called to her as she stared vaguely at him. A light of recognition flashed into her eyes.

"We are saved," he said. "The bomb worked."

"Saved," she echoed weakly. "The bomb worked."

19

BENTON and Gomo continued in charge of the chamber for the remainder of the day. The three patients began to gather strength rapidly, as Benton had done. The next morning saw them able to walk about.

"I have a headache worse than when I was a pugilistic apprentice," said Otter.

"Here too," Holton echoed; "though I never tried the game, but I can imagine how it must feel if this is anything like it."

"I'm feeling much better," Virginia smiled.

"What pleases me," said Benton, "is that we can begin to see the end of our stay in this country."

Gomo at this time entered the room, and with him was Duros. The latter extended his hand to the members of the party.

"Duros is now ruler of Teeheemen," he announced. "Urlus and his followers have fled from the city into the jungles. Tell us what the white gods wish, and it shall be done."

Virginia turned to Benton.

"Tell him," she said, "that we want to go home, and that we would like to know the way through the mountains."

Duros shook his head.

"If I knew the exit from the valley of Teeheemen," he said, "I would gladly tell my white friends. Duros would be glad to travel through it and view the land on the other side. Duros does not believe that where he was born is the only place where men may dwell."

"Duros is correct," Benton asserted. "The men of Teeheemen should be taught that there are vast valleys and countries many times larger than the Valley of Teeheemen. The land on the other side of the seemingly insurmountable mountain peaks that enclose your valley is not a land where spirits of the dead of Teeheemen dwell but is the land where other races exist, races that in many instances worship a living yet invisible God."

"Duros has a plan for finding the exit from the valley," he said after thinking for a few minutes. "It has ever been reported from the temple of the high priest that the exit was in some manner connected with the temple of Teeheemen. The temple must be thoroughly investigated first."

At this juncture, Gomo, who had remained silent during the conversation, spoke.

"If my friends will come with me," he said, "Gomo wishes to show them what he has discovered at the place where the walls of the temple were destroyed."

The members of the party gathered their weapons and followed after the giant native. Benton and Otter had recovered their rifles from the room where they had been left in the arena, and the rifles of Holton and Virginia had been recovered from one of the private rooms of Walum in the temple.

Gomo led the way to where the bomb placed by Benton had wrecked the temple wall. He went to a point where a large rent appeared in a portion of heavy masonry seemingly erected against the base of the granite of the mountain that rose almost perpendicularly into the heavens above the temple of Teeheemen. Gomo thrust his spear into the crack.

"Here, Gomo believes, is the beginning of the passage from the land of Teeheemen into the outer world."

Benton and Otter thrust the barrels of their rifles into the darkness of the opening.

"There must have been a door leading into this from the rear of the smother chamber where we were placed," Benton commented.

"Yes," Holton admitted. "We will have to get this place opened before we can enter and explore."

"I still have a couple of bombs in my possession," Benton laughed. "I think we can tear this thing wide open."

"We are willing for you to demonstrate," Virginia laughed, "but let us get at a safe distance before you place it."

Virginia and the other members of the party removed themselves while

Benton found what he considered a desirable point for placing the bomb. He set the bomb and placed the time lock at its greatest length. He left the spot and hurriedly rejoined the others.

Scarcely had he arrived where they were standing before the earth shook and a large section of the masonry and base of the mountain appeared to be torn away. When the accompanying shower of fine rocks and gravel had subsided the members of the party again advanced to the place.

"The exit from the Valley of Teeheemen," said Benton, as they looked into an enormous natural cavern that apparently receded into the bowels of the mountain.

Duros nodded.

"It is the way through which our first ancestors came," he said.

"We must make arrangements to pass through as soon as possible," said Benton. "Our packs yet contain enough goods for a week's journey and we have enough firearms and ammunition to furnish food and protection. It would be better, though, before undertaking the trip through the mountain, to return to our plane in the forest of Teeheemen and bring the other rifles and supplies that will be needed in our trip toward the coast."

"Gomo will make the trip," the big fellow offered, turning to Benton. "He will take a force of warriors and carry all the things."

"I will go with you," Holton offered. "The exact location of the plane may be difficult for you to find, since you were never there and know only the approximate position. I remember the road perfectly from the camp where we remained."

"I would like to make the trip, too," said Benton. "I would relish an opportunity of again shooting some of the strange beasts in the jungle of Teeheemen."

"I, too, must make the trip," said Virginia. "I want to get the clothing I left in the plane in my two suit cases."

"You will be better cared for in the temple of Teeheemen," Benton insisted. "The trip will require but a short time. We will take enough men to bring everything from the plane. What we cannot use in making our trip to the coast we will donate to King Duros."

After some protesting, Virginia finally agreed to remain at the temple of Teeheemen with Gala under the protection of a special guard which Duros would select. The new king of Teeheemen delegated Gomo to name a hundred of the best warriors of his forces to accompany the white men on their trip.

By evening Gomo had completed his task, and the party made preparations for an early march in the morning.

Virginia smilingly waved farewell to the expedition the next day.

"A few weeks more and I shall be going home to my people," she said, turning to Gala.

"Gala will be sad," replied the native girl, turning her eyes toward the young white woman. "She will never see the white sister again."

"You may, some time," Virginia suggested. "This is an unusual world. Who knows but that some time I may desire to return to the Valley of Teeheemen?"

"Gala will always live in that hope," replied the native girl.

"Let us go to the entrance of the mountain passage which Benton tore open with his bomb yesterday," Virginia suggested.

Gala consented, and the two wandered to the cavern mouth.

"Let us go inside," said Virginia. "It will be all right for just a little distance."

The two entered the opening after some difficult climbing and advanced a short distance into the gloom. Virginia stood peering into the darkness, when suddenly there was a rush of footsteps upon the rocky floor of the cavern, and before she could escape she felt herself seized by unseen hands that reached from the darkness and bore her from her feet.

Gala, who had not advanced so far into the cavern mouth, rushed for the opening and made her escape. She called loudly for help, and members of the Duros guard came running toward her. She informed them what had occurred, and the warriors rushed into the cavern. They shouted, and the answering echoes threw them into superstitious terror.

They left the place and reported the occurrence to Duros, who immediately ordered a large company of warriors with torches to assemble. An advance was started into the cavern and continued for more than half a mile. Duros in person led the vanguard of his men.

20

WHEN Virginia felt herself lifted and carried along she made no outcry, for she realized that her strength was incapable of combating with her unknown antagonist.

For a long time she was carried by powerful arms until she noticed the darkness in the cavern beginning to grow lighter. She glanced upward for a look at her unknown captor. The face she viewed filled her with terror. The man who was carrying her was of tremendous size and possessed the muscular development of a gorilla. He was beardless, and his skin was ashen gray. When he saw her glance at him he spoke, and the language used was that of the men of Teeheemen.

"Morop is the king of the hollow mountain," he announced. "Morop was the friend in secret of Walum, the high priest of Teeheemen. To Morop, Walum brought choice offerings from the land of Teeheemen. Walum is dead, for Morop has spied from the secret passage upon the white men and Duros. Morop's wife is old and ugly. The white woman shall become the wife of Morop."

Virginia felt the great arms of the giant crush her body to his breast. She felt his massive lips pressed with crushing force against her own.

"In a few days," the giant announced, "Morop of the hollow mountain will make a great feast for his new wife."

Still carrying her, Morop proceeded along the corridors of the great cavern. The light increased constantly, until Virginia could ascertain the cause for this. The mountain into which she was being carried was a great shell, largely hollow, and at the top of the volcanic peak was an enormous opening an eighth of a mile in diameter. Through this the sunlight and fresh air penetrated to a great portion of the interior.

Morop carried Virginia to a point in the cavern where a number of rudely fashioned stone huts stood. In one of these he placed the girl, and then pushed a large stone over the opening.

To Virginia the time passed slowly in her rough prison. Several hours had passed when she was aroused by the sound of a number of warriors of Morop's mountain tribe assembling and chanting fierce songs. Looking through one of the cracks in the wall of her prison, she saw more than a hundred powerful, brutelike men circling about and chanting.

They were armed with great bludgeons and spears. With a final wild shout they ceased their chanting and proceeded in the direction of the Valley of Teeheemen. Duros, advancing at the head of his forces into the hollow mountain, was suddenly attacked

with terrific fury by the tribesmen of Morop.

The men of Teeheemen fought by the light of their torches, and more than one of the warriors of Morop went down with a spear thrust in his body.

"If the white men were here with their thunder sticks we could easily conquer these enemies," Duros called to one of his lieutenants, as they fought together.

The word finally was passed along the line of the Duros followers to retire in order toward the entrance, as it would be necessary to obtain reinforcements and formulate a new plan for invading the mountain's interior. The order was carried out and the retreat was conducted successfully. Two hours later Virginia heard the tribesmen of Morop return and begin the celebration of their victory.

The celebration continued unabated for a week, and Virginia wondered if Morop had forgotten her presence in the village. Every day a wrinkled old woman had brought coarse food to her and had never spoken. With the old woman had come a man powerful enough to remove the stone from the doorway and place it in position again.

Morop had been too busy celebrating what he considered a victory over the men of Teeheemen when the latter retreated from the mountain, to pay any attention to his fair captive. As the joy of the victory and the incessant feasting began to grow wearisome, he again thought of Virginia and went to her prison. With little effort he removed the stone and entered.

Virginia shrank from before him. He laughed boisterously, and seizing the girl he crushed her body to his chest. She fought desperately but was as helpless as a child in the grasp of the king of the mountain giants. He tore a portion of her blouse from her shoulders and with a wild laugh pushed her from him.

"Tonight you will be the bride of Morop," he stated. "Tonight when the sun leaves the mountain top, Morop will then come to his new woman."

The giant again left the stone hut, closing the entrance after him with the big stone slab.

When he had gone, Virginia rushed to the opening and pushed against the stone with all of her power. Her efforts were unavailing, for the stone had been so fashioned that it fitted into a mortiselike groove in the side of the house and the floor of the cavern.

THE remainder of the day passed quickly for the girl, as the dread of the coming night filled her. When the gloom began to gather in the surrounding cavern depths, she again attempted to push the stone door away, but without success.

Darkness had gathered fully when she heard the stone moved from the entrance. She could distinguish Morop in the light of a torch which an attendant warrior of the tribe was carrying. The giant took the torch from the other and motioned for him to retire.

Entering the hut, he fastened the torch in a niche on the side of the wall. With the muscles of his great arms knotted and moving beneath his skin, Morop stood before the girl, naked except for a trapping about the loins. His powerful physique was one to create wonderment, and Virginia thought as she shrank from before him how little chance any ordinary man could have in battle against the great brute.

"Morop has come to claim his bride this night," he muttered in low tones that seemed to come almost like distant thunder from his chest. "Morop

(*Continued on Page* 184)

THE REMORSE of PROFESSOR PANEBIANCO

by Greye La Spina

Author of "The Tortoise-Shell Cat"

"GIELO, what an enormous crystal globe, Filippo!" exclaimed Dottore Giuseppe del Giovine, regarding the great inverted glass bell that hung over the professor's dissecting table. "What's the idea of that?" he added curiously.

The professor's black eyes rested upon the globe with the fondness of a parent. He pushed the table more centrally under the opening at the bell's lower extremity, then pulled on a chain operating a valve at the top.

"The purpose of this globe is to win me such recognition from the world of science as no man has ever enjoyed and no man after me can ever emulate," he responded, with a kind of grim enthusiasm.

"But how?"

The doctor was intensely interested.

"You are aware that Elena and I have long experimented on animals, to ascertain if that thing men call the 'soul' is at all tangible? We have now arrived at a very advanced point in our studies, so advanced that we are at a dead stop because we cannot obtain the necessary subjects for our next experiment."

"One can always find mice—or cats—or monkeys," said the doctor.

The professor shook his head decidedly.

"Such animals are things of the past, *caro amico*. We have seen the soul of a drowning mouse emerge from its body, in a spiral coil of vapor that wreathed its way out of the water to lose itself in the etheric spaces that include all life. We have watched the soul of a dying ape emerge in one long rush of fine, impalpable, smoke-like cloud that wound upward to become invisible as it, too, amalgamated with the invisible forces of the universe about us."

"I myself once saw what I believe might have been the soul of a dying man, as it departed from his body," asseverated the doctor, musingly. "Ah, if one could but detain that fine essence of immortality, what wonders could not one work in time? What mighty secrets would perhaps be discovered!"

"You understand, then, Giuseppe *mio*, what I await with anxiety? The subject for the most tremendous experiment of all! It is futile for me to attempt to make it upon one of the lower animals, since they do not possess the power of reason, and their souls would therefore be by far too tenuous for a successful experiment.

I have been trying for months to obtain possession of the person of some criminal condemned to death, that I might subject him to my theory as his dying breath fled, bearing with it his soul—that about which all men theorize, but which none have yet seen or conceived of as have I."

"The idea is tremendous, Filippo. What have the authorities done about it?"

"They refuse to assist me. I cannot tell them all that I desire to do, naturally, or my rivals would try to get ahead of me. Their stupid, petty jealousy! *Quanto è terribile!*"

"Exactly what do you wish to do, and how is this bell to serve you?" inquired the doctor, a puzzled series of lines drawing across his forehead.

"I have observed, *caro mio*, that the vaporous soul of the lower animal is so much lighter than the ether around it that it withstands the pull of gravity and rises, swaying with whatever currents of air are in the atmosphere, always to a higher level, where it dissipates into invisibility.

"I have been trying to possess myself of a living human being whose life was useless to the world, that his death might be made of transcendent value through my scientific knowledge. I constructed this crystal bell for a wonderful and stupendous purpose. It is intended to hold the tenuous wraith of the subject of my experiment.

"The valve above, open at first, will permit the air to escape at the top of the bell as it becomes displaced by the ascending essence of the dying man's soul. Then, when I pull the chain, thereby closing the valve, the soul would be retained by its own volatile nature within the bell, being unable to seek a lower level."

"Filippo, you astound me!"

There was something more than astonishment in the doctor's face, however, as his eyes searched the countenance of the professor sharply.

"My idea is indeed awe-inspiring, *caro dottore*. Your wonder is very natural," said the professor graciously.

"It must be trying to have to wait so long for a suitable subject for your experiment," ventured the doctor, with a side glance.

"Ah, how I shall love and venerate that human being who furnishes me with such a subject!" cried the professor fervently.

A deep sigh followed closely upon his words. The curtain hanging before the doorway was pushed to one side, as Elena Panebianco walked slowly into the room.

"How you will gaze upon that imprisoned soul!" cried she, with a passionate intensity that startled the doctor anew, as he turned his regard from her husband to her. "If it were a soul that loved you, how happy it would be to know that your entire thoughts were centered upon it, within the crystal bell! To see your eyes always fixed upon it, as it floated there within!"

She leaned weakly against the dissecting table, and her great eyes, dark with melancholic emotion, stared wildly out of her thin, fever-flushed face.

"*Tu sai impossibile!*" cried the professor. "What tragic jealousy is yours, Elena! A jealousy of things that do not as yet exist!"

ELENA did not reply. She loved too deeply, too passionately, too irrevocably. And the only return her husband made was to permit her assistance in his laboratory work. Her eager mind had flown apace with his; not that she loved the work for itself, but that she longed to gain his approbation. To him the alluring loveliness of her splendid body was as noth-

ing to the beauty of the wonderful intellect that gradually unfolded in his behalf.

In private, Filippo complained to the doctor that his wife was too demonstrative. She thought nothing of distracting his attention from important experiments, with pouting lips clamoring for a kiss, and not until he had hastily brushed her lips with his would she return to her work.

"I am obliged to bribe the woman with kisses," cried the professor, despairingly.

Elena had gone so far as to affirm to her husband that she was even jealous of his research, his experiments. That was unwise. No woman can interfere between a man and his chosen life-work. Such things are, as D'Annunzio puts it, "*piu che l'amore*" (greater than love), and prove relentless Juggernauts to those who tactlessly disregard the greater claims.

"He is worn out," said Elena to the doctor. "He has flung himself into his work to such an extent that nothing exists for him but that. He studies all night. He works all day. I have to force him to stop long enough to eat sufficient to maintain life."

"Go on, Elena, go on! When my head swims, I tie cold wet towels about it. When my brain refuses to obey me, I concentrate with inconceivable force of will upon my goal. Oh, Giuseppe *mio*, my very existence is bound up in this last experiment, which, alas! I am unable to complete because the authorities will not permit me to make use of the death of some criminal—a death that must be entirely useless to the scientific world, through their blind stupidity."

The doctor shrugged, with a gesture of his slender brown hands. His eyes sought Elena's face. Since he had been away the Signora Panebianco had altered terribly. She looked too delicate; she had faded visibly. Hectic roses flamed in her cheeks. Her thin hands, too, had been too cold when she touched his in greeting. Her constant cough racked her slender body. It seemed to Giuseppe del Giovine that she had become almost transparent, so slender had she become from loss of flesh. As she went from the room slowly with a gesture of helplessness, he turned to the professor.

"Your wife is a very sick woman," he declared, abruptly.

"I suppose she must be," Filippo responded absently. "She's very nervous, I know. She disturbs me inexcusably with silly demands for kisses and caresses, actually weeping when she thinks I don't see her, because I refuse to humor her foolish whims. I've been obliged, more than once, to drive her away with cold looks and hard words, because she has tried to coax me to stop work, insisting upon my talking with her."

He began adjusting his apparatus with an abstracted air. It was as well that he did not see the expression of indignation and despair that flashed across the mobile face of the physician, who had long loved Elena in secret, but hopelessly, as he very well knew, because she was absolutely indifferent to anybody but her husband.

"Yes, Giuseppe, she interrupts my most particular experiments to caress me ardently, trying to bring my lips down on hers. Often I have reproved her severely for attempting to turn me aside from my life-work. The man whose intellect has driven him to enter the precincts of the great mystery cannot stop to dally with the folly of fools, and love is the greatest folly of all."

"Blind fool, you!" muttered the doctor under his breath. "Love is the very breath of life itself!"

"If Elena is to assist me in my last experiment, the greatest of all, I must

get a subject soon, for she is wasting away fast. Oh, yes, I have observed it. Death has his fingers at her throat."

His voice was the voice of the man of science; there was not the slightest intonation that might have indicated other than passing interest in the unhappy Elena.

"What I am afraid of," he resumed, "is that even a human being's spirit will not materialize properly within the bell, unless instructed previously. And how can I expect a criminal to lend himself voluntarily to an experiment that necessitates his death for its success? No, the fool would cling too closely to his miserable life, and might even refuse to listen when I tried to prepare and instruct him. I ought to have for my experiment someone who knows just what I want done; someone who will carry out my wishes faithfully. And where I am I to find such a person?" he finished lugubriously.

THE curtains over the doorway swayed to admit Elena. It was only too evident from her expression that she had heard part, if not all, of her husband's words. There was an incomprehensible expression within those dark orbs that shrank not from the glance the professor turned upon the intruder.

"There is but one person in the whole world who could, and would, be able to carry out your ideas," said she, deliberately.

Filippo whirled upon Dottore del Giovine, relief and joy flashing over his face. Del Giovine gave a short exclamation and took an involuntary step forward, horror written on his face. The other man turned to Elena, caught her hands in his, and gazed down into those pellucid depths whence came the glow of a fire that burned within her heart for him alone.

"Elena! Can you really mean it? You fill me with the most intense, most vivid gratitude and admiration—and," he added hastily as if with an afterthought, "love."

"My life is burning low," was her quiet reply. "If my death can profit you, it is yours for the asking—if you desire it."

Stiff with incredulous horror, the doctor stood rooted to the spot. Elena knew what the professor desired; she was ready, willing, to serve as the subject of his experiment. It was for her a final proof of her love for him—and a test of his love for her. She realized that she alone, of all the world, knew the occult foundations of the science that would enable her to carry out successfully the other part of the experiment.

With an access of lofty emotions, Filippo Panebianco gathered her into his arms and kissed her pallid brow. Elena's dark eyes closed ecstatically under this caress; she felt his heart beating high, but knew, alas! it was not for her; it was with renewed hope for the success of the stupendous performance to which he had long been irrevocably pledged.

"Now I shall vindicate myself to those who have called me a visionary, a madman!" Filippo cried in triumph.

His wife clung to him, her eyes seeking his with an appeal that he deliberately refused to recognize. He was only too afraid that Elena might change her mind, might refuse what he desired more than anything else on earth: the accomplishment of his plans.

Hanging eagerly and anxiously on her reply, the professor murmured: "When, Elena? When?"

"When you desire, my husband. The fire of my life is burning very low."

"This is infamous!" cried Giuseppe del Giovine, in an outburst that

shook him from head to foot, so intense was his emotion. "Elena, are you, too, insane? Do you realize what you are doing? Cannot you understand that Filippo is quite mad with his visions? Even if what he has dreamed could be possible, do you know that you have offered him your death? Elena, Elena, give me your life! Put yourself into my hands! I will cure you. I know that I can cure you," he begged wildly.

The beautiful young woman looked sadly and understandingly at the impassioned doctor. She shook her head slowly. Then her eyes turned again to her husband. Giuseppe del Giovine realized that his interference was futile; Elena's life, Elena's death, both lay in the hands of the man she loved. And (cruel irony!) it was her death that would mean most to the man she loved.

The professor called a servant and issued hasty instructions; his rivals were to be summoned at once, to see the successful outcome of his experiment. Then he turned to his wife, elation shining from his glowing countenance.

"Help me prepare!" he commanded.

An expression of awful agony passed over Elena's set face, but she motioned the agitated young doctor indifferently from her path, and began to set in position various instruments on the table adjacent to that under the crystal bell.

"What are you intending to do, Filippo?" demanded del Giovine, grasping the exalted dreamer authoritatively by one elbow.

Filippo shook off that restraining hand with impatience.

"Watch, and your patience will be rewarded," was the answer, as he smiled mysteriously.

"But Elena will not die today," said the physician, his hesitating lips forming the words reluctantly.

"She will die today," affirmed the professor, still smiling.

"*Dio mio!* He is absolutely mad!" Del Giovine would have fled for assistance, but the horror of the situation rooted his feet to the spot. Moreover, an imperative gesture from the proud Elena held him frozen there, his questioning eyes on hers.

"When the bell rings, Elena *mia*, I shall free your soul from its earthly shell, on which the hold is already so frail, and let it fly upward into the crystal bell," murmured Filippo, more tenderly than his wife had ever heard him speak to her before.

"I did not believe you could do it," Elena said, strangely. "I thought you really loved me! Have you no soul yourself, my husband, that you can so relentlessly sacrifice a woman who adores you, to add fuel to the fires of your ambition?"

"Elena! No more, I beg you. You surely will not withdraw what you offered freely, of your own will?"

He turned his face from hers, lest unexpected weakness of the flesh might undo his will.

The doctor knew that Elena had risked her all on a single toss of the dice. Womanlike, she believed that Filippo would throw aside the everlasting fame which he hoped would accrue to him, instead of accepting, as he was doing, the sacrifice of herself.

With face still averted, the professor motioned his wife to place herself upon the table under the crystal bell.

She gave one dreadful, tearing sob.

"For me, life has long since lost its value," said she. "I think I may be happier dead!"

She mounted the table and stretched herself upon it.

Footsteps sounded outside the door. Came a knock. The paralyzed del Giovine saw the professor catch up a glittering knife. And then Elena

turned her face upward, and gazed so earnestly at the determined and ruthless scientist that he hesitated, weakening. Del Giovine saw the beloved woman of his soul push her lips together for her husband's last kiss.

"Why spoil this last exalted moment?" murmured Filippo harshly.

He dared not risk refusing her whim, for delay would be fatal to his plans; were not his rivals waiting for the work of entrance, behind the closed laboratory door? Leaning over his wife, he hastily brushed his lips against hers. She flung up her arms at once and caught him to her with convulsive strength.

The young doctor heard her whisper, "Farewell, unhappy man!"

Del Giovine struggled to throw off the almost hypnotic spell that bound him.

Furious at the delay, and hearing another knock at the door, Filippo jerked himself away from that passionate embrace. The knife flashed—plunged downward—. Then he stood back, an expression of stupefied amazement on his face as he gazed enchanted at the crystal bell.

"It is her soul! Look! That pale mist of azure cloud that rises from her wounded bosom so lightly! See it sway and drift! Oh, ethereal vapor, now you are entering your crystal tomb! I can almost distinguish her features, Giuseppe. Look, how they change, almost imperceptibly, but surely, as the current of air moves out at the top of the bell to accommodate the entrance of her wraith!

"Why does she look at me so? She is pitying me—me! How can that be, seeing I am to be envied? Have I not attained in this moment to the loftiest pinnacle of my success? My triumph is complete! No—no—I need the envy—the jealous envy—the admiration and astonishment of my fellow-workers, to complete the glory of my success!"

Del Giovine succeeded in throwing off the lethargy of horror that had bound him; a cry burst from the hitherto paralyzed vocal cords of the young doctor.

The door burst open. Into the room rushed the little group of men who were confreres and rivals in science with Professor Filippo Panebianco. Wordlessly the triumphant professor pointed to the crystal bell, all eyes following his guiding finger.

"DIO!" he suddenly screamed, in agony and despair. "I forgot to close the upper valve! See—see—it is wide open! And there—there floats upon the air the last soft, wavering fringes of that wraith that was the spirit of my wife!"

He flung himself upon the lifeless form of the woman who had loved him too well, and beat at her with maddened fury.

"It is your fault, Elena! All your fault!"

Someone uttered a cry: "He has killed his poor wife!"

"Secure him, gentlemen! He has gone utterly mad!" warned the doctor, springing forward.

By sheer united strength they overcame the mad scientist, who fought against them furiously, uttering incoherent phrases as he struggled.

"Why did I stop to give her a silly kiss? Oh, if I had not stopped, I would have remembered to close the valve, and the wonder of my triumph would have remained to cover with the mantle of success what they are pleased so stupidly to call my crime.

"But alas! I was always a tender fool! Oh, if only I could have remained firm against her, when she desired that fatal kiss! I, who believed I would never experience the emotion of regret, shall suffer remorse for that weakness until I die!"

ARHL-A OF THE CAVES

by C. M. Eddy, Jr.

Author of "The Ghost-Eater," "With Weapons of Stone," etc.

WHEN Arhl-a opened her eyes, darkness had settled over the universe. The tough cords of reindeer sinews which bound her hands and feet cut deep into her flesh, and her wrists and ankles were raw and bleeding from her futile struggles to free herself from the bonds. The flickering light of the fire at the entrance of the cavern caused the shadows to dance on the limestone walls in a ghostly, ever-changing glow. Silhouetted against the background of the fire loomed the huge body of Zurd, his eyes fastened intently upon her.

Ugh! how she hated him! She spat between her clenched teeth, and her tortured wrists strained anew at their fastenings as her gaze rested upon him. Never would she become his mate of her own free will! Better far that she should bury the keen blade of the stag-handled stone dagger, that lay hidden away beneath her garment of doeskin, clean to the hilt in her bosom than to suffer such insult at the hands of the human monster who had stolen her from her chosen one.

Zurd, the Coward! How well he was named! How different he was from Wagh, the Mighty, the man whom she loved. She could picture him now as she lay there, his tall, lithe, sinewy frame scarred from head to foot by the claws and teeth of the mighty beasts he fought and overpowered. He even wore a necklace made from the very teeth and claws that had inflicted those wounds, trophies she had strung together for him with her own hands and hung about his neck when it was finished. His broad head with its shock of jet-black hair, his powerful hands that could tear apart the jaws of the mighty cave-lion! He was a man, indeed!

She looked again at the squat figure still watching her from the mouth of the cave. His low, receding forehead with its heavy overhanging brow, his massive jaw, his short grotesque arms and legs, reminded her of the ape people that still roamed the forests and warred against her kind.

Zurd, the Coward! He was even afraid of her, a woman! He had sprung upon her from behind, and even now that he had spirited her many miles away from her own people he dared not loose her bonds. She thought of the day to come, when Wagh should trail Zurd to his hiding place. Then he would take him in his two hands and break him like a stick of wood across his knee.

Zurd rose and crossed the floor of the cavern to the helpless girl, with loping, swinging strides. He did not stand erect, his knees being slightly bent, and his similarity to a huge monkey was more marked than before.

He gave the girl a vicious prod with his foot and spoke to her. His tone was harsh and guttural, not at all like her own—low, liquid and musical. Indeed, he spoke more with his eyes and his gestures than with his lips, for language was then in its infancy and speech a power to conjure with.

"And how likes Arhl-a the fare that Zurd provides for her? A long journey and a longer sleep she has had since last she feasted upon the flesh of the reindeer."

Arhl-a's sloe-black eyes flashed fire.

"And does it aid Arhl-a to digest her food to be slung upon Zurd's back like the carcass of the shaggy cave-bear and be carried thus for miles through forest and field?" she asked. "Does it improve her appetite to lie here bound by thongs of the same creature he would have her eat?"

"Then Arhl-a must needs remain hungry and Zurd will feast alone. For bound she must remain until the fire dies out of her heart and she is tamed —until she will give herself to mate with Zurd."

"Much would Arhl-a prefer to suffer the great hunger and pass into the land of the long sleep," retorted the girl.

Zurd, angered by her taunts, caught up a piece of driftwood from the floor of the cave and raised it high above her head. The girl steeled herself for the blow, but his mood passed, and with an imprecation he flung the stick against the wall of the rock chamber. Satisfying himself with another kick at the defenseless girl, Zurd lumbered out of the cavern and into the night.

Arhl-a knew that he would soon return. When he had gorged himself on reindeer meat he would come back to her, and her night would be filled with nameless terror. Far rather would she spend a night in the forest and take her chances with the monsters there. She could hear some of them now as she lay with eyes half closed; the trumpeting of the elephants as they crashed their way down to the river, the howling cry of the terrible hyena, the bellow of the stag, the roar of the lion, and the growl of the cave-bear.

Her eyes scanned the length of the cavern within her range of vision in search of some way of releasing herself. The dancing light of the fire on the wall was poor illumination, but fate must have guided her eyes, for they lighted on a ragged point of rock that jutted out a few inches above the floor of the cave.

If only she could reach it before Zurd returned. Should he come back and discover her. . . .

Slowly she began her torturing journey toward the jagged rock that must serve as her liberator. At every move the cords cut deeper and deeper into her tender flesh. On, and still on, she rolled; it seemed miles instead of feet, hours instead of seconds. One more twist and she would be within reach of the broken stone. Could she make it? Every muscle, every nerve cried out in protest against the attempt. She gritted her teeth and clenched her fists so tightly that the nails sank deep into her palms. With a supreme effort she made the last turn and paused for the moment, exhausted.

The thought of Zurd roused her from her lethargy. If he discovered her. . . .

She bent every energy to the tedious task of sawing through the tough sinews that bound her, until at last they gave way and her wrists were free. The stone dagger in her bosom made short work of her other bonds and Arhl-a gave an articulate sigh of relief when the last cord dropped away.

2

THE sun yet glowed, a flaming ball of red in the western sky, when Wagh, the Mighty, pushed his way out of the great forest and came in sight of the huge cliffs which had been the dwelling ground of his people. The season was growing cold again, and the larger part of the dwellers had already started on their migratory march to where the warmer breezes would blow upon them. But Wagh, together with a few of the hardier ones, had chosen to linger in the old haunts for a while. Later, by forced marches, they could easily overtake the slower moving older ones and join them in their new camping ground.

The other hunters had not returned from the jungle, and the place was well-nigh deserted. He picked his way over the rocks to his cave and entered, letting his burden of pelts slip from his broad back to the floor. Wagh had a strange premonition that something was wrong; that was why he had left the chase and come home earlier than usual. His keen eyes swept the surroundings in search of that which might either confirm or allay his suspicions. He wondered where Arhl-a could be. Most likely she was with We-na, mate of Ze-ka, the Flint-cutter. He did not see what these two women could find to talk about. They were always together. Still, he reflected, he was early. Arhl-a would return in due time.

The patter of sandaled feet fell upon his ear. Ah! But it was not Arhl-a who burst with the speed of the wind into his cave. It was We-na, breathless from the haste with which she had traveled.

"Where is Arhl-a?"

"I have not seen her since early morn. I had thought to find her with you in the cave of Ze-ka. See!"

The girl thrust her hand into her bosom and displayed a broad fillet of tiger hide.

Wagh's eyes dilated as they recognized the object the girl held. He had fashioned this fillet himself for Arhl-a to wear. His strong hand closed about the wrist of the girl in a viselike grip and tightened until she winced beneath the pressure.

"Speak, girl! Where found We-na the head-dress made for the raven locks of Arhl-a?"

"At the edge of the great jungle, where Wagh spends his day hunting the woolly mammoth and the saber-tooth tiger who preys upon his people and robs the land of the food that they desire. I thought it might be that Arhl-a had joined Wagh in the chase today, but when I saw him return alone I hastened to show him that which I had found."

"We-na did well to come at once to Wagh with her discovery. Come, take him to the place where she found the fillet of tiger-hide that he might seek for trace of what has become of Arhl-a, woman of Wagh."

"Wait. First shall I take the news to Ze-ka, that he may ask the hunters about her as they return. Then shall I show you where I found the ornament."

At last they set out for the edge of the great jungle, and the girl led Wagh to a spot not far from where he had entered the great forest earlier in the day and indicated the spot where she had found the fillet of Ahrl-a. There in the earth Wagh read the story of the struggle that had occurred. It was all as plain to him as the pictures that decorated the walls of his cave. He saw that it was no jungle creature to whom she had fallen a victim; it was a two-footed beast that had spirited her away. But who had dared to make off with Arhl-a, woman of Wagh, the Mighty? He would track him to his hiding place and beat out his brains against the side of his own habitation!

It was too late, now, to follow the trail, for already the shades of night

were falling. He would return to his people and there he would count noses. Soon he would know who had stolen his mate away. Then, on the morrow, he would set out upon the trail, and by the antlers of the great reindeer, one of the two would not return alive!

The hunters were nearly all returned, and already the circle fires had been lighted when Wagh reached the camping grounds. The others straggled in by ones and twos until only one remained unaccounted for—Zurd, the Coward.

3

WAGH awoke in the morning as the first rays of the sun were streaking the eastern sky. He selected from the pile of crude weapons in the corner of the cave his favorite lance, the head carved with a likeness of the cave-bear that it might be more effective against him; a stone hatchet which had put the finishing touches to more than one four-footed antagonist; and a long, sharp dagger of stone, with an edge as keen as the finest tempered steel.

Thus armed, the man set out upon his quest. With these simple weapons he would face all the dangers that beset him and make his way to where he knew his Arhl-a must be waiting, an unwilling captive at the mercy of Zurd. With unerring accuracy he read the trail of the fleeing man. Every broken twig or crushed blade of grass bore a message for this man who had learned to interpret their significance. On, and still on, he followed the path so plainly marked for his eyes. At times, when the spoor would not be so clear, he would go along on all fours, his nose close to the ground, sniffing, more like one of the animals of the jungle than man.

He wondered how far the two had gone. He knew that their progress would be slow, for Zurd would be hampered with the burden of the girl —and he knew that Arhl-a would never have gone with him of her own volition.

Well on toward midday he stopped short in his tracks and listened, for the wind had brought to his quivering nostrils the scent of the reindeer, and Wagh realized that he was hungry. Cautiously, silently, he made his way in the direction where he knew the herd must be grazing. He pushed on through the underbrush without making a sound, for man could, if he chose, move more silently than any of the animals that roamed at the edge of a clearing.

The herd were making their way directly toward his hiding place. It could not have been better if he had planned it out for himself. He swung into the overhanging branches of a big tree and waited, until the last of the reindeer passed beneath the tree. Then, swinging lightly from the branches, he dropped to the back of the hindmost animal and plunged his lance clean to the shaft into its shoulder.

The startled animal plunged into the underbrush with its human freight, and Wagh clung to its spreading antlers for support, lest he be brushed off by the branch of some tree and crushed by the flying feet of his wounded steed. The now frantic animal crashed heedlessly on, trying in vain to shake off its unaccustomed burden. Of a sudden, one foot stepped into a deep hole, and the reindeer stumbled and tottered to its knees. With the agility of a monkey, Wagh sprang clean over its antlers, and before the frightened animal could regain its feet he sank his stone dagger deep into its heart. A last convulsive effort to rise, and the reindeer collapsed and rolled over upon its side, dead!

Regaining his weapons, Wagh proceeded to strip the animal of its pelt. Next he gathered a head of dry leaves and twigs. With a sharp bit of hard

wood and a hollowed-out piece of soft wood he proceeded to build a fire, twirling the hardwood stick upon the other until a spark caught the dry leaves. He nursed the tiny blaze with care, until he had a fire of the size he desired. Then, cutting a large, juicy steak from the animal he had killed, he proceeded to cook his dinner. Retracing his steps, Wagh finally picked up the trail he had left and once more set out upon his way.

All this had taken time, and it was not until late afternoon when Wagh at last came in sight of the cold, barren, deserted cliffs whither Zurd had borne the helpless girl. Every nerve tense, every sense alert, he drew nearer and nearer to the cave where the single trail led. No sound broke the stillness, save the lapping of the sea-waves upon the beach at the foot of the cliffs. Boldly he entered the cavern, before which the fire had smoldered and died. And there, his body already grown cold, he found Zurd, with Arhl-a's stag-handled stone dagger shaft-deep between his shoulder-blades.

But where was Arhl-a?

Once more he took up the trail, harder to follow now, with darkness coming on. Back into the forest Wagh followed the spoor of the woman he loved. Already the moon had risen and flooded the scene with silvery rays. Wagh was desperate. He must find Arhl-a before the animals of the night came out to roam the jungle, else all that he might find would be her bones, picked clean!

Suddenly, upon the somber stillness of the night, rang out a piercing cry—the cry of a human voice, a cry fraught with horror and distress. And in that cry Wagh recognized the voice of Arhl-a!

4

ARHL-A, crouching in the shadows, heard the heavy step of Zurd as he approached the cave. Zurd, his belly filled with the savory meat of the reindeer, had turned his thoughts to the helpless girl he had left bound in the far corner of the cavern. Suiting action to impulse, he made his way to where he had left her. The food had warmed his body and the blood flowed hot through his veins; he yearned for the solace that only the soft warm body of the girl could give him. His eyes agleam with lust, he entered the cave.

Out of the darkness, Arhl-a sprang.

Zurd reeled and lurched forward unsteadily under the impact of the unexpected attack. He tried to shake off the body that clung to him with a grip of steel. He swore a mighty oath, invoking the anger of the gods upon this girl who dared defy him. He felt a sudden biting, stinging sensation as the blade of the girl's dagger was buried deep into his back. His body burned with a feverish fire. Again the stone knife bit his flesh. He could feel the life-blood gushing from the open wound. He staggered drunkenly and pitched face down upon the floor of the cave. The cavern echoed hideously with his mighty groans. At length they grew weaker, until finally they ceased altogether. . . .

Arhl-a breathed a great sigh of relief as the silence of death fell over the cave. Death, sudden and sure, held no terrors for this girl of the cave and the wilderness. It was the living whom she fought and feared. Exhausted with the strenuous experiences of the day and stopping only long enough to replenish the fire, that she might be protected from the chance prowler from the jungle near by, she curled up into a snug warm ball and slept—a long, deep, refreshing, dreamless sleep.

When Arhl-a awoke the sun was high in the heavens. With only a passing glance at her lifeless companion she made her way down the side of the cliff to where the sea-waves gently lapped the sun-kissed shore.

Then, letting her single garment of doeskin slip from her white shoulders, she stepped out into the water and bathed, the little waves playing over her lithe form. At last, tired of her sport, she stretched at full length on the sandy beach and basked in the glorious warmth of the sun.

Donning her doeskin wrap once more, she sought out the remains of the reindeer flesh upon which Zurd had feasted the night before and roasted some of it for her breakfast in the hot embers of the dying fire. Her bodily needs satisfied, Arhl-a became possessed of a desire to be on her way back to her people, and Wagh. But first she must have weapons. She re-entered the cave and stripped the dead body of the weapons it wore, leaving her stag-handled dagger in the body that Wagh, should he be trailing them, might know that she was safe. Thus armed, she scaled the barren walls of the cliff and plunged into the heart of the great forest.

All through the long day she plunged on, ever on. But Arhl-a possessed not the ability of Wagh to follow unerringly the vaguely defined trail through the jungle. It was not until twilight closed about her that the girl realized that she was lost. Had she but known, she had traveled in a gigantic circle and was but a short distance from the cave where she had spent the night before, with the silent form of Zurd her sole companion.

The fast gathering darkness brought with it a disquieting silence —the silence that always preceded the voices of the creatures of the night. Above the tree-tops the white moon shone bright in a clear sky and Arhl-a caught an occasional glimpse of a tiny, twinkling star.

Intent upon finding refuge for the long night ahead, the girl did not see the small, beadlike eyes that peered at her from the underbrush, nor did she hear the catlike tread of the creature that trailed her as she pushed on. She did not know that long, hairy arms reached out to encircle her, until she felt a gigantic paw close upon her shoulder and she wheeled to meet her new-found foe. But when she saw the wicked eyes that burned into her own, the low, slavering jaw and the hairy, misshapen body of the great ape that held her in its grasp, then horror overwhelmed her and she screamed—a shrill, piercing, blood-curdling scream.

In answer, a mighty form came crashing through the forest and stood before them, and Arhl-a's heart leapt with joy as she beheld the one who had come to her aid—Wagh, her mate and her protector.

With a harsh, guttural cry the ape flung the girl from him and turned to give battle to his more formidable antagonist. Another moment and the two were locked in a mighty, death-like embrace, with only the wide-eyed girl to witness the battle supreme for which she was to be the prize.

SILENTLY they fought, the stillness broken only by the snapping of dry twigs beneath their feet or the dull thud as the huge bodies crashed against the trunks of the massive trees.

At last Wagh gained the opening he sought and brought his stone ax down with terrific force upon the head of the beast, cleaving it from skull to chin between the eyes. The hairy bulk tottered for a brief instant and toppled in an inert mass at the feet of the victorious man.

And there in the heart of the jungle, with only the moon looking on, the girl found her place in the outstretched arms of the man and the evening breeze softly kissed the reunited pair.

Author of "Dagon," "The Rats in the Walls," etc.

"Efficiunt daemones, ut quae non sunt, sic tamen quasi sint, conspicienda hominibus exhibeant."—Lactantius.

I WAS far from home, and the spell of the eastern sea was upon me. In the twilight I heard it pounding on the rocks, and I knew it lay just over the hill where the twisting willows writhed against the clearing sky and the first stars of evening. And because my fathers had called me to the old town beyond, I pushed on through the shallow, new-fallen snow along the road that soared lonely up to where Aldebaran twinkled among the trees; on toward the very ancient town I had never seen but often dreamed of.

It was the Yuletide, which men call Christmas, though they know in their hearts it is older than Bethlehem and Babylon, older than Memphis and mankind. It was the Yuletide, and I had come at last to the ancient sea town where my people had dwelt and kept festival in the elder time when festival was forbidden; where also they had commanded their sons to keep festival once every century, that the memory of primal secrets might not be forgotten. Mine were an old people, old even when this land was settled three hundred years before. And they were strange, because they had come as dark, furtive folk from opiate southern gardens of orchids, and spoken another tongue before they learnt the tongue of the blue-eyed fishers. And now they were scattered, and shared only the rituals of mysteries that none living could understand. I was the only one who came back that night to the old fishing town as legend bade, for only the poor and the lonely remember.

Then beyond the hill's crest I saw Kingsport outspread frostily in the gloaming; snowy Kingsport with its ancient vanes and steeples, ridgepoles and chimneypots, wharves and small bridges, willow trees and graveyards; endless labyrinths of steep, narrow, crooked streets, and dizzy church-crowned central peak that time durst not touch; ceaseless mazes of colonial houses piled and scattered at all angles and levels like a child's disordered blocks; antiquity hovering on gray wings over winter-whitened gables and gambrel roofs. And against the rotting wharves the sea pounded; the secretive, immemorial sea out of which the people had come in the elder time.

Beside the road at its crest a still higher summit rose, bleak and wind-swept, and I saw that it was a burying-ground where black gravestones stuck ghoulishly through the snow like the decayed fingernails of a gigantic corpse. The printless road was very lonely, and sometimes I thought I heard a distant horrible creaking as of a gibbet in the wind. They had hanged four kinsmen of mine for witchcraft in 1692, but I did not know just where.

As the road wound down the seaward slope I listened for the merry sounds of a village at evening, but did not hear them. Then I thought of the season, and felt that these old Puritan folk might well have Christmas customs strange to me, and full of silent hearthside prayer. So after that I did not listen for merriment or look for wayfarers, but kept on down past the hushed, lighted farmhouses and shadowy stone walls to where the signs of ancient shops and sea taverns creaked in the salt breeze, and the grotesque knockers of pillared doorways glistened along deserted, unpaved lanes in the light of little, curtained windows.

I had seen maps of the town, and knew where to find the home of my people. It was told that I should be known and welcomed, for village legend lives long; so I hastened through Back Street to Circle Court, and across the fresh snow on the one full flagstone pavement in the town, to where Green Lane leads off behind the Market House. I was glad I had chosen to walk. The white village had seemed very beautiful from the hill; and now I was eager to knock at the door of my people, the seventh house on the left in Green Lane, with an ancient peaked roof and jutting second story, all built before 1650.

There were lights inside the house when I came upon it, and I saw from the diamond window-panes that it must have been kept very close to its antique state. The upper part overhung the narrow, grass-grown street and nearly met the overhanging part of the house opposite, so that I was almost in a tunnel, with the low stone doorstep wholly free from snow. There was no sidewalk, but many houses had high doors reached by double flights of steps with iron railings. It was an odd scene, and because I was strange to New England I had never known its like before. Though it pleased me, I would have relished it better if there had been footprints in the snow, and people in the streets, and a few windows without drawn curtains.

WHEN I sounded the archaic iron knocker I was half afraid. Some fear had been gathering in me, perhaps because of the strangeness of my heritage, and the bleakness of the evening, and the queerness of the silence in that aged town of curious customs. And when my knock was answered I was fully afraid, because I had not heard any footsteps before the door creaked open. But I was not afraid long, for the gowned, slippered old man in the doorway had a bland face that reassured me; and though he made signs that he was dumb, he wrote a quaint and ancient welcome with the stylus and wax tablet he carried.

He beckoned me into a low, candle-lit room with massive exposed rafters and dark, stiff, sparse furniture of the seventeenth century. The past was vivid there, for not an attribute was missing. There was a cavernous fireplace and a spinning-wheel at which a bent old woman in loose wrapper and deep poke-bonnet sat back toward me, silently spinning despite the festive season. An infinite dampness seemed upon the place, and I marveled that no fire should be blazing. The high-backed settle faced the row of curtained windows at the left, and seemed to be occupied, though I was

not sure. I did not like everything about what I saw, and felt again the fear I had had. This fear grew stronger from what had before lessened it, for the more I looked at the old man's bland face, the more its very blandness terrified me. The eyes never moved, and the skin was too like wax. Finally I was sure it was not a face at all, but a fiendishly cunning mask. But the flabby hands, curiously gloved, wrote genially on the tablet and told me I must wait a while before I could be led to the place of festival.

Pointing to a chair, table, and pile of books, the old man now left the room; and when I sat down to read I saw that the books were hoary and moldy, and that they included old Morryster's wild "Marvells of Science," the terrible "Saducismus Triumphatus" of Joseph Glanvil, published in 1681, the shocking "Daemonolatreia" of Remigius, printed in 1595 at Lyons, and worst of all, the unmentionable "Necronomicon" of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred, in Olaus Wormius' forbidden Latin translation: a book which I had never seen, but of which I had heard monstrous things whispered. No one spoke to me, but I could hear the creaking of signs in the wind outside, and the whir of the wheel as the bonneted old woman continued her silent spinning, spinning.

I thought the room and the books and the people very morbid and disquieting, but because an old tradition of my father's had summoned me to strange feastings, I resolved to expect queer things. So I tried to read, and soon became tremblingly absorbed by something I found in that accursed "Necronomicon"; a thought and a legend too hideous for sanity or consciousness. But I disliked it when I fancied I heard the closing of one of the windows that the settle faced, as if it had been stealthily opened. It had seemed to follow a whirring that was not of the old woman's spinning-wheel. This was not much, though, for the old woman was spinning very hard, and the aged clock had been striking. After that I lost the feeling that there were persons on the settle, and was reading intently and shudderingly when the old man came back booted and dressed in a loose antique costume, and sat down on that very bench, so that I could not see him. It was certainly nervous waiting, and the blasphemous book in my hands made it doubly so. When 11 o'clock struck, however, the old man stood up, glided to a massive carved chest in a corner, and got two hooded cloaks, one of which he donned, and the other of which he draped round the old woman, who was ceasing her monotonous spinning. Then they both started for the outer door; the woman lamely creeping, and the old man, after picking up the very book I had been reading, beckoning me as he drew his hood over that unmoving face or mask.

We went out into the moonless and tortuous network of that incredibly ancient town; went out as the lights in the curtained windows disappeared one by one, and the Dog Star leered at the throng of cowled, cloaked figures that poured silently from every doorway and formed monstrous processions up this street and that, past the creaking signs and antediluvian gables, the thatched roofs and the diamond-paned windows; threading precipitous lanes where decaying houses overlapped and crumbled together, gliding across open courts and churchyards where the bobbing lantherns made eldritch drunken constellations.

Amid these hushed throngs I followed my voiceless guides; jostled by elbows that seemed preternaturally soft, and pressed by chests and stomachs that seemed abnormally pulpy; but seeing never a face and hearing never a word. Up, up, up, the eery columns slithered, and I saw that all

the travelers were converging as they flowed near a sort of focus of crazy alleys at the top of a high hill in the center of the town, where perched a great white church. I had seen it from the road's crest when I looked at Kingsport in the new dusk, and it had made me shiver because Aldebaran had seemed to balance itself a moment on the ghostly spire.

There was an open space around the church; partly a churchyard with spectral shafts, and partly a half-paved square swept nearly bare of snow by the wind, and lined with unwholesomely archaic houses having peaked roofs and overhanging gables. Death-fires danced over the tombs, revealing gruesome vistas, though queerly failing to cast any shadows. Past the churchyard, where there were no houses, I could see over the hill's summit and watch the glimmer of stars on the harbor, though the town was invisible in the dark. Only once in a while a lanthern bobbed horribly through serpentine alleys on its way to overtake the throng that was now slipping speechlessly into the church.

I waited till the crowd had oozed into the black doorway, and till all the stragglers had followed. The old man was pulling at my sleeve, but I was determined to be the last. Then finally I went, the sinister man and the old spinning woman before me. Crossing the threshold into that swarming temple of unknown darkness, I turned once to look at the outside world as the churchyard phosphorescence cast a sickly glow on the hilltop pavement. And as I did so I shuddered. For though the wind had not left much snow, a few patches did remain on the path near the door; and in that fleeting backward look it seemed to my troubled eye that they bore no mark of passing feet, not even mine.

The church was scarce lighted by all the lantherns that had entered it, for most of the throng had already vanished. They had streamed up the aisle between the high white pews to the trapdoor of the vaults which yawned loathsomely open just before the pulpit, and were now squirming noiselessly in. I followed dumbly down the footworn steps and into the dank, suffocating crypt. The tail of that sinuous line of night-marchers seemed very horrible, and as I saw them wriggling into a venerable tomb they seemed more horrible still. Then I noticed that the tomb's floor had an aperture down which the throng was sliding, and in a moment we were all descending an ominous staircase of rough-hewn stone; a narrow spiral staircase damp and peculiarly odorous, that wound endlessly down into the bowels of the hill, past monotonous walls of dripping stone blocks and crumbling mortar. It was a silent, shocking descent, and I observed after a horrible interval that the walls and steps were changing in nature, as if chiseled out of the solid rock. What mainly troubled me was that the myriad footfalls made no sound and set up no echoes. After more eons of descent I saw some side passages or burrows leading from unknown recesses of blackness to this shaft of nighted-mystery. Soon they became excessively numerous, like impious catacombs of nameless menace; and their pungent odor of decay grew quite unbearable. I knew we must have passed down through the mountain and beneath the earth of Kingsport itself, and I shivered that a town should be so aged and maggoty with subterraneous evil.

Then I saw the lurid shimmering of pale light, and heard the insidious lapping of sunless waters. Again I shivered, for I did not like the things that the night had brought, and wished bitterly that no forefather had summoned me to this primal rite. As the steps and the passage grew broader, I heard another sound, the thin, whining mockery of a feeble

flute; and suddenly there spread out before me the boundless vista of an inner world—a vast fungous shore litten by a belching column of sick greenish flame and washed by a wide oily river that flowed from abysses frightful and unsuspected to join the blackest gulfs of immemorial ocean.

FAINTING and gasping, I looked at that unhallowed Erebus of titan toadstools, leprous fire and slimy water, and saw the cloaked throngs forming a semicircle around the blazing pillar. It was the Yule-rite, older than man and fated to survive him; the primal rite of the solstice and of spring's promise beyond the snows; the rite of fire and evergreen, light and music. And in that Stygian grotto I saw them do the rite, and adore the sick pillar of flame, and throw into the water handfuls gouged out of the viscous vegetation which glittered green in the chlorotic glare. I saw this, and I saw something amorphously squatted far away from the light, piping noisomely on a flute; and as the thing piped I thought I heard noxious muffled flutterings in the fetid darkness where I could not see. But what frightened me most was that flaming column; spouting volcanically from depths profound and inconceivable, casting no shadows as healthy flame should, and coating the nitrous stone above with a nasty, venomous verdigris. For in all that seething combustion no warmth lay, but only the clamminess of death and corruption.

The man who had brought me now squirmed to a point directly beside the hideous flame, and made stiff ceremonial motions to the semicircle he faced. At certain stages of the ritual they did groveling obeisance, especially when he held above his head that abhorrent "Necronomicon" he had taken with him; and I shared all the obeisances because I had been summoned to this festival by the writings of my forefathers. Then the old man made a signal to the half-seen flute-player in the darkness, which player thereupon changed its feeble drone to a scarce louder drone in another key; precipitating as it did so a horror unthinkable and unexpected. At this horror I sank nearly to the lichened earth, transfixed with a dread not of this nor any world, but only of the mad spaces between the stars.

Out of the unimaginable blackness beyond the gangrenous glare of that cold flame, out of the tartarean leagues through which that oily river rolled uncanny, unheard, and unsuspected, there flopped rhythmically a horde of tame, trained, hybrid winged things that no sound eye could ever wholly grasp, or sound brain ever wholly remember. They were not altogether crows, nor moles, nor buzzards, nor ants, nor vampire bats, nor decomposed human beings, but something I cannot and must not recall. They flopped limply along, half with their webbed feet and half with their membranous wings; and as they reached the throng of celebrants the cowled figures seized and mounted them, and rode off one by one along the reaches of that unlighted river, into pits and galleries of panic where poison springs feed frightful and undiscoverable cataracts.

The old spinning woman had gone with the throng, and the old man remained only because I had refused when he motioned me to seize an animal and ride like the rest. I saw when I staggered to my feet that the amorphous flute-player had rolled out of sight, but that two of the beasts were patiently standing by. As I hung back, the old man produced his stylus and tablet and wrote that he was the true deputy of my fathers who had founded the Yule worship in this ancient place; that it had been decreed I should come back; and that the most secret mysteries were yet to be performed. He wrote this in a very

ancient hand, and when I still hesitated he pulled from his loose robe a seal ring and a watch, both with my family arms, to prove that he was what he said. But it was a hideous proof, because I knew from old papers that that watch had been buried with my great-great-great-great-grandfather in 1698.

Presently the old man drew back his hood and pointed to the family resemblance in his face, but I only shuddered, because I was sure that the face was merely a devilish waxen mask. The flopping animals were now scratching restlessly at the lichens, and I saw that the old man was nearly as restless himself. When one of the things began to waddle and edge away, he turned quickly to stop it; so that the suddenness of his motion dislodged the waxen mask from what should have been his head. And then, because that nightmare's position barred me from the stone staircase down which we had come, I flung myself into the oily underground river that bubbled somewhere to the caves of the sea; flung myself into that putrescent juice of earth's inner horrors before the madness of my screams could bring down upon me all the charnel legions these pest-gulfs might conceal.

AT THE hospital they told me I had been found half-frozen in Kingsport Harbor at dawn, clinging to the drifting spar that accident sent to save me. They told me I had taken the wrong fork of the hill road the night before, and fallen over the cliffs at Orange Point—a thing they deducted from prints found in the snow. There was nothing I could say, because everything was wrong. Everything was wrong, with the broad window showing a sea of roofs in which only about one in five was ancient, and the sound of trolleys and motors in the streets below. They insisted that this was Kingsport, and I could not deny it.

When I went delirious at hearing that the hospital stood near the old churchyard on Central Hill, they sent me to St. Mary's Hospital in Arkham, where I could have better care. I liked it there, for the doctors were broadminded, and even lent me their influence in obtaining the carefully sheltered copy of Alhazred's objectionable "Necronomicon" from the library of Miskatonic University. They said something about a "psychosis," and agreed that I had better get my harassing obsessions off my mind.

So I read again that hideous chapter, and shuddered doubly because it was indeed not new to me. I had seen it before, let footprints tell what they might; and where it was I had seen it were best forgotten. There was no one—in waking hours—who could remind me of it; but my dreams are filled with terror, because of phrases I dare not quote. I dare quote only one paragraph, put into such English as I can make from the awkward Low Latin.

"The nethermost caverns," wrote the mad Arab, "are not for the fathoming of eyes that see; for their marvels are strange and terrific. Cursed the ground where dead thoughts live new and oddly bodied, and evil the mind that is held by no head. Wisely did Ibn Schacabac say that happy is the tomb where no wizard hath lain, and happy the town at night whose wizards are all in ashes. For it is of old rumor that the soul of the devil-bought hastes not from his charnel clay, but fats and instructs *the very worm that gnaws;* till out of corruption horrid life springs, and the dull scavengers of earth wax crafty to vex it and swell monstrous to plague it. Great holes secretly are digged where earth's pores ought to suffice, and things have learnt to walk that ought to crawl."

PHANTOMS

by Laurence R. D'Orsay

THE only man who knew the story was Carson, and he never told it. He was as hard-headed a man as you could find in the country and his pride was that he wasn't superstitious.

When Sellars called on him that evening he left the monstrous tale in Carson's breast. True, he repudiated, ten minutes later, the confession made, evidently, in a moment of weakness.

"You can't go back on your statements like that, Sellars," the physician said quietly. "Even if the hop has so undermined your system that it's but a matter of weeks, you're not insane. You are as sane as I am, and you're lying to me when you try to get out of it like that."

"Swear to me that you'll never tell —never tell. All made up of whole cloth—spun you a yarn—don't know why. All rot, Carson, old man. Promise—to forget it!"

"I would promise, and welcome," said the other slowly, "if it weren't for the victims. The child, man! You know, Sellars, your case is serious. If you die with that on your soul! I guess I'm old-fashioned and all that; but the child, apart from the—the other thing—abandoned, as you say, in the woods! See a priest—let me call in Father Quinn. My God, Sellars!"

Sellars laughed, a trifle uneasily. The doctor's blue eyes widened with horror.

"You won't see a priest, Sellars?" he pleaded.

"No, damn the priest—damn you, if you believe the rot I gave you a while back. I made it up—always was a bit theatrical—I lied—"

"You lie now, Sellars, you know that"; and the keen eyes bored to the shrunken soul rattling in the frail body before him. "Stop lying, man. You are about to die; it's no use blinking the fact. Common decency, even if you have no respect for religion—"

With an oath, the other turned on his heel and slammed the door behind him.

YES, Martha was dead and gone. There was no doubt about that. Yet, as Sellars glanced uneasily about the one little room comprizing the old ramshackle cabin in the midst of the marsh, he had an eery sensation that she was present. He had a feeling that she was trying to impress her presence on him, that she was vainly trying to communicate with him.

This was the third day that he had passed alone in the old cabin since Martha died. But three days—they seemed like years. Like years it seemed since he had returned in his

skiff from Vallejo to his home above the inlet and Martha, noting his drunken state, had started the argument.

It had degenerated into the usual squabble, for both were of uncertain temper. Martha, womanlike, seeing that she was being worsted in the argument, had pushed him through the door of the cabin, causing him to land full-length in the sticky mud outside.

Then he had risen in a towering rage and, grabbing a heavy iron bar, had dealt a terrific blow at his wife's head, expecting to see her dodge as on many similar occasions. But she had slipped and lost her balance, and with a crunching, sickening sound the bar had descended on her unprotected head. He could see her now, lying where she had dropped without a cry or groan.

Horrified and frightened, he had poured cold water on her upturned face, had slapped and chafed her wrists. Finally, in a frenzy of terror, he had placed his hand over her heart. There was no movement, not even a flutter. Martha was dead, her head crushed in by the frightful blow.

He had sought the hypodermic needle again, and his fears had fallen from him. He had picked up the baby and taken it to the outskirts of Suisun. Someone would find it and give it a home.

But as the drug gradually wore off, he had fallen a prey to remorse and fear, and at last had fled to Carson for comfort and counsel. And, God pity him, he had not had the courage to go through with it!

Sellars straightened up and glanced around. To his fervid imagination, a thousand pairs of eyes seemed watching him. The leaves on the trees and bushes near by, rustling in the wind, sounded like accusing voices. A crane rosé from the swamp with a mighty flapping of wings and a shrill, harsh cry, causing Sellars' flesh to creep and his hair to stand on end. What if the crane had seen, and was now trying to attract man's attention to the murderous deed?

Martha's body had been disposed of in a shallow grave quickly dug in the soft, muddy ground. It was covered over with damp earth. Sellars breathed a sigh of relief. All the same, if only the crane hadn't seen!

How gloomy and depressing the old cabin seemed! The very air seemed weighted with an unearthly, deathly chill. And those unseen eyes — watching — watching his every movement. . .

He had been aware of their presence for two years and more, long before Martha died. The doctor had said "hallucinations," but Sellars knew better. At night, out at his lines or setting his nets, he had been conscious of ghostly whispers and strange murmurs, which quivered in the air about him. He could not shake off that strange sensation that invisible eyes were watching him out of the misty, damp air that hovered over the swamp.

The mysterious sounds were more noticeable in foggy or rainy weather; in fact, several times, when out late at night, he had seen mistlike shapes dogging his footsteps. He had at last come to the firm conviction that the air around the swamp was inhabited by a peculiar group of phantoms, whose forms were almost visible in damp or foggy weather.

Foggy, stormy, gloomy! And the wind this evening whistled across the swamp with a mournful intensity, like a legion of demons turned adrift, seeking for some human being to destroy. Every moment Sellars, sitting there, expected to see the cabin torn apart and its debris scattered broadcast over the swamp. The rain came down in torrents, dripping down the chimney and threatening to extinguish the small fire in the open hearth.

If only Martha were not buried so close to the house! Again and again

he felt certain that some one was trying to force open the door. Tiptoeing over, he listened intently. He imagined he could see misty shapes peering in through the solitary window. A damp chill was in the room, despite the fire.

He rolled a barrel of water against the door, then fastened a large sheet of cardboard across the window. The misty shapes, furious that their view was obstructed, pointed ghostly, accusing fingers in his direction.

THE night wore on, and Sellars was unafraid. He pulled a writing tablet towards him and began to write, laughing at the foiled phantom shapes outside.

He dozed off to sleep, only to awake with a shriek of terror and that strange, intangible feeling that the house was surrounded by invisible beings, ready to pounce upon him the moment he stepped outside. And then a cold perspiration stood on his forehead. What if the piece of cardboard which he had fastened across the window should fail to resist their attempts to force it?

With terrified eyes he glanced across the room. The cardboard still protected the window. But Martha seemed to be in the room; and so strong was this feeling that, although he could not see her, he caught himself speaking to her and waiting for her to answer. She seemed, somehow, to be in the room sewing or knitting in the old, familiar way; and yet she was buried in the shallow grave outside the cabin. . . .

What a gloomy place the cabin was! He saw something on the threshold, but as he looked again it was not there. He searched every nook and corner of the room, even going down on his knees and looking under the bed. He could discover nothing. Finally he decided that it must have been the cat; it was now purring lazily before the hearth, and he gave it a vicious kick and began to prepare hot coffee.

But the wind began to rise, and the rain beat against the window pane in a steady downpour. A chill crept over Sellars; the cat was mewing eerily. At times the cabin rocked and swayed with the fury of the gale. Again he was sure that Martha was in the room —quite close to him now—seeking to communicate with him.

There was a loud rapping at the door, a loud, insistent knocking, as if some one demanded admittance.

In a voice trembling with fear, Sellars asked who was there. No response came, but the latch clicked as if some one were trying to open the door.

Panic-stricken, Sellars sat at the table, muttering incoherently to himself. He noticed that the cat, with arched back and hair standing straight in the air, dived under the bed and continued to spit and mew.

Again that knocking on the door, making it quiver on its frail hinges. Then the bar that secured it on the inside began to move slowly out of its socket!

Sellars half attempted to rise from his chair, with the intention of holding the bar in its place, but he was powerless to move. The cat gave a wild screech and dashed through the flame and smoke of the hearth up the wide chimney.

A loud click of the latch, and the door swung open. With eyes starting from their sockets, Sellars, nearly crazed with terror, watched several misty shapes circling round the threshold. They changed and drifted in the wind like phantom forms of fog or smoke.

The desperate man's hand flew for the revolver in his hip-pocket. As he grasped the weapon, the foremost of the phantoms glided up to where he sat. His brain reeled as he felt a pair of ice-cold hands encircle his wrists. His hands were held as in a vise.

Sellars tried to struggle to his feet, but other hands forced him with irresistible pressure back into the chair. His elbow knocked the lamp from the table. It overturned on the floor; and at that moment the fire on the hearth went out, leaving the room in utter darkness.

The rain and wind had suddenly ceased. The cat, on the roof, was mewing in an agony of terror. Far across the swamp, the bell of one of the channel buoys sent out a mournful sound, like the bell in the belfry of a church as a funeral approaches.

The chill, clammy hands that encircled Sellars' wrists with a slow, steady pressure forced the muzzle of his revolver against his forehead. He tried desperately to resist, but he was as putty in the grip of those unseen hands.

And then, in a far corner of the room, he saw Martha. And her face was red with blood from the wound he had inflicted.

Sellars made a desperate effort to rise from his chair. The thought flashed through his mind that if he could reach her he would be saved. But in the grip of those uncanny, unearthly forces he was powerless.

The muzzle of the revolver was forced back slowly, irresistibly. Now, like the finger of fate, it pointed directly at his forehead.

A pressure on his finger, a flash of fire before his eyes! Martha swayed forward as if to embrace—drifting through space, drifting, drift—. . . .

"SUICIDE," said Carson, at the inquest. "A constitution undermined by long and excessive use of alcohol and drugs. Brain snapped. Undoubtedly he was already insane when he killed his wife."

"But what about the statement in deceased's handwriting, containing what purported to be a record of the happenings of the hours immediately preceding his death?" asked the coroner. "That seems rational enough."

"Alcohol and drugs," said the doctor shortly. "Hallucinations."

And he turned abruptly, as if he were glad to have done with the case. For Carson was as hard-headed a man as you could find in the country, and his pride was that he wasn't superstitious.

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A gripping tale of werewolves and the powers of evil

WATCH FOR THIS STORY IN WEIRD TALES

THE EYRIE

IN OUR November issue we asked the readers for an expression of opinion on horror stories of the necrophilic type, and promised that we would take the word of the readers as a command. Many letters have been received in answer to the request, and more are coming in by every mail.

Up to date, those who want horror stories have distinctly the advantage, but many of them qualify their demand for thrillers by saying that the horror stories must not be disgusting. Some of our readers want the magazine to drip with gore ("the scarier they are, the better I like them," writes Bessie Douglas, of Portland, Maine); but these are in a small minority. As near as the editor can make out from the expression of opinion so far received, the readers of WEIRD TALES don't want anything nauseating, and yet they do want to read eery, thrilling and bizarre tales of the Edgar Allan Poe type—tales such as they cannot get in any other magazine. But the question is still open. WEIRD TALES belongs to you, the readers, and your opinions will be eagerly welcomed.

Many of our readers, even while casting their votes against "bloody" stories, express the fear that the tales in this magazine may cease to be weird, and that the very quality that gives it its distinction will disappear.

Randall Campbell, of Henryetta, Oklahoma, writes: "When I buy a *Radio News* I want it to be about radio. The same with WEIRD TALES—I want it to be *weird.*"

The same idea is expressed by C. A. Corson, of Chicago, who writes: "I am heartily in favor of publishing anything that savors of the terrible, weird, occult or unreal. To make WEIRD TALES absolutely distinctive in this era of stereotyped fiction, and in order to interest a great many readers, it seems to me that it is imperative, in order not to mislead the readers of your magazine, to make it really a magazine of weird, uncanny fiction, different from any other. I believe also that a large number of readers today are surfeited with sea stories, western yarns, etc., etc., etc., and that a large clientele will back you up in making WEIRD TALES live up to its title. Keep your magazine up to what the name implies."

A voice on the other side is raised by W. S. Charles, of Pendleton, Oregon, who writes: "I herewith put in my oar against 'horror stories,' particularly that class that are somber and in the main vicious, beyond the realm of reason. It is bad for you from a circulation point; for when a reader for the first time picks up your magazine and reads such a story, while it for the moment fascinates him or her, to later cause insomnia, you can count on that

party next month to pass you up for something that does not leave bad night dreams. And I am not speaking of the personal effect upon myself—for you couldn't budge my nerves with a sledge hammer.''

Well, readers, we are going to keep the magazine weird, but NOT disgusting. The votes for the necrophilic tales were so few that we are satisfied you want us to keep the magazine clean. Stories of the Poe type—scary stories—spooky stories—mystic and occult fiction—thrilling mysteries—bizarre crime stories—all these will find place in WEIRD TALES, but those of you who want tales of blood-drinking and cannibalism will have to make your opinion register a great deal more strongly than you have yet done before we let down the bars to this type of stories. We repeat here what we have said before: WEIRD TALES belongs to you, the readers, and we will be guided by your wishes. That is the reason we ask you, each month, to write in to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, and let us know which story is your favorite. We want you to point out the particular story that you like best.

The readers' favorite story in the November issue is ''The Brain in the Jar,'' by Norman Elwood Hammerstrom and R. F. Searight. This story received nearly half of all the votes cast, as well as a number of votes for second choice. In the choice of stories, at least, you, the readers, have selected a distinctively ''weird'' tale as your favorite. ''Teoquitla the Golden,'' by Ramón de las Cuevas, comes second in the balloting. For a time this held the lead in the poll, but then the votes began to pour in for ''The Brain in the Jar,'' landing this unusual tale in first place.

A remarkable feature of the balloting is the wide range of stories that have drawn votes for first place. Two of the authors themselves took a hand in the voting. Arthur J. Burks, whose story, ''Thus Spake the Prophetess,'' ran high in the poll, cast his own vote for ''Teoquitla the Golden,'' and Norman Elwood Hammerstrom, co-author with R. F. Searight of ''The Brain in the Jar,'' also cast his own vote for ''Teoquitla the Golden.''

Lieutenant Burks accompanies his vote with an interesting letter of comment on the November issue:

''I like the new magazine, received this afternoon, and instead of knocking out a thousand words or so this evening as is my wont, I lighted the old corncob and began to read. Ramón de las Cuevas is a writing *hombre.* Please convey my respects to him. This is humbler than it sounds, I assure you! I liked his story best of the twelve I have read so far. After these, in the order named, I like 'The Brain in the Jar,' which is exceptionally good, 'Adventure of Souls,' 'The Desert Lich,' and 'A Soulless Resurrection.' 'The Tower of Silence' gets a vote, too. I like the careful workmanship of Brosnatch's cover and art headings. Hold on to that boy! Also keep 'Ramón of the Caves' busy—he knows his stuff! His description of the old beggar woman took me bodily back to the West Indies. In any case my vote for the best story goes to him. May I also vote 'yes' for horror stories.''

Everett McNeil, of New York City, in explaining his vote for ''The Desert Lich'' by Frank Belknap Long, Jr., writes: ''A good tale of this kind is a difficult thing to write. It is difficult to give it just the proper perspective, so that no part stands out with disproportionate prominence; to put into it that subtle feel of horror and weirdness that attracts, instead of repulses, the imagination, that makes the reader shudder, and yet read on. It is difficult for the author, when picturing the weird or horrible, to exercise a proper repression, to go so far and then to stop, leaving the rest to the

readers' imagination. These difficulties I think Mr. Long has overcome with unusual skill. In addition, I like the way he has put his story into words. There is personality in his style. In short, I think this story an unusually good tale of its kind, and I feel that it is no more than fair that, when he does a good piece of work, he should be told that it is good work. Hence this letter. Congratulations on your 'new' WEIRD TALES. Success!!"

We are always glad to get such letters as this. But we are equally glad to get letters of frank criticism, for it is only by constant touch with you, the readers, that we can know what type of stories you want to read. We will give you what you want. And do not fear that the magazine is going to lose its "weird" quality merely by being kept clean. Read "Out of the Long Ago," "The Ocean Leech," and "Luisma's Return," in this issue, and you will see that the magazine completely lives up to its name.

The new, handy form of the magazine seems to have taken the fancy of the readers. It is half the page size of the old WEIRD TALES but has double the number of pages.

Elwin J. Owens, of Cloquet, Minnesota, comments briefly: "Several changes you have made in the magazine are highly commendable. To enumerate briefly: "Its size is far more convenient, whether on the reading table, placed in a traveling grip, or tucked in one's pocket; the cover page (as are the headings and tailpieces) by Mr. Andrew Brosnatch is thoroughly in keeping with the other excellent features; your table of contents is considerably more attractive to the reader groping for entertainment, on account of its not being so congested, and being in the front, handy for the searching eye; the stories—twenty-two in all, variety, and not a poor one—comprize a masterful piece of editorial art; and the headings add much to the balance. WEIRD TALES is now a 'Magazine Distinctive'."

Some of our readers write that they have had considerable trouble in obtaining copies of WEIRD TALES on the news stands. If you are one of these, please ask your news dealer to order a supply of this magazine from his branch of the American News Company.

Several readers have asked us to give them more stories (such as "The Brain in the Jar") which combine both science and horror. Others ask for more electrical stories. To those readers who want electrical stories we will call attention to "Radio V-Rays," a remarkable pseudo-scientific story by Jan Dirk in the March issue; Will Smith's utterly fascinating "Wanderlust by Proxy" in next month's issue; and "The Electronic Plague," by Edward Hades, which is coming soon. Also, J. Schlossel, author of "Invaders From Outside" in this issue, has written a remarkable radio story for you, called "A Message From Space." Such stories plumb the future with the eye of prophecy, and the vision of these authors may stimulate the imagination of inventors and scientists to the practical benefit of mankind, just as Jules Verne's remarkable tales bore rich fruit in actual inventions made by readers of his fantastic fiction. Norman Elwood Hammerstrom, in a letter to The Eyrie, expresses this thought when he says: "All things are possible. We live in a weird universe, whose surface we have barely scratched. The wildest miracles are perfectly possible. As people learn more and more, such stories as mine ('The Brain in the Jar') will seem more plausible."

And don't forget to mail in your vote for the best story in this issue. Send it to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 325 N. Capitol Ave., Indianapolis. We want to know what stories you prefer, so that we can give you more of the same kind.

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INVADERS FROM OUTSIDE

(*Continued from Page* 16)

down in a cloudburst. The invaders were cut off absolutely from all reinforcements from their own kind on No. 5. Knowing that they were doomed, they maneuvered their cubes to form a protecting wall between them and their foes. The defenders became the aggressors. They began storming the barricade. The invaders were bunched together behind the cubes waiting.

A LOW hum came from behind the cubes. It rose and rose. It came from the throats of the two-legged invaders. The sound was not displeasing. It gathered volume every instant. Though it was not very melodious at first, still it teemed with pathos. One by one the invaders joined in the song. It hinted of a mighty, daring attempt and of a bitter failure. It was their death song.

Meanwhile the invaders on No. 5 who had, through their great knowledge of stellar mechanics, guided their own world from out of the depths of space, were now working desperately in their attempt to install machines that would enable them to swing No. 5 out of its orbit. They had failed in their attempt to conquer the Confederation, and their only wish was to take No. 5 from out of the solar system and escape.

They were installing the machines underground. They threw up shield after shield to protect themselves from the death-dealing rays. Two out of every five machines that they installed were destroyed by the twin jets of light.

The number of invaders left on No. 5 was very small. In desperation they started the machines. The speed of No. 5 began to increase, and she was

rotating faster, too. Something had gone amiss. The jets of light, in destroying nearly half of their machinery, had upset their calculations. The two-legged invaders on No. 5 were seen to run wildly about. They tried to stop the machinery that they had started, but somehow could not do so.

The rotation of No. 5 became still swifter. Hundreds of thousands of cubes were hurled into the heavens by the centrifugal force of that rotating world. The Confederacy picked off as many as it could with the crossing jets of light, but some managed to escape and were seen heading for Neptune. No. 5 was breaking up! The centrifugal force had become greater than its power of gravitation. Huge masses were seen to detach themselves and go whirling off into space.

Saturn, the largest body in the vicinity, was seen to draw fully one-third of the matter that had composed No. 5 in its general direction. The powerful gravitational force of the Sun drew many large pieces, some of which were more than eight hundred miles in diameter, toward himself. The Moon, circling the Earth, came from behind its protection and bore the brunt of a stream of small pieces that struck its surface. Life there was instantly destroyed. The surface of the Moon became partially incandescent. Parts of the Earth, thanks to the Moon, escaped practically uninjured. But there was only a wild kind of life existing there. Jupiter received its share. Two large fragments went hurtling toward Mars.

In destroying No. 5 the invaders had destroyed themselves and nearly all the life on the solar system. The survivors of the Twelve Confederate Worlds made their way to the Earth, the least injured of the planets, and there they began anew, in a strange environment, to build the civilization that had been wrecked by the invaders from beyond the Milky Way.

THE END

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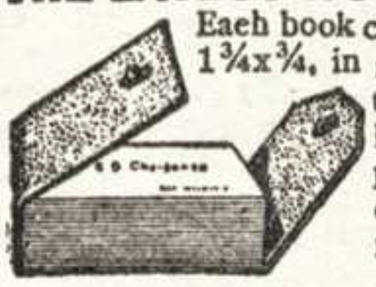

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THE VALLEY OF TEEHEEMEN

(*Continued from Page* 156)

is the most powerful of the men of the hollow mountain. All women of the mountain belong to him. You belong to Morop now. Once Walum would have claimed you, but Walum is dead and he was the friend of Morop."

Virginia noted the open doorway and made a quick effort to reach it. Once in the gloom she hoped to be able to outrun the beast or elude him in the darkness. Morop apparently had anticipated some such move, for as the girl made the attempt he sprang, catlike, in front of her and grasped her. He crushed her time after time to his body as she fought and screamed in terror.

The crack of two revolver shots in rapid succession suddenly awoke the echoes of the surrounding caverns. Virginia felt the giant form holding her crumple and distinguished the spurt of Morop's warm life blood upon her neck.

"Quick, Virginia," called a voice from without.

"Benton!" she cried joyfully.

"We must run," he said quickly, grasping her hand and pulling her after him.

Together they fled into the darkness beyond the village of stone huts. As they ran they could hear the shouts of the warriors of Morop, who had come from their huts to investigate the source of the unusual reports.

"Holton and a band are waiting a short distance from here," said Benton.

Through the darkness they hurried as best they could. Their progress was uninterrupted, and in the distance Virginia soon detected a glow of light from a hundred torches.

"Holton, Otter and the Duros forces," Benton explained. "They

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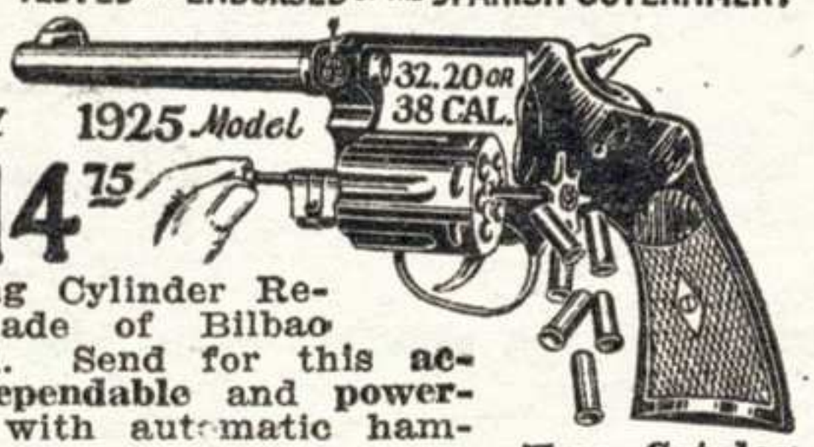

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thought it best for one of us to enter the village and find out if possible where you were before attacking the place. I arrived at the time the big fellow entered your prison."

"Just in time to save me," she asserted. "I can never repay you."

"You could, Virginia," he said, "but I dare not think of ever assessing the price."

"How am I to know?" she queried.

Their eyes met in the faint light.

"Virginia," he said, "I love you. I had hoped to be able to tell you some time, but did not intend to now, for fear you might think that I was anxious to take advantage of our present situation."

For answer her hand clasped his a little tighter.

"I am glad," she said, "to know that you do."

Into the circle of light the two made their way. Holton and Otter advanced from the group of waiting warriors and expressed their delight over the rescue. Benton was required to explain immediately how he had accomplished the feat single-handed.

"We must keep close watch," said Holton. "We are at a point where we can block the progress of any parties through this portion of the cavern. We could arrest any pursuing parties, and there may be such as soon as the death of the man in the stone hut is discovered."

"The cavern widens to a quarter of a mile, a little farther from here," Benton explained. "It is there that the village of the mountain men begins."

"In the morning," Holton continued, "we will march through and if they oppose our passage we will fight our way past them."

Benton then turned again to Virginia.

"We returned today from our trip to the plane," he explained. "When

we learned that you had been captured by the strange inhabitants of this hollow mountain, we immediately planned to rescue you. We have three hundred warriors with us. Other than our own rifles and revolvers we have distributed the remainder of the weapons among Gomo, Duros and their followers. We taught them to use the weapons on our return trip from the plane. Duros learned in an hour's time. Gomo and Duros, with this force of men, will accompany us not only through the mountain but as far as we need their services. Upon getting out of here we shall seek the coast at once and obtain definite knowledge of our location."

"I want to get some of my other clothing," said Virginia. "The mountain brute nearly tore to pieces the ones that I am wearing."

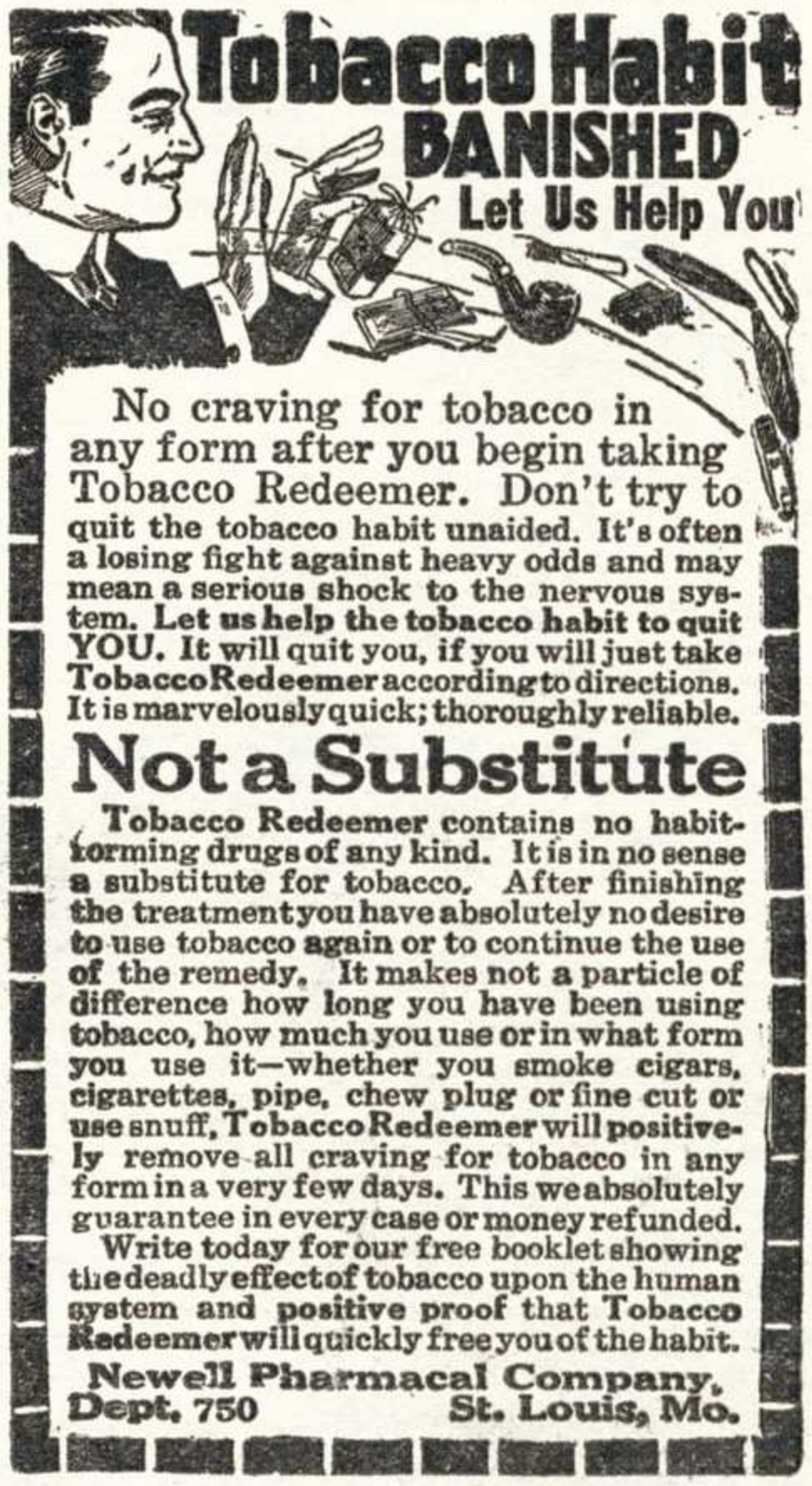
"All of your things have been brought," said Benton. "Gala and two other native women are with the party. I shall lead you to them, as they are taking care of your things."

Holton and Otter held a conference with Gomo and Duros in which they were later joined by Benton.

"We will camp here all night and proceed in the morning," said Benton. "Virginia informs me that there is good daylight when we get farther into the mountain. Leave a strong guard so that we will not be surprized, and we can get some much needed rest."

The plan was followed and the night was spent without incident. In the morning the forces of warriors and carriers began moving forward through the mountain toward the place where Morop's village stood. A short distance from the village a crowd of the Morop forces came advancing to meet the warriors of Duros and the white party.

"There's no use to wait for action



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at close quarters," said Benton. "Open on them now."

Twenty rifles in the hands of the white men, Duros, Gomo and other warriors began to crack. Dozens of the advancing mountain men fell to the floor of the cavern. Their followers, however, were persistent and kept coming on, to fall as their comrades had fallen. Nearly a hundred of them had been stretched upon the cavern floor before the remainder broke and fled.

"Duros will be king of the hollow mountain, too," cried the chieftain as he viewed the flight of the mountain men.

The advance continued until the stone village was reached. The inhabitants had fled, and no further opposition was encountered. For a time the expedition halted to survey the wonders of the opening in the mountain top.

The march through the mountain then continued. The light afforded by the opening in the top of the peak gradually grew dimmer as the expedition advanced. It became necessary to light the torches again. For another two hours the march continued through the gloom of the great cavern.

"Daylight at last!" Benton suddenly exclaimed.

Virginia, who was walking near him, looked ahead and distinguished what appeared to be a spot of light about the size of a saucer. The diameter gradually increased as the party advanced. The opening to the other side of the jungle was finally reached, and the members of the party halted just out of the cavern.

"Out of the Valley of Teeheemen," said Benton.

"Now for the coast and the first ship for home," remarked Otter.

The camp that night was made a

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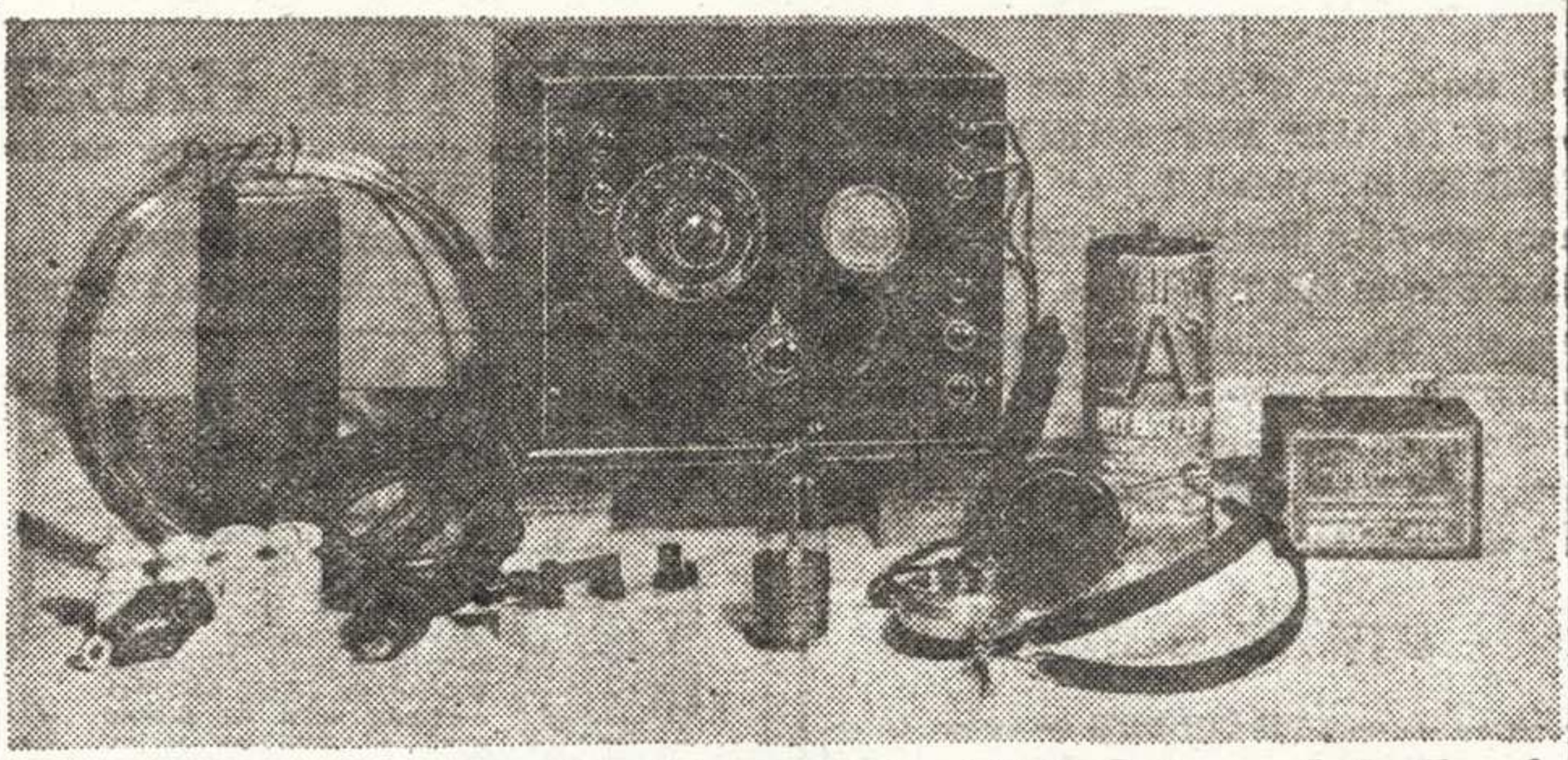

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short distance from the exit of the cavern.

21

TWO weeks later a small steamship plying in the fruit trade between New Orleans and South American ports steamed from the harbor of a small South American port and made toward the open sea.

On the dock stood a solitary, tall figure waving a fragment of a leather trapping. On the deck of the steamer three white men and a young girl stood and watched the lone figure.

As the man on the dock waved, the girl in reply waved her handkerchief. There were tears in her eyes. Benton was at her side.

"Gomo, good-bye," she called.

"Good-bye to the land of Teeheemen," echoed her companion.

THE END

Note.—The first part of this story was published in the November issue of WEIRD TALES *Copy will be mailed to any address on receipt of 25 cents.*

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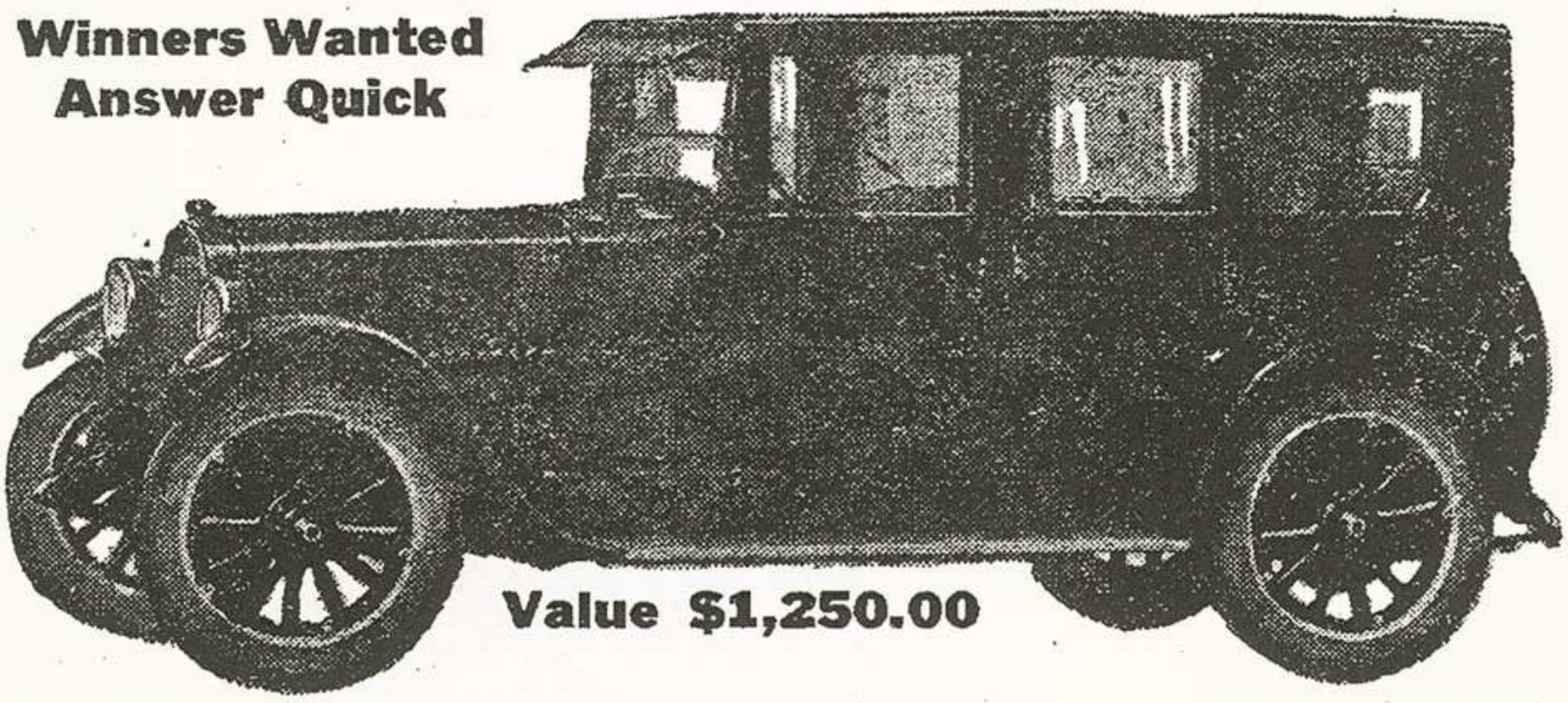

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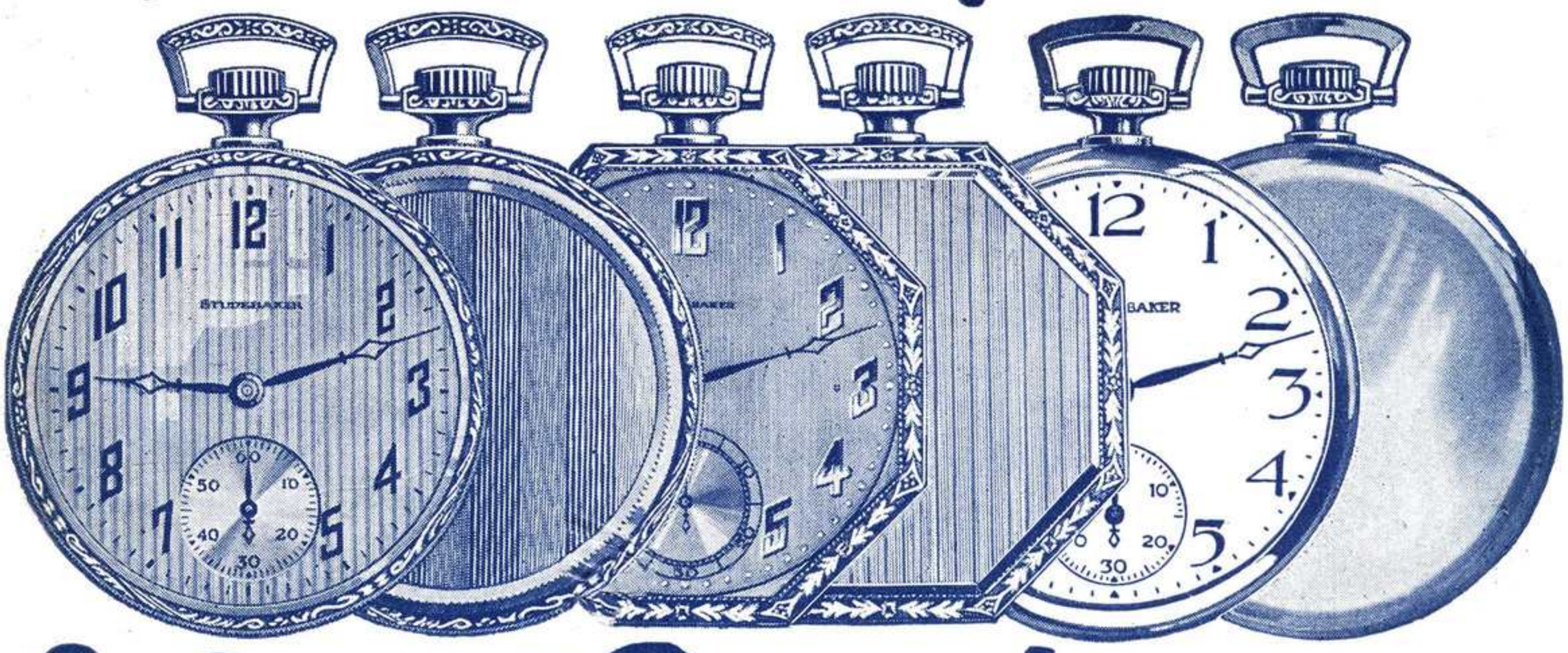

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