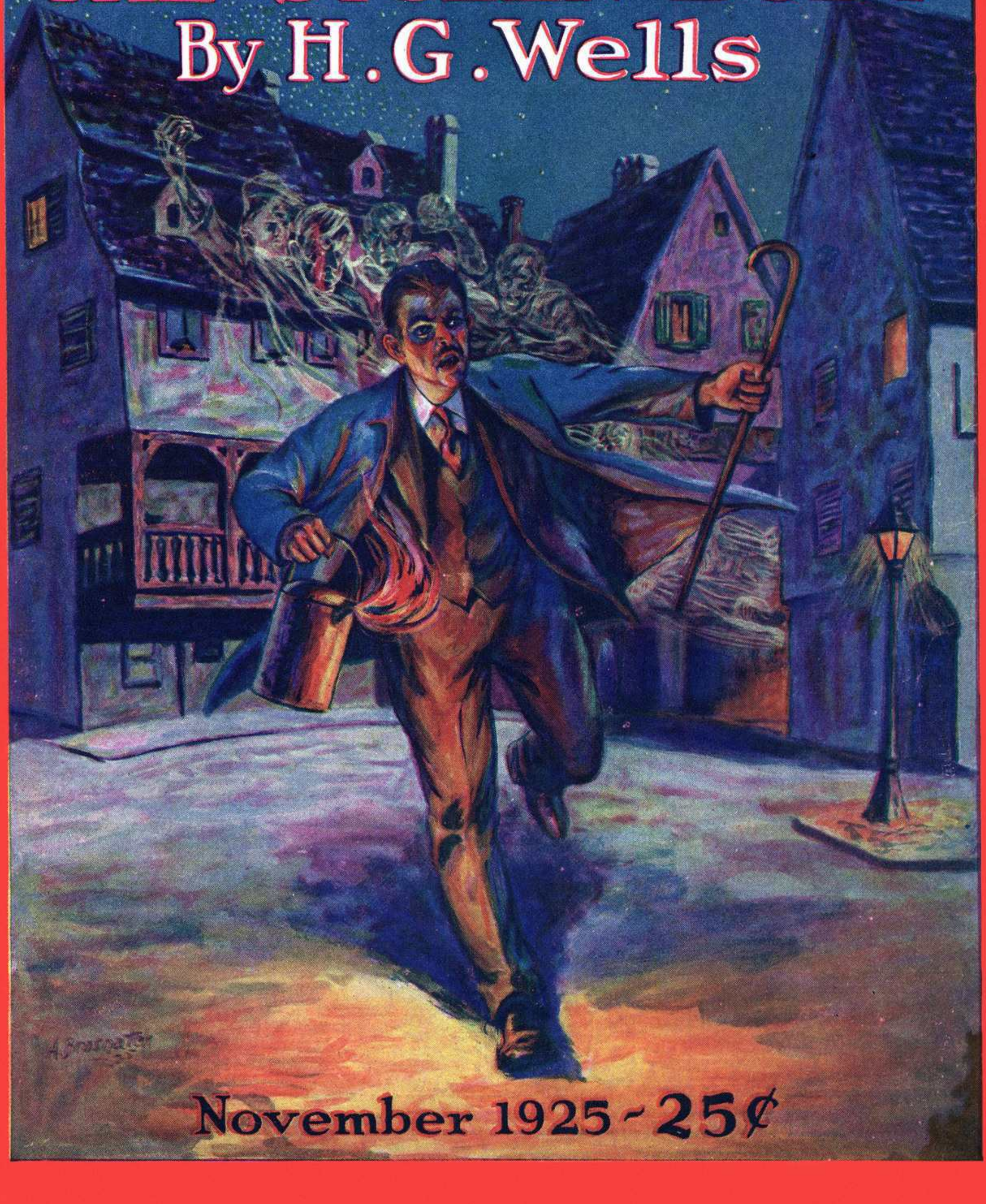
Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

THE STOLEN BODY

By H. G. Wells



November 1925 - 25¢

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Weird Tales

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VOLUME VI NUMBER 5

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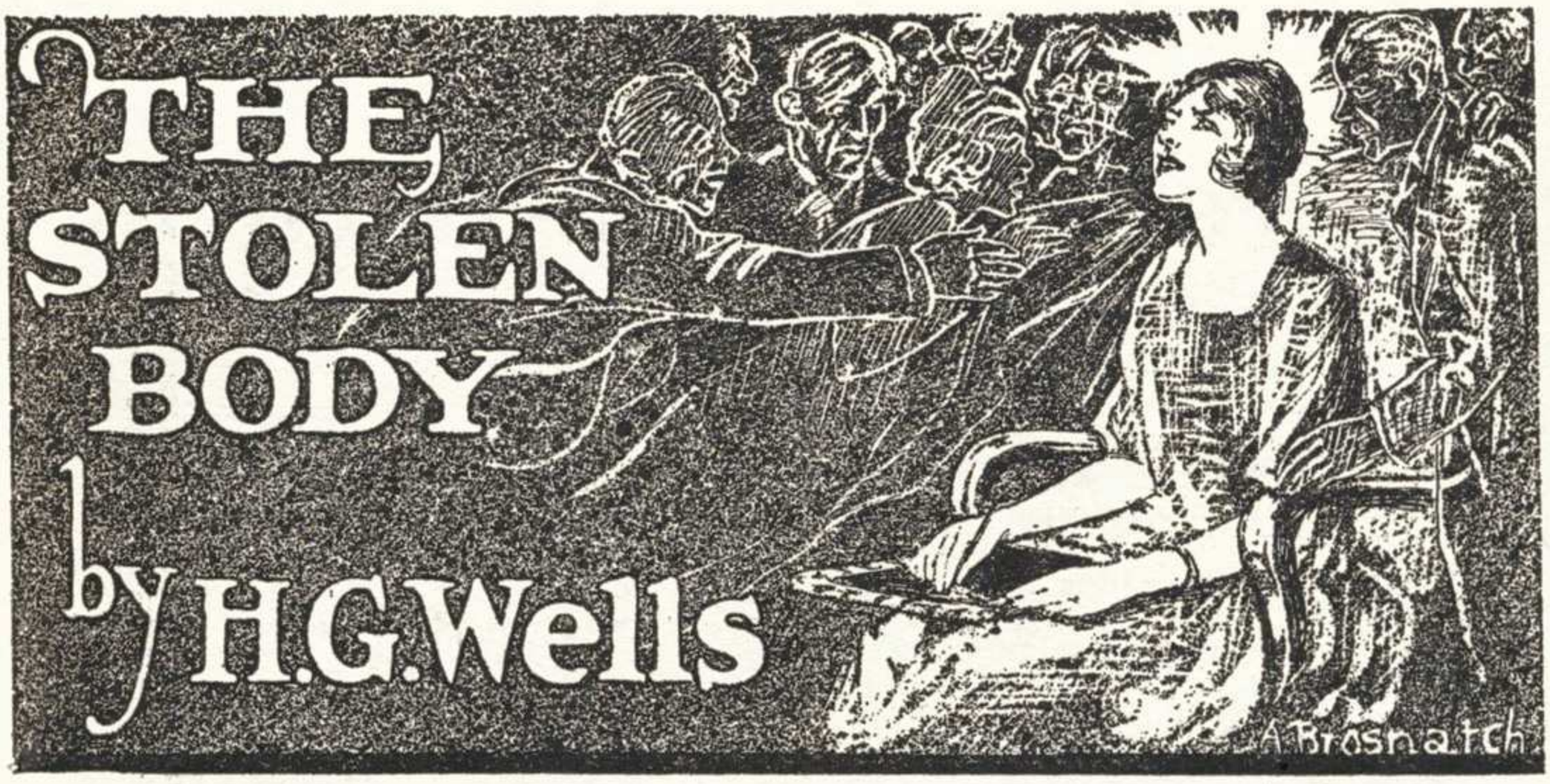


Author of "Men Like Gods," "Outline of History," etc.

MR. BESSEL was the senior partner in the firm of Bessel, Hart and Brown, of St. Paul's Churchyard, and for many years he was well known among those interested in psychical research as a liberal-minded and conscientious investigator. He was an unmarried man, and instead of living in the suburbs, after the fashion of his class, he occupied rooms in the Albany, near Piccadilly. He was particularly interested in the questions of thought transference and of apparitions of the living, and in November, 1896, he commenced a series of experiments in conjunction with Mr. Vincey, of Staple Inn, in order to test the alleged possibility of projecting an apparition of one's self by force of will through space.

Their experiments were conducted in the following manner: At a prearranged hour Mr. Bessel shut himself in one of his rooms in the Albany and Mr. Vincey in his sitting room in Staple Inn, and each then fixed his mind as resolutely as possible on the other. Mr. Bessel had acquired the art of self-hypnotism, and, so far as he could, he attempted first to hypnotize himself and then to project himself as a "phantom of the living" across the intervening space of nearly two miles into Mr. Vincey's apartment. On several evenings this was tried without any satisfactory result, but on the fifth or sixth occasion Mr. Vincey did actually see or imagine he saw an apparition of Mr. Bessel standing in his room. He states that the appearance, although brief, was very vivid and real. He noticed that Mr. Bessel's face was white and his expression anxious, and, moreover, that his hair was disordered. For a moment Mr. Vincey, in spite of his state of expectation, was too surprized to speak or move, and in that moment it seemed to him as though the figure glanced over its shoulder and incontinently vanished.

It had been arranged that an attempt should be made to photograph any fantasm seen, but Mr. Vincey had not the instant presence of mind to snap the camera that lay ready on the table beside him, and when he did so he was too late. Greatly elated, however, even by this partial success, he made a note of the exact time, and at once took a cab to the Albany to inform Mr. Bessel of this result.

He was surprized to find Mr. Bessel's outer door standing open to

the night, and the inner apartments lit and in an extraordinary disorder. An empty champagne magnum lay smashed upon the floor; its neck had been broken off against the inkpot on the bureau and lay beside it. An octagonal occasional table, which carried a bronze statuette and a number of choice books, had been rudely overturned, and down the primrose paper of the wall inky fingers had been drawn, as it seemed for the mere pleasure of defilement. One of the delicate chintz curtains had been violently torn from its rings and thrust upon the fire, so that the smell of its smoldering filled the room. Indeed the whole place was disarranged in the strangest fashion. For a few minutes Mr. Vincey, who had entered sure of finding Mr. Bessel in his easy chair awaiting him, could scarcely believe his eyes, and stood staring helplessly at these unanticipated things.

Then, full of a vague sense of calamity, he sought the porter at the entrance lodge. "Where is Mr. Bessel?" he asked. "Do you know that all the furniture is broken in Mr. Bessel's room?"

The porter said nothing, but, obeying his gestures, came at once to Mr. Bessel's apartment to see the state of affairs. "This settles it," he said, surveying the lunatic confusion. "I didn't know of this. Mr. Bessel's gone off. He's mad!"

He then proceeded to tell Mr. Vincey that about half an hour previously, that is to say, at about the time of Mr. Bessel's apparition in Mr. Vincey's rooms, the missing gentleman had rushed out of the gates of the Albany into Vigo Street, hatless and with disordered hair, and had vanished into the direction of Bond Street. "And as he went past me," said the porter, "he laughed—a sort of gasping laugh, with his mouth open and his eyes glaring—I tell you, sir, he fair scared me!—like this."

According to his imitation it was anything but a pleasant laugh. "He waved his hand, with all his fingers crooked and clawing—like that. And he said, in a sort of fierce whisper, '*Life!*' Just that one word, '*Life!*'"

"Dear me," said Mr. Vincey. "Tut, tut," and "Dear me!" He could think of nothing else to say. He was naturally very much surprized. He turned from the room to the porter and from the porter to the room in the gravest perplexity. Beyond his suggestion that probably Mr. Bessel would come back presently and explain what had happened, their conversation was unable to proceed. "It might be a sudden toothache," said the porter, "a very sudden and violent toothache, jumping on him suddenly-like and driving him wild. I've broken things myself before now in such a case . . ." He thought. "If it was, why should he say '*life*' to me as he went past?"

Mr. Vincey did not know. Mr. Bessel did not return, and at last Mr. Vincey, having done some more helpless staring, and having addressed a note of brief inquiry and left it in a conspicuous position on the bureau, returned in a very perplexed frame of mind to his own premises in Staple Inn. This affair had given him a shock. He was at a loss to account for Mr. Bessel's conduct on any sane hypothesis. He tried to read, but he could not do so; he went for a short walk, and was so preoccupied that he narrowly escaped a cab at the top of Chancery Lane; and at last—a full hour before his usual time—he went to bed. For a considerable time he could not sleep because of his memory of the silent confusion of Mr. Bessel's apartment, and when at length he did attain an uneasy slumber it was at once disturbed by a very vivid and distressing dream of Mr. Bessel.

He saw Mr. Bessel gesticulating wildly, and with his face white and contorted. And, inexplicably mingled with his appearance, suggested perhaps by his gestures, was an intense fear, an urgency to act. He even believed that he heard the voice of his fellow experimenter calling distressfully to him, though at the time he considered this to be an illusion. The vivid impression remained though Mr. Vincey awoke. For a space he lay awake and trembling in the darkness, possessed with that vague, unaccountable terror of unknown possibilities that comes out of dreams upon even the bravest men. But at last he roused himself, and turned over and went to sleep again, only for the dream to return with enhanced vividness.

He awoke with such a strong conviction that Mr. Bessel was in overwhelming distress and need of help that sleep was no longer possible. He was persuaded that his friend had rushed out to some dire calamity. For a time he lay reasoning vainly against this belief, but at last he gave way to it. He arose, against all reason, lit his gas, and dressed, set out through the deserted streets—deserted, save for a noiseless policeman or so and the early news carts—towards Vigo Street to inquire if Mr. Bessel had returned.

But he never got there. As he was going down Long Acre some unaccountable impulse turned him aside out of that street towards Covent Garden, which was just waking to its nocturnal activities. He saw the market in front of him—a queer effect of glowing yellow lights and busy black figures. He became aware of a shouting, and perceived a figure turn the corner by the hotel and run swiftly towards him. He knew at once that it was Mr. Bessel. But it was Mr. Bessel transfigured. He was hatless and disheveled, his collar was torn open, he grasped a bone-handled walking-cane near the ferrule end, and his mouth was pulled awry.

And he ran, with agile strides, very rapidly. Their encounter was the affair of an instant. "Bessel!" cried Vincey.

The running man gave no sign of recognition either of Mr. Vincey or of his own name. Instead, he cut at his friend savagely with the stick, hitting him in the face within an inch of the eye. Mr. Vincey, stunned and astonished, staggered back, lost his footing, and fell heavily on the pavement. It seemed to him that Mr. Bessel leapt over him as he fell. When he looked again Mr. Bessel had vanished, and a policeman and a number of garden porters and salesmen were rushing past towards Long Acre in hot pursuit.

With the assistance of several passers-by—for the whole street was speedily alive with running people—Mr. Vincey struggled to his feet. He at once became the center of a crowd greedy to see his injury. A multitude of voices competed to reassure him of his safety, and then to tell him of the behavior of the madman, as they regarded Mr. Bessel. He had suddenly appeared in the middle of the market screaming *"Life! Life!"* striking left and right with a blood-stained walking-stick, and dancing and shouting with laughter at each successful blow. A lad and two women had broken heads, and he had smashed a man's wrist; a little child had been knocked insensible, and for a time he had driven everyone before him, so furious and resolute had his behavior been. Then he made a raid upon a coffee stall, hurled its paraffin flare through the window of the post office, and fled laughing, after stunning the foremost of the two policemen who had the pluck to charge him.

Mr. Vincey's first impulse was naturally to join in the pursuit of his

friend, in order if possible to save him from the violence of the indignant people. But his action was slow, the blow had half stunned him, and while this was still no more than a resolution came the news, shouted through the crowd, that Mr. Bessel had eluded his pursuers. At first Mr. Vincey could scarcely credit this, but the universality of the report, and presently the dignified return of two futile policemen, convinced him. After some aimless inquiries he returned towards Staple Inn, padding a handkerchief to a now very painful nose.

He was angry and astonished and perplexed. It appeared to him indisputable that Mr. Bessel must have gone violently mad in the midst of his experiment in thought transference, but why that should make him appear with a sad white face in Mr. Vincey's dreams seemed a problem beyond solution. He racked his brains in vain to explain this. It seemed to him at last that not simply Mr. Bessel, but the order of things must be insane. But he could think of nothing to do. He shut himself carefully into his room, lit his fire—it was a gas fire with asbestos bricks—and, fearing fresh dreams if he went to bed, remained bathing his injured face, or holding up books in a vain attempt to read, until dawn. Throughout that vigil he had a curious persuasion that Mr. Bessel was endeavoring to speak to him, but he would not let himself attend to any such belief.

ABOUT dawn, his physical fatigue asserted itself, and he went to bed and slept at last in spite of dreaming. He rose late, unrested and anxious, and in considerable facial pain. The morning papers had no news of Mr. Bessel's aberration—it had come too late for them. Mr. Vincey's perplexities, to which the fever of his bruise added fresh irritation, became at last intolerable, and, after a fruitless visit to the Albany, he went down to St. Paul's Churchyard to Mr. Hart, Mr. Bessel's partner, and, so far as Mr. Vincey knew, his nearest friend.

He was surprized to learn that Mr. Hart, although he knew nothing of the outbreak, had also been disturbed by a vision, the very vision that Mr. Vincey had seen—Mr. Bessel, white and disheveled, pleading earnestly by his gestures for help. That was his impression of the import of his signs. "I was just going to look him up in the Albany when you arrived," said Mr. Hart. "I was so sure of something being wrong with him."

As the outcome of their consultation the two gentlemen decided to inquire at Scotland Yard for news of their missing friend. "He is bound to be laid by the heels," said Mr. Hart. "He can't go on at that pace for long." But the police authorities had not laid Mr. Bessel by the heels. They confirmed Mr. Vincey's overnight experiences and added fresh circumstances, some of an even graver character than those he knew—a list of smashed glass along the upper half of Tottenham Court Road, an attack upon a policeman in Hampstead Road, and an atrocious assault upon a woman. All these outrages were committed between half-past 12 and a quarter to 2 in the morning, and between those hours—and, indeed, from the very moment of Mr. Bessel's first rush from his rooms at half-past 9 in the evening—they could trace the deepening violence of his fantastic career. For the last hour, at least from before 1, that is, until a quarter to 2, he had run amuck through London, eluding with amazing agility every effort to stop or capture him.

But after a quarter of 2 he had vanished. Up to that hour witnesses were multitudinous. Dozens of people had seen him, fled from him or

pursued him, and then things suddenly came to an end. At a quarter to 2 he had been seen running down the Euston Road towards Baker Street, flourishing a can of burning colza oil and jerking splashes of flame therefrom at the windows of the houses he passed. But none of the policemen on Euston Road beyond the Waxwork Exhibition, nor any of those in the side streets down which he must have passed had he left the Euston Road, had seen anything of him. Abruptly he disappeared. Nothing of his subsequent doings came to light in spite of the keenest inquiry.

Here was a fresh astonishment for Mr. Vincey. He had found considerable comfort in Mr. Hart's conviction: "He is bound to be laid by the heels before long," and in that assurance he had been able to suspend his mental perplexities. But any fresh development seemed destined to add new impossibilities to a pile already heaped beyond the powers of his acceptance. He found himself doubting whether his memory might not have played him some grotesque trick, debating whether any of these things could possibly have happened; and in the afternoon he hunted up Mr. Hart again to share the intolerable weight on his mind. He found Mr. Hart engaged with a well-known private detective, but as that gentleman accomplished nothing in this case, we need not enlarge upon his proceedings.

All that day Mr. Bessel's whereabouts eluded an unceasingly active inquiry, and all that night. And all that day there was a persuasion in the back of Mr. Vincey's mind that Mr. Bessel sought his attention, and all through the night Mr. Bessel with a tear-stained face of anguish pursued him through his dreams. And whenever he saw Mr. Bessel in his dreams he also saw a number of other faces, vague but malignant, that seemed to be pursuing Mr. Bessel.

It was on the following day, Sunday, that Mr. Vincey recalled certain remarkable stories of Mrs. Bullock, the medium, who was then attracting attention for the first time in London. He determined to consult her. She was staying at the house of that well-known inquirer, Dr. Wilson Paget, and Mr. Vincey, although he had never met that gentleman before, repaired to him forthwith with the intention of invoking her help. But scarcely had he mentioned the name of Bessel when Dr. Paget interrupted him. "Last night —just at the end," he said, "we had a communication."

He left the room, and returned with a slate on which were certain words written in a handwriting, shaky indeed, but indisputably the handwriting of Mr. Bessel!

"How did you get this?" said Mr. Vincey. "Do you mean—?"

"We got it last night," said Dr. Paget. With numerous interruptions from Mr. Vincey, he proceeded to explain how the writing had been obtained. It appears that in her séances, Mrs. Bullock passes into a condition of trance, her eyes rolling up in a strange way under her eyelids, and her body becoming rigid. She then begins to talk very rapidly, usually in voices other than her own.

At the same time one or both of her hands may become active, and if slates and pencils are provided they will then write messages simultaneously with and quite independently of the flow of words from her mouth. By many she is considered an even more remarkable medium than the celebrated Mrs. Piper. It was one of these messages, the one written by her left hand, that Mr. Vincey now had before him. It consisted of eight words written discon-

nectedly: "George Bessel . . . trial excavn. . . . Baker Street . . . help . . . starvation." Curiously enough, neither Dr. Paget nor the two other inquirers who were present had heard of the disappearance of Mr. Bessel—the news of it appeared only in the evening papers of Saturday—and they had put the message aside with many others of a vague and enigmatical sort that Mrs. Bullock has from time to time delivered.

When Dr. Paget heard Mr. Vincey's story, he gave himself at once with great energy to the pursuit of this clue to the discovery of Mr. Bessel. It would serve no useful purpose here to describe the inquiries of Mr. Vincey and himself; suffice it that the clue was a genuine one, and that Mr. Bessel was actually discovered by its aid.

He was found at the bottom of a detached shaft which had been sunk and abandoned at the commencement of the work for the new electric railway near Baker Street Station. His arm and leg and two ribs were broken. The shaft is protected by a boarding nearly twenty feet high, and over this, incredible as it seems, Mr. Bessel, a stout, middle-aged gentleman, must have scrambled in order to fall down the shaft. He was saturated in colza oil, and the smashed tin lay beside him, but luckily the flame had been extinguished by his fall. And his madness had passed from him altogether. But he was, of course, terribly enfeebled, and at the sight of his rescuers he gave way to hysterical weeping.

In view of the deplorable state of his flat, he was taken to the house of Dr. Hatton in Upper Baker Street. Here he was subjected to a sedative treatment, and anything that might recall the violent crisis through which he had passed was carefully avoided. But on the second day he volunteered a statement.

Since that occasion Mr. Bessel has several times repeated this statement—to myself among other people—varying the details as the narrator of real experiences always does, but never by any chance contradicting himself in any particular. And the statement he makes is in substance as follows.

In order to understand it clearly it is necessary to go back to his experiments with Mr. Vincey before his remarkable attack. Mr. Bessel's first attempts at self-projection, in his experiments with Mr. Vincey, were, as the reader will remember, unsuccessful. But through all of them he was concentrating all his power and will upon getting out of the body—"willing it with all my might," he says. At last, almost against expectation, came success. And Mr. Bessel asserts that he, being alive, did actually, by an effort of will, leave his body and pass into some place or state outside this world.

The release was, he asserts, instantaneous. "At one moment I was seated in my chair, with my eyes tightly shut, my hands gripping the arms of the chair, doing all I could to concentrate my mind on Vincey, and then I perceived myself outside my body—saw my body near me, but certainly not containing me, with the hands relaxing and the head drooping forward on the breast."

Nothing shakes him in his assurance of that release. He describes in a quiet, matter-of-fact way the new sensation he experienced. He felt he had become impalpable—so much he had expected, but he had not expected to find himself enormously large. So, however, it would seem he became. "I was a great cloud—if I may express it that way—anchored to my body. It appeared to me, at first, as if I had discovered a greater self of which the conscious being in my brain was only a little part. I saw the Albany and Piccadilly and Re-

gent Street and all the rooms and places in the houses, very minute and very bright and distinct, spread out below me like a little city seen from a balloon. Every now and then vague shapes like drifting wreaths of smoke made the vision a little indistinct, but at first I paid little heed to them. The thing that astonished me most, and which astonishes me still, is that I saw quite distinctly the insides of the houses as well as the streets, saw little people dining and talking in the private houses, men and women dining, playing billiards, and drinking in restaurants and hotels, and several places of entertainment crammed with people. It was like watching the affairs of a glass hive."

Such were Mr. Bessel's exact words as I took them down when he told me the story. Quite forgetful of Mr. Vincey, he remained for a space observing these things. Impelled by curiosity, he says, he stooped down, and, with the shadowy arm he found himself possessed of, attempted to touch a man walking along Vigo Street. But he could not do so, though his finger seemed to have passed through the man. Something prevented his doing this, but what it was he finds it hard to describe. He compares the obstacle to a sheet of glass.

"I felt as a kitten may feel," he said, "when it goes for the first time to pat its reflection in a mirror." Again and again, on the occasion when I heard him tell this story, Mr. Bessel returned to that comparison of the sheet of glass. Yet it was not altogether a precise comparison, because, as the reader will speedily see, there were interruptions of this generally impermeable resistance, means of getting through the barrier to the material world again. But naturally there is a very great difficulty in expressing these unprecedented impressions in the language of everyday experience.

A thing that impressed him instantly, and which weighed upon him throughout all this experience, was the stillness of this place—he was in a world without sound.

At first Mr. Bessel's mental state was an unemotional wonder. His thought chiefly concerned itself with where he might be. He was out of the body—out of his material body, at any rate—but that was not all. He believes, and I for one believe also, that he was somewhere out of space, as we understand it, altogether. By a strenuous effort of will he had passed out of his body into a world beyond this world, a world undreamt of, yet lying so close to it and so strangely situated with regard to it that all things on this earth are clearly visible both from without and from within in this other world about us. For a long time, as it seemed to him, this realization occupied his mind to the exclusion of all other matters, and then he recalled the engagement with Mr. Vincey, to which this astonishing experience was, after all, but a prelude.

He turned his mind to locomotion in this new body in which he found himself. For a time he was unable to shift himself from his attachment to his earthly carcass. For a time this new strange cloud body of his simply swayed, contracted, expanded, coiled, and writhed with his efforts to free himself, and then quite suddenly the link that bound him snapped. For a moment everything was hidden by what appeared to be whirling spheres of dark vapor, and then through a momentary gap he saw his drooping body collapse limply, saw his lifeless head drop sideways, and found he was driving along like a huge cloud in a strange place of shadowy clouds that had the luminous intricacy of London spread like a model below.

But now he was aware that the fluctuating vapor about him was something more than vapor, and the temerarious excitement of his first essay was shot with fear. For he perceived, at first indistinctly, and then suddenly very clearly, that he was surrounded by *faces!* that each roll and coil of the seeming cloud-stuff was a face. And such faces! Faces of thin shadow, faces of gaseous tenuity. Faces like those faces that glare with intolerable strangeness upon the sleeper in the evil hours of his dreams. Evil, greedy eyes that were full of covetous curiosity, faces with knit brows and snarling, smiling lips; their vague hands clutched at Mr. Bessel as he passed, and the rest of their bodies was but an elusive streak of trailing darkness. Never a word they said, never a sound from the mouths that seemed to gibber. All about they pressed in that dreamy silence, passing freely through the dim mistiness that was his body, gathering ever more numerously about him. And the shadowy Mr. Bessel, now suddenly fear-stricken, drove through the silent, active multitude of eyes and clutching hands.

So inhuman were these faces, so malignant their staring eyes, and shadowy, clawing gestures, that it did not occur to Mr. Bessel to attempt intercourse with these drifting creatures. Idiot phantoms, they seemed, children of vain desire, beings unborn and forbidden the boon of being, whose only expressions and gestures told of the envy and craving for life that was their one link with existence.

It says much for his resolution that, amidst the swarming cloud of these noiseless spirits of evil, he could still think of Mr. Vincey. He made a violent effort of will and found himself, he knew not how, stooping towards Staple Inn, saw Vincey sitting attentive and alert in his arm-chair by the fire.

And clustering also about him, as they clustered ever about all that lives and breathes, was another multitude of these vain voiceless shadows, longing, desiring, seeking some loophole into life.

For a space Mr. Bessel sought ineffectually to attract his friend's attention. He tried to get in front of his eyes, to move the objects in his room, to touch him. But Mr. Vincey remained unaffected, ignorant of the being that was so close to his own. The strange something that Mr. Bessel has compared to a sheet of glass separated them impermeably.

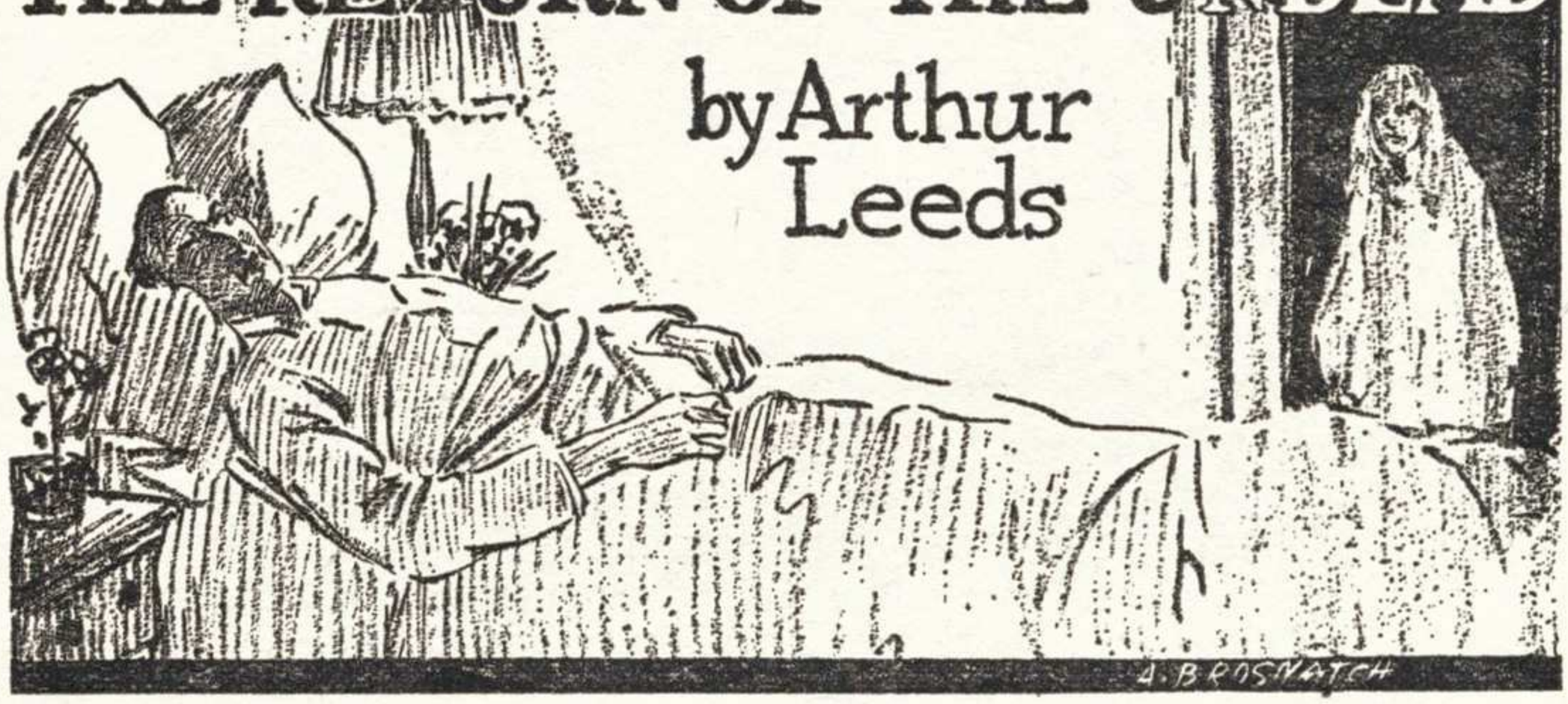
And at last Mr. Bessel did a desperate thing. I have told how that in some strange way he could see not only the outside of a man as we see him, but within. He extended his shadowy hand and thrust his vague black fingers, as it seemed, through the heedless brain.

Then, suddenly, Mr. Vincey started like a man who recalls his attention from wandering thoughts, and it seemed to Mr. Bessel that a little dark-red body situated in the middle of Mr. Vincey's brain swelled and glowed as he did so. Since that experience he has been shown anatomical figures of the brain, and he knows now that this is that useless structure, as doctors call it, the pineal eye. For strange as it will seem to many, we have, deep in our brains—where it cannot possibly see any earthly light—an eye! At the time this, with the rest of the internal anatomy of the brain, was quite new to him. At the sight of its changed appearance, however, he thrust forth his finger, and, rather fearful still of the consequences, touched this little spot. And instantly Mr. Vincey started, and Mr. Bessel knew that he was seen.

(Continued on page 705)

THE RETURN OF THE UNDEAD

by Arthur Leeds



"That the ghastly extremes of agony are endured by man the unit, and never by man the mass—for this let us thank a merciful God."—Edgar Allan Poe, *The Premature Burial.*

TO HAVE died—and yet to be undead! What a horrible thought! And yet, what a fascinating story, albeit one that fairly set every nerve in my pain-racked body trembling with the frightful suggestion contained in it! And to think that this book that I had just finished reading told, in the form of fiction, what the poor devil of a German also had told me as he lay there beside me in shell-scarred "No Man's Land," waiting for his ticket to "go West," only a few months before.

"Yes, there are wehr-wolves," he assured me, solemnly, his face contorted with pain the while he talked—in his own language, which I spoke almost as well as himself; "they are the slaves of the vampires—*the undead*—those beings who claim their victims after death, and who carry on their terrible act of mutilation and desecration"—he paused to cross himself and murmur a word of prayer—"forever and forever! Doubt it not, *Kamerad.* My brother, now, knew a man, an Austrian, who had met a wehr-wolf at midnight, in the forest district of his own homeland. Shortly after that, in our own Black Forest, my brother himself encountered a wehr-wolf. In the following year, my brother died; and as he lay on his death-bed, he called me to his side.

"'Karl,' he declared, laying his hand on my arm, 'remember what I have told you in the past. The undead are as swift in their movements and as immune to harm from human hands as were the valkyries of old. I am marked by a being, a vampire—one of the undead host; an overlord of wehr-wolves—and he—*it*—has given me the sign. Therefore, brother of mine, heed what I say; and, as you love me, carry out this, my last request, even as you hope for the death of a Christian and for salvation after death. After they have buried me, you must take my body out of the ground—on the day of my burial, remember, and before sunset. Do not forget that—*before sunset.* You must have help; Heinrich Arndt will assist you; I have spoken to him as I am now speaking to you. Take me from the coffin, and plunge the old sword of our great-great-grandfather straight through my heart. Leave the sword in my body; bind it there with wire. Then, bind the crucifix in the clasp of both my dead hands. Return

my body to the grave, and rest content that you have done what I most desire, in life and death, for so only can you save me from everlasting torment.' ''

I had been unconscious, from the pain of my wound and from the horrible thirst, when the scouting party picked me up that night. The dead German was left where he had fallen. When I returned to consciousness, it all seemed like a bad dream; and when sober realization of all that I had been through, and all that he had told me, came to me, the poor fellow's story seemed to be only the raving of a thirst-tortured brain. Human vampires! Beings that lived forever upon the blood of others; wehr-wolves; the damnable clan of the undead! Such things never were, I assured myself, in heaven, earth, or hell itself!

And yet, now, in this small-town hospital in New York state, where a sudden attack of appendicitis had been the cause of my enforced confinement to a hospital cot for the second time in my career, I had again come upon that horrible suggestion.

You have read Bram Stoker's *Dracula?* Nothing that Poe, or Doyle, or Ambrose Bierce, or even Marion Crawford ever wrote quite equals it in undiluted horror. It deals—in case you have *not* read it—with the strange and terrible adventures of a young Englishman who goes into the mountains of Carpathia to purchase for the firm by which he is employed a certain extensive estate, belonging to a Count Dracula, a mysterious individual who lives secluded in his ancient castle in the mountains. Dracula is greatly disturbed by the sight of blood, when his guest happens to cut himself, in his host's presence, while shaving. He warns the young man never to let him see blood of any kind, asserting that it has a terrible effect upon him.

Subsequently, his visitor learns to his horror that the count is one of what the author—like my acquaintance of the battlefield—refers to as *the undead.* Throughout the day, Dracula lies in an open coffin in the vaults of the castle; at night—as soon as the sun has set—he, as it were, returns to life, when he becomes, while retaining his human form, a blood-sucking vampire, with the power to climb the outer walls of the castle after the manner of a fly, and to transport himself, as if by magic, from place to place about the countryside.

The "undead," the story explains, nightly seek a victim, from whom, while asleep, they suck the life blood, drawing it from two minute holes which they bite in the throat. When the person eventually dies as a result of this draining of the vital fluid—the operation of sucking the blood is not completed in one night, but continues, perhaps, for a week or more—*the victim, also, after death, becomes one of the horrible society of the undead* and, although buried, nightly comes from the tomb to draw the life blood from others—men, women, and little children—thus always increasing the terrible breed of human vampires and propagating their hellish practises.

MY READING of this absorbing though terrifying book had been greatly disturbed by the unending cries, moans, and uncontrolled expostulations of a child in the outer ward. The little hospital was crowded to the limit, an epidemic of typhoid having broken out in the town only a few weeks before my admission. My own case being an unusually acute and dangerous one, requiring, as the doctors agreed, a great deal of special treatment preliminary to the operation, Dr. Spalding had insisted upon a private room, and the only one then vacant was situated just off the women's general ward, which was on the upper floor of the little, two-story,

building. To enter my room, one had to pass through this ward, crowded with beds filled with girls and women ranging in age from three and four years up.

The "starvation" treatment for typhoid was still in use among the physicians in the town, and from early morning until the hour when the lights were extinguished in the evening, a constant source of annoyance was the incessant conversation of the younger patients in connection with what they were going to eat when they got better. Restricted in diet as they were, this was only natural; but the repeated discussion of their gastronomic abilities and inclinations, which had, at first, been highly diverting, was beginning to get on my nerves. Every sound from this outer ward was distinctly audible in my room, whereas I had to call pretty loudly if, instead of merely ringing the bell on the cord at the head of my bed, I wished to summon a nurse. Finally, since there was no escape from it, I grew resigned to the situation, and tried to read without noticing them.

Then, about a week before the day which had been set for my operation arrived, this child of whom I have spoken, Martha Walton, was brought into the ward. Her parents were poor people, and very ignorant. As the night nurse, Miss Richards, remarked to me, their idea of taking care of a sick child evidently was to be as "good" to it as they knew how, and to indulge its every wish so far as lay in their power. Consequently —the nurse had learned from the doctor—when the parents discovered that the little one was very ill, before calling in medical aid they had stuffed her with all the "goodies" for which she cried, and had done a dozen other things to heighten the fever and hurry the case to a crisis. The result was that when the child was admitted to the hospital, she was in a much more critical condition than any of the others. Added to this, she was but ten years old, with no understanding of her trouble; a child who, constantly petted and "given in to" at home, made the very worst kind of a typhoid patient.

Now, hospital romances have been one of the interesting features of the Great War; but my hospital romance was not a part of my experience in France. I had loved my present little day nurse, Viola Manning, ever since she first came into my room with a few sympathetic words which were the preliminary to another of those abominable ice-caps beneath which the doctor insisted I was to be kept half buried. She had agreed with me that it was pretty tough to have to take the count with an attack of appendicitis after pulling through an operation on my head, where the shrapnel splinter had "got" me, and also recovering from the effects of a gassing—between which and appendicitis I felt there was little choice—administered by the ever attentive Huns. "She loved me for the dangers I had passed, and I loved her that she did pity them." She was—well, just a real, old-fashioned, womanly girl who understood her chosen work and carried it on with the alertness and expedition of an army nurse combined with the tenderness of a woman who is born to "mother." To paraphrase another and more up-to-date dramatist, who is also a song writer, "if I came out (of the ether, after the operation), and I would come out, there'd be a real girl waiting for me."

On the day following Martha's arrival, Viola had come into my room and opened the door wide, so that I could see out into the women's ward.

"There's the little nuisance—poor little thing!—who's been giving us all so much trouble since yesterday after-

noon," she said, pointing to a cot set in an angle of the ward directly across from my own door. "I'm afraid she has only one chance in a thousand of ever getting better. Just look at the poor little creature, Frank."

The youngster was hardly any larger than a properly developed child of seven; and her long, straight, straw-colored hair accentuated the pallor of her wan little face, even with the fever at its height. As she lay there, for the moment with only her face turned toward me, the watery gray eyes seemed to shine with a kind of pinkish glow, reminding me of the eyes of an animal, seen in the dark.

She was frightfully thin, the arms and hands mere bones, covered with yellow, parchmentlike skin. The poor little cheeks were deeply sunken; while the thin lips seemed constantly to tremble, giving a consequent tremolo sound to her continual crying and muttering. Altogether, she reminded me of a very old and decrepit woman, instead of a child of ten. But I had small opportunity to study the features, for she tossed almost continually, meanwhile keeping up the unending, whimpering cry that had so affected everyone about her, and which filled me with a peculiar, nameless fear rather than with pity for her condition.

"If that sort of thing has disturbed your reading, it has almost driven the other patients crazy," remarked Viola, watching the child as I was doing. "At first they only laughed at her, teasing her in a friendly way; but when the temper that is still raging in that nerve-racked little body let itself go—as it did last night, you remember—they soon changed their tactics, and tried to reason with her, telling her to try, for her own sake, to be as quiet as possible, so she'd get well sooner. But Martha showed them that she won't listen to anyone—and the matron and her doctor are no exceptions. So the other children, advised by us and by the older patients, are now disregarding her utterly; and the poor little thing just tosses and cries, although she's always ready almost to fight with the nurses when they go near her. I've never had a case get on *my* nerves as this one has; the child just doesn't seem human—I can't explain the way I feel about her."

"Why don't they give her a hypodermic?" I inquired.

"Morphine? She's had enough morphine to quiet two grown-ups," my little nurse replied. "You must have heard her terrible screams when they gave her the first injection yesterday, just after they brought her in. If we had a single private room that we could use for her, we'd take her out of the ward in a minute, in justice to the other patients. Even during her short periods of sleep, she tosses and mutters nearly all the time. I only hope—"

She had been looking at me and studying my face while speaking, and now she stopped dead, looking at me with reproachful eyes.

"Oh, Frank! How could you, after my last warning!" she almost gasped.

"Why? What do you mean?" I came back.

"Now, my dear, don't attempt to deceive me; you can't do it! I *know;* that beastly Holloway has been up here again, and he's managed to get some more morphine. I'm going to tell Miss Gregory, as sure as I hope to see you get well, and have him removed from the hospital. How—how could you, Frank?"

I might have known that it was no use to try to lie to my little nurse. No physician had a sharper eye for certain "signs" of a patient's condition than had this little girl who had promised to marry me. It hurt, but I confessed.

"You're right. But don't blame poor old Holloway. I don't know

just how he got it; but I do know that I had almost to swear my life away and beg for half an hour before he'd come through with a few tablets. I needed them, girlie; really I did. I'd had a simply rotten day, with pain and 'nerves', and I wanted so much just to sleep soundly through one night."

"Nonsense!" she cried, sharply. "You had too much of the dreadful stuff over in France. You've become too used to it. But you'll positively not get more than an eighth of a grain without Dr. Spalding's orders if *I* can help it. How much did Holloway give you?"

Then, confound me, I did lie to her. So it is with the man or woman upon whom morphine has set its grip. The drug *makes* you lie; and you do so with an easy conscience, unblushingly and whole-heartedly.

"Six quarter-grain tablets. They lasted me all night. I woke up three times. But I feel fine—comparatively speaking—this morning; and—never again, honey, I promise!"

"Never again if *I* can prevent it," she assured me, solemnly. "I may not speak to Miss Gregory now; but I'll find a way to keep Holloway down in the men's ward. He should have been discharged before this, anyway. And he knows very well he has no right even to visit on this floor without special permission. That's the worst of these little institutions; rules are made only to be broken. Promise me, Frank, dear, that you'll obey the doctor's orders without question, and not even ask for more morphine than he prescribes. You know —don't you?—what your recovery means to me."

I promised, and I meant to try to keep my promise. I kissed her, and she went out into the ward. But what I did not tell her was that, safely hidden in the pocket of my night-gown, wrapped in a handkerchief, was a small, brown bottle, as yet unopened, containing an even hundred half-grain morphine tablets. Exactly how Holloway had managed to get hold of them, I had no idea; but that is exactly what he had done —and had stolen them, probably, with no more compunction than any other drug addict has in getting his favorite "dope" in any way that presents itself. I say "drug addict" advisedly, for the difference between those sick people who manage to get more than is prescribed for them and those others, on the outside, who use it regularly as the result of an unconquerable habit, is a difference of degree, rather than of kind.

Both of us—Holloway, especially, I know—felt the urgent need of the drug, and, regardless of hospital or hygienic rules, we, possessing it, were making use of it. Holloway had simply declared that the drug cabinet in the anesthetizing room was "as good as wide open." The great thing was to have it on hand when the crying need for its soothing influence asserted itself. I would "go easy" in the future—if I was not able to content myself with my allowance of the drug, at least Viola must not know that I was breaking my promise to her; and soon, I felt certain, I would be through with the operation, convalescent, well again, and out of the hospital—ready to claim Viola as my wife. Then I would be through with the accursed drug forever. But it was not accursed to me now. Let Barrie sing the praises of his "Lady Nicotine"; for just a little while I would have two loves—Viola and "My Lady Morphia".

But a word or two is necessary in connection with the effect of the drug upon me. Each night I was allowed the eighth-of-a-grain injection—which, alone, produced no effect whatsoever. I had long since passed the eighth-of-a-grain stage. It was what I managed to obtain through Holloway that soothed my aching

nerves during the night. And the direct effect of the drug was to so greatly accelerate the brain action as to entirely drive sleep away, leaving me lying there, throughout the long hours, with my mind a strange panorama of fantasies. There were times, during these nocturnal mental ramblings, when my soul seemed to be entirely separated from my body. I appeared to stand apart and watch, fascinated, that part of me—the physical body containing the disordered mind—which lay there on the bed. And this very mental condition, the fascinating guess-work as to what new pictures would unfold themselves each night, the mystery and uncertainty of it all—irresistibly enticing to a mind such as mine—these were the things that made me cling to my little bottle of white tablets as the drowning man clings to the proverbial straw.

But I had given Viola my promise, and for her dear sake I would—try to—keep it.

2

WHY seek to battle with forces which one knows one can not combat successfully—unaided? I do not believe that anyone, unaided, has ever successfully flung off the grip of a drug habit such as that which now held me in its power. Every night preceding the operation I had had a little—just a little—extra morphine. Enough, as it were, to feed the desire for it. Not enough to show itself; or at any rate Viola made no comment that led me to believe that she had noticed anything. If she had, I suppose I should have done my best to lie out of it—and felt justified in so doing.

And now, the operation was successfully over. Two days had passed since they carried me back into my little room and congratulated me upon having won out against death again, coming through an operation that was—and, I believe, remains—unique in the history of operations upon that annoying physical excess baggage known as the vermiform appendix. It would be another month, perhaps, before I could get up; two weeks, probably, before I even could take solid food. My guardian angel, Viola, was with me during the day just as much as proper attention to her other duties would permit her to be.

And the craving for the morphine was upon me again, stronger than ever. My nerves constantly cried out for the rest-producing, though never sleep-inducing, drug. I slept—*actually* slept—throughout the day, mostly in the morning, but hardly at all during the night. And at night I used the morphine just as much as I actually dared to do without leaving myself in such a state as to draw the attention of the girl to whom I had given my promise. Indeed, I was aware that I was doing for my conscience, my better self, just what the drug was intended to do with my mind and body. I was gradually producing what might be termed a state of somnipathy of the soul.

Next to the way in which my mind constantly speculated upon the possibilities of increasing the doses of the morphine, I seemed to be interested, most morbidly, I realized, in the way in which the child, Martha, clung tenaciously to life.

To my left as I lay in bed, was a large bow-window, overlooking the hospital grounds. Since the operation, I was allowed to sit up in bed more than formerly, and, the hospital being situated on the outskirts of the little town, beyond the white brick walls surrounding the not very extensive grounds, I could see the open, snow-covered country.

In the extreme southwestern corner of the yard stood two gray stone buildings, the larger one, I had been

informed, being the ice-house. There was always a well-trodden path leading to it through the snow; the porter, Jennings, was kept busy carrying ice into the hospital for the fever patients. To the other building there was no path; and this fact, somehow, seemed to disturb me. Why, I asked myself, had nobody died in the hospital since the last snow-fall? For this smaller building, Viola had rather reluctantly explained, was a sort of private morgue. Viola, I felt sure, had wished to keep my mind free from gloomy thoughts; which was why, at first, she had hesitated about answering my question in regard to this particular out-building. But, since finding out what it really was, my first act each morning, after my blind was raised, was to lift myself gently until I could see out of the window, and then to look for the long-anticipated track through the snow to the door of what I fantastically termed "The House of the Dead."

"Today," I would say each morning upon starting to look out, "there will be a path to the door." But in these two days, there had been no change. Snow had fallen once, covering the path to the ice-house; but it was quickly trodden down where that path led. Only in front of the smaller gray building, the snow remained undisturbed.

And then, that same night, Martha died.

My light had been turned out, as usual, about 10 o'clock; and I lay there in the darkened room under the spell of the morphine, though far from being inclined to sleep. The blinds were drawn down to within an inch or two of the bottom of the window; but beneath them there entered the reflection of a bright, full moon. I could just make out the time by the little traveling-clock on the table; it was twenty minutes to 1. The door of my room was standing open halfway, as I always asked to have it left after the children had quieted down for the night. I could hear the single night nurse on that floor, Miss Richards, moving about in the ward-kitchen.

Martha had not been asleep since early in the evening. She lay there, tossing as was her habit, and moaning in a way that caused my nerves fairly to dance, although the peculiar fascination I felt in watching her made me bear with the annoyance.

I listened to the monotonous, jarring sounds until I was on the point of ringing for the nurse to come and close my door; my hand reached out for the bell-cord; then, abruptly, all sounds from the child ceased.

Instinctively, I knew what the sudden silence meant; and, involuntarily, I shuddered. I had never feared death—and God knows I had faced it often enough during the past two years. But how strangely, with what terrific suddenness, death had come to this poor, tortured child! A sharp intake of the breath, the suggestion of a final, low moan, *and that was the end!*

The silence of the next minute or two was doubly oppressive; my heart sounded like the beating of a drum. Apparently, the other children slept peacefully on. Then, my hand still holding the button on the bell-cord, I rang once, very gently.

A couple of minutes passed; then Miss Richards came to the door and looked in.

"What do you want, Mr. Herndon? I thought you'd be sound asleep hours ago. Or did you just wake up?"

"Miss Richards," I said quietly, "I think you had better call Jennings and have him carry Martha's body out of the ward before any of the others wake up. She died about five minutes ago."

She looked at me in utter astonishment, but said nothing. Evidently, she could see that I was quite in earnest, and that I was sure of my statement being correct. Leaving my room, I heard her tiptoe across to the corner of the ward where Martha's bed stood, and I knew that, in the darkness, she was making a hurried examination of the body. A moment later, I heard her going softly down the stairs.

When she returned with the porter, he carried the child's body out of the ward; I heard him stumble once as, half asleep, he descended the stairway. The nurse made up the cot; and in the morning the other occupants of the ward were told that Martha had been removed during the night to a private room, in order that she should no longer disturb those about her. The children accepted the explanation, apparently well satisfied to be rid of such an uncongenial companion. And Martha, as I knew, was indeed occupying a "private room."

All the rest of that night, though, I had lain there, speculating that, in the morning, there would be a path to the door of the little gray building. And, sure enough, there was. It was a bright, sunny morning, and Viola, more radiant to my eyes than sun or moon, sat beside me on the edge of the bed as we talked of Martha's merciful release from human pain and suffering. But while we talked, and even as the bright, morning sun seemed to light the whole world with the promise of health regained and happiness won, the glory of the early morning seemed to fade into a misty vista of a Transylvanian forest at sunset; and my mind continually reverted to the lost soul, Dracula, the fiery-eyed wehr-wolves, and the undead host who, like Dracula, haunted the world of the living.

Just after my light lunch, the sun was obscured by clouds, and about 4 o'clock it commenced to snow heavily.

"Isn't this fine?" laughed Viola, coming into my room. "It will be simply grand for sleighing in the morning, and I'll get Dr. Spalding to take me into town tomorrow night, after I've got off duty, when he makes his evening call. And don't be jealous, you old silly, because he thinks Mrs. Spalding is the only woman worth talking about in the whole world."

"I'm not jealous," I answered, "but—I was just thinking the snow will cover all the paths again, won't it?"

"Of course," replied Viola. "Why?"

"Nothing," I said, settling back again on the pillow. "I guess I'll just rest again until Dr. Spalding shows up."

And, calling me an old sleepyhead, Viola, after kissing me, quietly left the room.

3

"MISS MURRAY," I said, addressing the new night nurse, "won't you please give me a half-grain injection tonight? I'm frightfully jumpy, and just about dead for a sound sleep. Miss Richards does, occasionally, when she sees that I really need it."

Her reply, after looking at me intently for a moment, was to load the hypodermic syringe as I had requested. Then a child called to her from the ward; and as she left the room I picked up the little phial she had left lying on the table, uncorked it, and dropped six or eight of the tablets it contained into my left hand. When she came back a moment or two later, she failed to notice that the phial had been moved. Every grain counted, to add to my depleted store of the drug.

"I wish you'd raise the blind, so the moonlight can come in," I said; "it won't keep me awake. It seems to be a lovely night."

"It's beautiful outside, now. But Jennings will have some snow cleaning to do in the morning. Please try to get right to sleep, Mr. Herndon. Miss Manning says that you are inclined to lie awake after getting your hypodermic, and then sleep during the day. Nothing like the good before-midnight sleep, you know. If you need me, give one short ring. Good night."

Just as I told her Miss Richards always did, she left my door open as she went out, but a little more than half way. The lights in the ward were all out; and, now that the unfortunate little Martha was no more, there was hardly a sound to be heard in the building. Even outside, there was no wind; my own breathing and the beating of my heart alone were audible.

Then I gave myself up wholly to the wooing of my false goddess, Morphia. How much of the drug I swallowed during the next two hours I have not the faintest idea; but many times I took one of the tiny white tablets from my little bottle.

My nerves were throbbing; my muscles seemed continually to relax and contract; it appeared that the spinal cord was being slowly petrified. My neck, at the base of the brain, felt as if a steel band, which was being slowly tightened, encircled it. Through it all, a thousand strange, unnatural visions swept through my brain; the moonlight in the room seemed to become a variegated color display, reminding me of the Northern Lights that I had often seen in northern Ontario, while on hunting trips, before the war. At some distance from the hospital, a dog howled mournfully. It was the first sound to break the perfect stillness of the winter night; and instantly the thought of Dracula's wehr-wolves, with their frothing, blood-dripping fangs and fiery eyes, returned to me.

My mind centered on that silent, mysterious castle in the Carpathian mountains, the subterranean vaults, the open coffin with the chalk-faced count lying in it, his wide-open, glassy eyes gazing at nothing, the half-parted, blood-red lips exposing the needle-pointed teeth, bound in the trance of death but yet *undead*, waiting only for the setting of the sun to free him from death's grasp, before setting forth on his horrible, nightly mission.

The moonlight, falling across a large, potted rubber-plant standing just beside the window, threw ghostly black shadows on the wall opposite.

Then, of a sudden, there was a terrific, whirring sound within my head, accompanied by a sound like the far-away tinkling of bells, and everything went dark.

How long this sleep or unconscious state lasted, I have no idea; but when next I opened my eyes it seemed to me that I had been awakened by hearing a noise, as of someone fumbling with a lock or bolt, at some considerable distance, and, apparently, outside the hospital. Then—and this occasioned me no small amount of wonder—I raised myself, without any effort, to a sitting position. Up to now, I had been unable to raise myself except very slowly, on account of the pain in the region of the operation wound.

I looked out of the window. All outdoors was still bathed in a flood of moonlight, though now the moon was sinking lower. A white mantle of glittering snow spread over fields, hospital grounds and distant hills. There was not even a path to the ice-house.

Suddenly, one of the children in the ward commenced muttering in

her sleep. From mere curiosity, I lay back, trying to catch her disconnected words. Altogether, it was perhaps five minutes before I again sat upright, feeling moved—by what force, I cannot say—to look out of the window.

As my gaze turned toward the corner of the yard, the blood in my veins seemed suddenly transformed into ice, while my heart, for a second or two, apparently stopped beating.

The moonlight had suddenly and most strangely taken on almost the brilliancy of early morning sunlight; every object in the grounds was distinctly visible; and, horror unutterable, *the door of "The House of the Dead" was flung wide open, and from the doorway there ran a single track, made by a pair of naked feet, the prints pointing, as the track ran, toward the hospital!*

Five minutes before, I had seen the door closed, the snow in the yard smooth and undisturbed. Then I recalled the noise as of the rattling lock or bolt, which sound, apparently, had awakened me.

A thought flashed into my mind that caused me to reach out for the bell-cord; but my arm fell as if paralyzed. I tried to call out, to scream; but no sound came from my dry, contracted throat.

Martha had come back—but—*as what?*

The silence in the hospital was as of the grave itself; I lay like one already dead. The brain alone remained living and conscious of the awful horror of the situation. God! This was maddening! Surely, helplessness in the presence of such terror is the climax of human agony!

Then an added dread made itself manifest; horripilation swept over me.

Distinctly I heard the patter of naked feet, steadily approaching. Up the main stairway, across the short hallway, then into and across the ward, toward the open door of my room!

I could not cry out, could not even pray. Thought itself was almost impossible. I closed my eyes—and waited.

A board in the floor squeaked faintly; I had heard it do so often, when stepped upon. Against my will, yet compelled by a power I could in no way control, I again opened my eyes.

In the doorway, plainly seen in the moonlight, stood the dead child. Dead, did I say? This being was alive; or, rather, horrible as the realization was to me, *it was undead!*

The long, yellow hair hung straight down over the drooping, bony shoulders. The night-gown, in which the child had been carried into the dead-house, clung to her damply, as though death had been a matter of only a few minutes ago, and as though the fever-sweat had been unaffected by the chill of the winter night. And yet, it gave out a noxious, musty effluvium, as of the tomb itself. The parchmentlike skin of the face was more tightly drawn than ever; its pallor contrasted sharply with the scarlet lips, thin and cruel-looking, that now seemed drawn back in a sort of venomous smile, exposing the irregular and, in life, badly-cared-for teeth. Only the canines appeared to have escaped decay, or to have been *replaced since death had occurred.* I noticed that they were unusually long and sharply pointed.

But the eyes! Can I ever forget those terrible eyes!

Sunken in the head until they appeared almost like empty sockets, they yet burned with a fearsome, red glow, baleful and horrifying.

But, in another way, the face upon which I gazed was changed. Not alone was it the awful pallor of it that showed the work of the hand of Death. There was in it something

(Continued on page 712)

LUKUNDOO

by Edward Lucas White

"IT STANDS to reason," said Twombly, "that a man must accept the evidence of his own eyes, and when eyes and ears agree, there can be no doubt. He has to believe what he has both seen and heard."

"Not always," put in Singleton, softly.

Every man turned toward Singleton. Twombly was standing on the hearth-rug, his back to the grate, his legs spread out, with his habitual air of dominating the room. Singleton, as usual, was as much as possible effaced in a corner. But when Singleton spoke he said something. We faced him in that flattering spontaneity of expectant silence which invites utterance.

"I was thinking," he said, after an interval, "of something I both saw and heard in Africa."

Now, if there was one thing we had found impossible it had been to elicit from Singleton anything definite about his African experiences. As with the Alpinist in the story, who could tell only that he went up and came down, the sum of Singleton's revelations had been that he went there and came away. His words now riveted our attention at once. Twombly faded from the hearth-rug, but not one of us could ever recall having seen him go. The room readjusted itself, focused on Singleton, and there was some hasty and furtive lighting of fresh cigars. Singleton lit one also, but it went out immediately, and he never relit it.

WE WERE in the Great Forest, exploring for pigmies. Van Rieten had a theory that the dwarfs found by Stanley and others were a mere cross-breed between ordinary negroes and the real pigmies. He hoped to discover a race of men three feet tall at most, or shorter. We had found no trace of any such beings.

Natives were few; game scarce; food, except game, there was none; and the deepest, dankest, drippingest forest all about. We were the only novelty in the country, no native we met had even seen a white man before, most had never heard of white men. All of a sudden, late one afternoon, there came into our camp an Englishman, and pretty well used up he was, too. We had heard no rumor of him; he had not only heard of us but had made an amazing five-day march to reach us. His guide and two bearers were nearly as done up as he. Even though he was in tatters and had five days' beard on, you could

see he was naturally dapper and neat and the sort of man to shave daily. He was small, but wiry. His face was the sort of British face from which emotion has been so carefully banished that a foreigner is apt to think the wearer of the face incapable of any sort of feeling; the kind of face which, if it has any expression at all, expresses principally the resolution to go through the world decorously, without annoying or intruding upon anyone.

His name was Etcham. He introduced himself modestly, and ate with us so deliberately that we should never have suspected, if our bearers had not had it from his bearer, that he had had but three meals in the five days, and those small. After we had lit up he told us why he had come.

"My chief is ve'y seedy," he said between puffs. "He is bound to go out if he keeps this way. I thought perhaps. . . ."

He spoke quietly in a soft, even tone, but I could see little beads of sweat oozing out on his upper lip under his stubby mustache, and there was a tingle of repressed emotion in his tone, a veiled eagerness in his eye, a palpitating inward solicitude in his demeanor that moved me at once. Van Rieten had no sentiment in him; if he was moved he did not show it. But he listened. I was surprized at that. He was just the man to refuse at once. But he listened to Etcham's halting, diffident hints. He even asked questions.

"Who is your chief?"

"Stone," Etcham lisped.

That electrified both of us.

"Ralph Stone?" we ejaculated together.

Etcham nodded.

For some minutes Van Rieten and I were silent. Van Rieten had never seen him, but I had been a classmate of Stone's, and Van Rieten and I had discussed him over many a camp-fire. We had heard of him two years before, south of Luebo in the Balunda country, which had been ringing with his theatrical strife against a Balunda witch-doctor, ending in the sorcerer's complete discomfiture and the abasement of his tribe before Stone. They had even broken the fetish-man's whistle and given Stone the pieces. It had been like the triumph of Elijah over the prophets of Baal, only more real to the Balunda.

We had thought of Stone as far off, if still in Africa at all, and here he turned up ahead of us and probably forestalling our quest.

ETCHAM'S naming of Stone brought back to us all his tantalizing story, his fascinating parents, their tragic death; the brilliance of his college days; the dazzle of his millions; the promise of his young manhood; his wide notoriety, so nearly real fame; his romantic elopement with the meteoric authoress whose sudden cascade of fiction had made her so great a name so young, whose beauty and charm were so much heralded; the frightful scandal of the breach-of-promise suit that followed; his bride's devotion through it all; their sudden quarrel after it was all over; their divorce; the too much advertised announcement of his approaching marriage to the plaintiff in the breach-of-promise suit; his precipitate remarriage to his divorced bride; their second quarrel and second divorce; his departure from his native land; his advent in the dark continent. The sense of all this rushed over me and I believe Van Rieten felt it, too, as he sat silent.

Then he asked:

"Where is Werner?"

"Dead," said Etcham. "He died before I joined Stone."

"You were not with Stone above Luebo?"

"No," said Etcham, "I joined him at Stanley Falls."

"Who is with him?" Van Rieten asked.

"Only his Zanzibar servants and the bearers," Etcham replied.

"What sort of bearers?" Van Rieten demanded.

"Mang-Battu men," Etcham responded simply.

Now that impressed both Van Rieten and myself greatly. It bore out Stone's reputation as a notable leader of men. For up to that time no one had been able to use Mang-Battu as bearers outside of their own country, or to hold them for long or difficult expeditions.

"Were you long among the Mang-Battu?" was Van Rieten's next question.

"Some weeks," said Etcham. "Stone was interested in them and made up a fair-sized vocabulary of their words and phrases. He had a theory that they are an offshoot of the Balunda and he found much confirmation in their customs."

"What do you live on?" Van Rieten inquired.

"Game, mostly," Etcham lisped.

"How long has Stone been laid up?" Van Rieten next asked.

"More than a month," Etcham answered.

"And you have been hunting for the camp!" Van Rieten exclaimed.

Etcham's face, burnt and flayed as it was, showed a flush.

"I missed some easy shots," he admitted ruefully. "I've not felt ve'y fit myself."

"What's the matter with your chief?" Van Rieten inquired.

"Something like carbuncles," Etcham replied.

"He ought to get over a carbuncle or two," Van Rieten declared.

"They are not carbuncles," Etcham explained. "Nor one or two. He has had dozens, sometimes five at once. If they had been carbuncles he would have been dead long ago. But in some ways they are not so bad, though in others they are worse."

"How do you mean?" Van Rieten queried.

"Well," Etcham hesitated, "they do not seem to inflame so deep nor so wide as carbuncles, nor to be so painful, nor to cause so much fever. But then they seem to be part of a disease that affects his mind. He let me help him dress the first, but the others he has hidden most carefully, from me and from the men. He keeps his tent when they puff up, and will not let me change the dressings or be with him at all."

"Have you plenty of dressings?" Van Rieten asked.

"We have some," said Etcham doubtfully. "But he won't use them; he washes out the dressings and uses them over and over."

"How is he treating the swellings?" Van Rieten inquired.

"He slices them off clear down to flesh level, with his razor."

"What?" Van Rieten shouted.

Etcham made no answer but looked him steadily in the eyes.

"I beg pardon," Van Rieten hastened to say. "You startled me. They can't be carbuncles. He'd have been dead long ago."

"I thought I had said they are not carbuncles," Etcham lisped.

"But the man must be crazy!" Van Rieten exclaimed.

"Just so," said Etcham. "He is beyond my advice or control."

"How many has he treated that way?" Van Rieten demanded.

"Two, to my knowledge," Etcham said.

"Two?" Van Rieten queried.

Etcham flushed again.

"I saw him," he confessed, "through a crack in the hut. I felt impelled to keep a watch on him, as if he was not responsible."

"I should think not," Van Rieten agreed. "And you saw him do that twice?"

"I conjecture," said Etcham, "that he did the like with all the rest."

"How many has he had?" Van Rieten asked.

"Dozens," Etcham lisped.

"Does he eat?" Van Rieten inquired.

"Like a wolf," said Etcham. "More than any two bearers."

"Can he walk?" Van Rieten asked.

"He crawls a bit, groaning," said Etcham simply.

"Little fever, you say," Van Rieten ruminated.

"Enough and too much," Etcham declared.

"Has he been delirious?" Van Rieten asked.

"Only twice," Etcham replied; "once when the first swelling broke, and once later. He would not let anyone come near him then. But we could hear him talking, talking steadily, and it scared the natives."

"Was he talking their patter in delirium?" Van Rieten demanded.

"No," said Etcham, "but he was talking some similar lingo. Hamed Burghash said he was talking Balunda. I know too little Balunda. I do not learn languages readily. Stone learned more Mang-Battu in a week than I should have learned in a year. But I seemed to hear words like Mang-Battu words. Anyhow the Mang-Battu bearers were scared."

"Scared?" Van Rieten repeated, questioningly.

"So were the Zanzibar men, even Hamed Burghash, and so was I," said Etcham, "only for a different reason. He talked in two voices."

"In two voices," Van Rieten reflected.

"Yes," said Etcham, more excitedly than he had yet spoken. "In two voices, like a conversation. One was his own, one a small, thin, bleaty voice like nothing I ever heard. I seemed to make out, among the sounds the deep voice made, something like Mang-Battu words I knew, as *nedru, metebaba,* and *nedo,* their terms for 'head', 'shoulder', 'thigh', and perhaps *kudra* and *nekere* ('speak' and 'whistle'); and among the noises of the shrill voice *matomipa, angunzi,* and *kamomami* ('kill', 'death', and 'hate'). Hamed Burghash said he also heard those words. He knew Mang-Battu far better than I."

"What did the bearers say?" Van Rieten asked.

"They said, *'Lukundoo, Lukundoo!'*" Etcham replied. "I did not know that word; Hamed Burghash said it was Mang-Battu for 'leopard'."

"It's Mang-Battu for 'conjuring'," said Van Rieten.

"I don't wonder they thought so," said Etcham. "It was enough to make one believe in enchantment to listen to those two voices."

"One voice answering the other?" Van Rieten asked perfunctorily.

Etcham's face went gray under his tan.

"Sometimes both at once," he answered huskily.

"Both at once!" Van Rieten ejaculated.

"It sounded that way to the men, too," said Etcham. "And that was not all."

He stopped and looked helplessly at us for a moment.

"Could a man talk and whistle at the same time?" he asked.

"How do you mean?" Van Rieten queried.

"We could hear Stone talking away, his big, deep-chested baritone rumbling along, and through it all we could hear a high, shrill whistle, the oddest, wheezy sound. You know, no

matter how shrilly a grown man may whistle, the note has a different quality from the whistle of a boy or a woman or little girl. They sound more treble, somehow. Well, if you can imagine the smallest girl who could whistle keeping it up tunelessly right along, that whistle was like that, only even more piercing, and it sounded right through Stone's bass tones."

"And you didn't go to him?" Van Rieten cried.

"He is not given to threats," Etcham disclaimed. "But he had threatened, not volubly, nor like a sick man, but quietly and firmly, that if any man of us (he lumped me in with the men), came near him while he was in his trouble, that man should die. And it was not so much his words as his manner. It was like a monarch commanding respected privacy for a death-bed. One simply could not transgress."

"I see," said Van Rieten shortly.

"He's ve'y seedy," Etcham repeated helplessly. "I thought perhaps. . . ."

His absorbing affection for Stone, his real love for him, shone out through his envelope of conventional training. Worship of Stone was plainly his master passion.

Like many competent men, Van Rieten had a streak of hard selfishness in him. It came to the surface then. He said we carried our lives in our hands from day to day just as genuinely as Stone; that he did not forget the ties of blood and calling between any two explorers, but that there was no sense in imperiling one party for a very problematical benefit to a man probably beyond any help; that it was enough of a task to hunt for one party; that if two were united, providing food would be more than doubly difficult; that the risk of starvation was too great. Deflecting our march seven full days' journey (he complimented Etcham on his marching powers) might ruin our expedition entirely.

VAN RIETEN had logic on his side and he had a way with him. Etcham sat there apologetic and deferential, like a fourth-form schoolboy before a head master. Van Rieten wound up.

"I am after pigmies, at the risk of my life. After pigmies I go."

"Perhaps, then, these will interest you," said Etcham, very quietly.

He took two objects out of the side-pocket of his blouse, and handed them to Van Rieten. They were round, bigger than big plums, and smaller than small peaches, about the right size to enclose in an average hand. They were black, and at first I did not see what they were.

"Pigmies!" Van Rieten exclaimed. "Pigmies, indeed! Why, they wouldn't be two feet high! Do you mean to claim that these are adult heads?"

"I claim nothing," Etcham answered evenly. "You can see for yourself."

Van Rieten passed one of the heads to me. The sun was just setting and I examined it closely. A dried head it was, perfectly preserved, and the flesh as hard as Argentine jerked beef. A bit of a vertebra stuck out where the muscles of the vanished neck had shriveled into folds. The puny chin was sharp on a projecting jaw, the minute teeth white and even between the retracted lips, the tiny nose was flat, the little forehead retreating, there were inconsiderable clumps of stunted wool on the Lilliputian cranium. There was nothing babyish, childish or youthful about the head, rather it was mature to senility.

"Where did these come from?" Van Rieten enquired.

"I do not know," Etcham replied precisely. "I found them among Stone's effects while rummaging for medicines or drugs or anything that could help me to help him. I do not know where he got them. But I'll swear he did not have them when we entered this district."

"Are you sure?" Van Rieten queried, his eyes big and fixed on Etcham's.

"Ve'y sure," lisped Etcham.

"But how could he have come by them without your knowledge?" Van Rieten demurred.

"Sometimes we were apart ten days at a time hunting," said Etcham. "Stone is not a talking man. He gave me no account of his doings and Hamed Burghash keeps a still tongue and a tight hold on the men."

"You have examined these heads?" Van Rieten asked.

"Minutely," said Etcham.

Van Rieten took out his notebook. He was a methodical chap. He tore out a leaf, folded it and divided it equally into three pieces. He gave one to me and one to Etcham.

"Just for a test of my impressions," he said, "I want each of us to write separately, just what he is most reminded of by these heads. Then I want to compare the writings."

I handed Etcham a pencil and he wrote. Then he handed the pencil back to me and I wrote.

"Read the three," said Van Rieten, handing me his piece.

Van Rieten had written:

"An old Balunda witch-doctor."

Etcham had written:

"An old Mang-Battu fetish-man."

I had written:

"An old Katongo magician."

"There!" Van Rieten exclaimed. "Look at that! There is nothing Wagabi or Batwa or Wambuttu or Wabotu about these heads. Nor anything pigmy either."

"I thought as much," said Etcham.

"And you say he did not have them before?"

"To a certainty he did not," Etcham asserted.

"It is worth following up," said Van Rieten. "I'll go with you. And first of all, I'll do my best to save Stone."

He put out his hand and Etcham clasped it silently. He was grateful all over.

NOTHING but Etcham's fever of solicitude could have taken him in five days over the track. It took him eight days to retrace with full knowledge of it and our party to help. We could not have done it in seven, and Etcham urged us on, in a repressed fury of anxiety, no mere fever of duty to his chief, but a real ardor of devotion, a glow of personal adoration for Stone which blazed under his dry conventional exterior and showed in spite of him.

We found Stone well cared for. Etcham had seen to a good, high thorn *zdreeba* round the camp, the huts were well built and thatched and Stone's was as good as their resources would permit. Hamed Burghash was not named after two Seyyids for nothing. He had in him the making of a sultan. He had kept the Mang-Battu together, not a man had slipped off, and he had kept them in order. Also he was a deft nurse and a faithful servant.

The two other Zanzabaris had done some creditable hunting. Though all were hungry, the camp was far from starvation.

Stone was on a canvas cot and there was a sort of collapsible camp-stool-table, like a Turkish tabouret, by the cot. It had a water-bottle and some

vials on it and Stone's watch, also his razor in its case.

Stone was clean and not emaciated, but he was far gone; not unconscious, but in a daze; past commanding or resisting anyone. He did not seem to see us enter or to know we were there. I should have recognized him anywhere. His boyish dash and grace had vanished utterly, of course. But his head had grown more leonine; his hair was still abundant, yellow and wavy; the close, crisped blond beard he had grown during his illness did not alter him. He was big and big-chested yet. His eyes were dull and he mumbled and babbled mere meaningless syllables, not words.

Etcham helped Van Rieten to uncover him and look him over. He was in good muscle for a man so long bedridden. There were no scars on him except about his knees, shoulders and chest. On each knee and above it he had a full score of roundish cicatrices, and a dozen or more on each shoulder, all in front. Two or three were open wounds and four or five barely healed. He had no fresh swellings except two, one on each side, on his pectoral muscles, the one on the left being higher up and farther out than the other. They did not look like boils or carbuncles, but as if something blunt and hard were being pushed up through the fairly healthy flesh and skin, not much inflamed.

"I should not lance those," said Van Rieten, and Etcham assented.

They made Stone as comfortable as they could, and just before sunset we looked in at him again. He was lying on his back, and his chest showed big and massive yet, but he lay as if in a stupor. We left Etcham with him and went into the next hut, which Etcham had resigned to us. The jungle noises were no different there than anywhere else for months past, and I was soon fast asleep.

Sometime in the pitch dark I found myself awake and listening. I could hear two voices, one Stone's, the other sibilant and wheezy. I knew Stone's voice after all the years that had passed since I heard it last. The other was like nothing I remembered. It had less volume than the wail of a new-born baby, yet there was an insistent carrying power to it, like the shrilling of an insect. As I listened I heard Van Rieten breathing near me in the dark, then he heard me and realized that I was listening, too. Like Etcham I knew little Balunda, but I could make out a word or two. The voices alternated with intervals of silence between.

Then suddenly both sounded at once and fast, Stone's baritone basso, full as if he were in perfect health, and that incredible stridulous falsetto, both jabbering at once like the voices of two people quarreling and trying to talk each other down.

"I can't stand this," said Van Rieten. "Let's have a look at him."

He had one of those cylindrical electric night-candles. He fumbled about for it, touched the button and beckoned me to come with him. Outside of the hut he motioned me to stand still, and instinctively turned off the light, as if seeing made listening difficult.

Except for a faint glow from the embers of the bearers' fire we were in complete darkness, little starlight struggled through the trees, the river made but a faint murmur. We could hear the two voices together and then suddenly the creaking voice changed into a razor-edged, slicing whistle, indescribably cutting, continuing right through Stone's grumbling torrent of croaking words.

"Good God!" exclaimed Van Rieten.

Abruptly he turned on the light.

We found Etcham utterly asleep, exhausted by his long anxiety and the

exertions of his phenomenal march and relaxed completely now that the load was in a sense shifted from his shoulders to Van Rieten's. Even the light on his face did not wake him.

The whistle had ceased and the two voices now sounded together. Both came from Stone's cot, where the concentrated white ray showed him lying just as we had left him, except that he had tossed his arms above his head and had torn the coverings and bandages from his chest.

The swelling on his right breast had broken. Van Rieten aimed the center line of the light at it and we saw it plainly. From his flesh, grown out of it, there protruded a head, such a head as the dried specimens Etcham had shown us, as if it were a miniature of the head of a Balunda fetishman. It was black, shining black as the blackest African skin; it rolled the whites of its wicked, wee eyes and showed its microscopic teeth between lips repulsively negroid in their red fullness, even in so diminutive a face. It had crisp, fuzzy wool on its manikin skull, it turned malignantly from side to side and chittered incessantly in that inconceivable falsetto. Stone babbled brokenly against its patter.

Van Rieten turned from Stone and waked Etcham, with some difficulty. When he was awake and saw it all, Etcham stared and said not one word.

"You saw him slice off two swellings?" Van Rieten asked.

Etcham nodded, choking.

"Did he bleed much?" Van Rieten demanded.

"Ve'y little," Etcham replied.

"You hold his arms," said Van Rieten to Etcham.

He took up Stone's razor and handed me the light. Stone showed no sign of seeing the light or of knowing we were there. But the little head mewled and screeched at us.

Van Rieten's hand was steady, and the sweep of the razor even and true. Stone bled amazingly little and Van Rieten dressed the wound as if it had been a bruise or scrape.

Stone had stopped talking the instant the excrescent head was severed. Van Rieten did all that could be done for Stone and then fairly grabbed the light from me. Snatching up a gun he scanned the ground by the cot and brought the butt down once and twice, viciously.

We went back to our hut, but I doubt if I slept.

NEXT day, near noon, in broad daylight, we heard the two voices from Stone's hut. We found Etcham dropped asleep by his charge. The swelling on the left had broken, and just such another head was there miauling and spluttering. Etcham woke up and the three of us stood there and glared. Stone interjected hoarse vocables into the tinkling gurgle of the portent's utterance.

Van Rieten stepped forward, took up Stone's razor and knelt down by the cot. The atomy of a head squealed a wheezy snarl at him.

Then suddenly Stone spoke English.

"Who are you with my razor?"

Van Rieten started back and stood up.

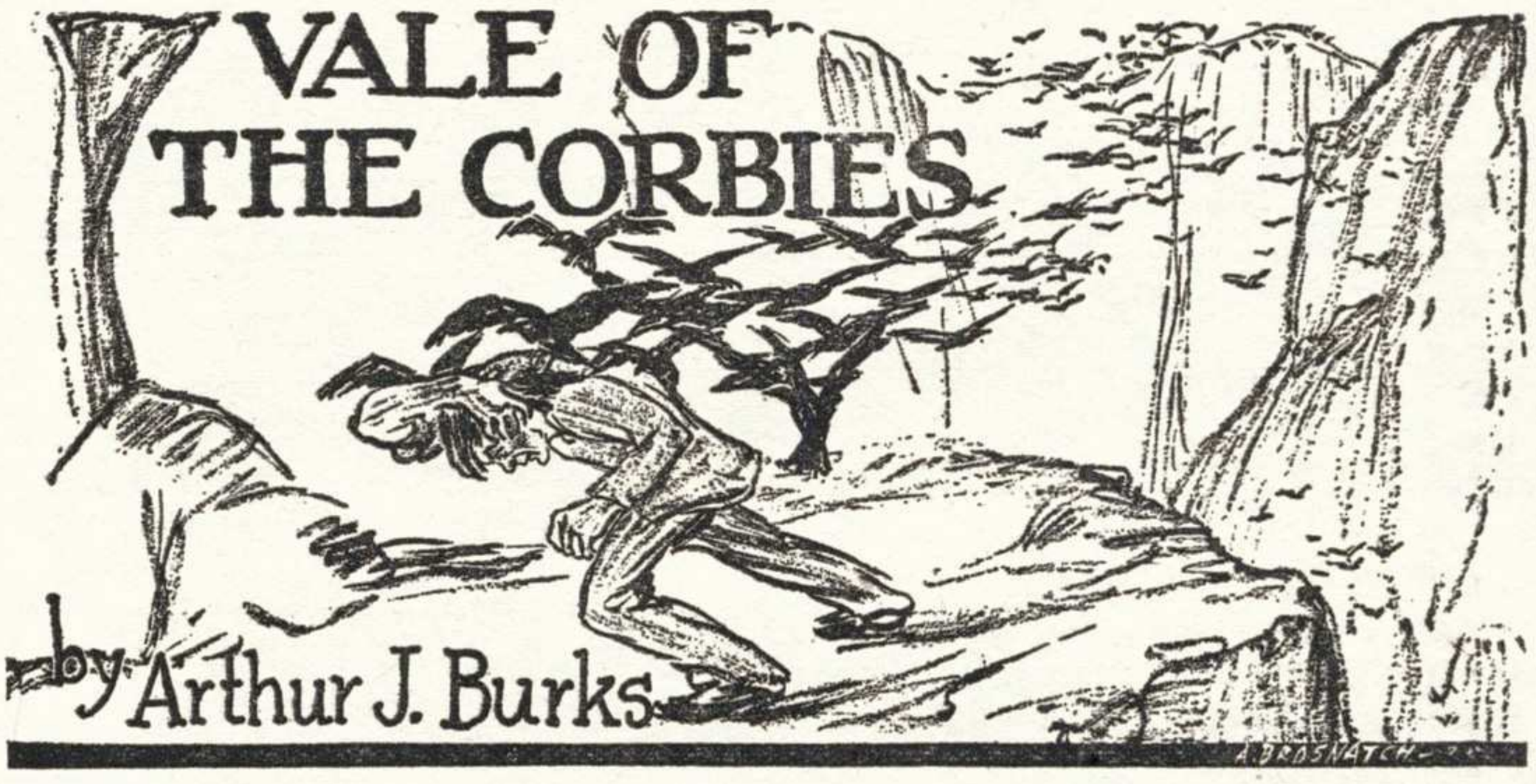
Stone's eyes were clear now and bright, they roved about the hut.

"The end," he said; "I recognize the end. I seem to see Etcham, as if in life. But Singleton! Ah, Singleton! Ghosts of my boyhood come to watch me pass! And you, strange specter with the black beard, and my razor! Aroint ye all!"

"I'm no ghost, Stone," I managed to say. "I'm alive. So are Etcham and Van Rieten. We are here to help you."

(Continued on page 710)

VALE OF THE CORBIES



by Arthur J. Burks

Author of "Black Medicine," "Strange Tales From Santo Domingo," etc.

MY FEAR is an intangible fear; yet to me it is terribly real. Reason tells me that my experiences are but the figments of realistic nightmares, while my inner consciousness tells me that what I have gone through has been something more than disordered imagining. I know, in my mind, that it has all been a dream, or a series of dreams.

Yet how can I explain to myself those strange red dots on my hands, my face, my neck?

These are very real. They are not hallucinations, for such of my friends as still come to see me at intervals have noted the dots and remarked upon their peculiar appearance.

This fact it is that is slowly but surely driving me to the very door of the insane asylum. Damn it, I know they have all been dreams! Yet dream creatures do not leave their marks upon the body of the dreamer.

But I had best go back and tell it all from the beginning.

I believe that from childhood I dreamed at intervals, widely spaced intervals, of a little secluded valley which had no location except in the recesses of my subconscious mind. It has always been a sunless valley, with a dark cloud hiding the sun. Miasmatic mists have hung like airy shrouds in the still air above the valley's floor. There has been no breeze in this valley, nor anything that lived or moved. The air has been good, freighted with a musty kind of perfume that has ever tantalized my sensitive nostrils; but it has always been air with a strange sort of chill to it that has ever caused me to waken shivering from my dream. I have called the place a valley, yet I do not know for sure that it is a valley, since only my imagination has walled the valley in. It is as though somewhere beyond the mists and the black cloud there were a circle of high hills which I cannot see, just beyond the reach of my vision.

Always, in my dream, I enter the valley through a narrow cleft in the walls of stone. I know it is a cleft, though I have never seen the walls, for countless times have I believed that, by putting forth my hands, I could have touched the walls on either hand—and I have always feared to put forth my hands, lest they encounter nothingness, and this knowledge of nothingness where I had expected walls might cause my mind to collapse with thoughts of wide immensities, or caverns, bottomless, on my right hand

and on my left. I prefer not to know the truth, or to delude myself with the knowledge that there may be walls when, possibly, there are none at all.

Straight through this cleft I go until my sensitive feelings tell me that I have entered the valley.

Then begin my strange sensations.

First, there is a terrible feeling of loneliness. A feeling of great space all about me. A sense of surrounding desolation which my eye can not see. And over all a silence that is as heavy as a giant's cloak upon the shoulders of a mere boy.

There is the inevitable chill in the air which causes me to shiver, even though—as is sometimes the case when I have dreamed of entering the valley swiftly, with much exertion—my body is bathed in perspiration.

Quietly, lest I disturb the eery atmosphere of the place, I seat myself, cross-legged, upon the ground.

And almost at once the queer noises begin to be heard! Always, until a few weeks ago, the noises have been the same, never varying from dream to dream—which, during the passing of the years, have occurred so frequently that the dreams seem to blend into one long nightmare that has no end.

What are the noises?

They are the beating, beating in the air about me of silken, invisible wings! Yet, until a few weeks ago, I had never seen the creatures whose wings I had heard. Out of the misty distances they come, those wings that whir in the air, those creatures that always swerve and dart hither and yon, ever just far enough within the mists that I cannot see the creatures themselves. When I remember hearing the wings the first time I am sure there was but one pair of them. Out of the mists they came whirring, and I heard them slap smartly as the creature who traveled upon them, sensing my presence perhaps, stayed its flight and darted back into the fog. Only to return a few seconds later, slapping its wings together smartly ere it darted back and was lost!

When the dream came again—and this second time I was several months older—it was repeated in all its details as I have outlined it above. Except that now there were two creatures instead of one! Distinctly, while I held my breath to listen, came the whirring of two pairs of wings. Still the creatures were invisible, though I knew from the sound that they were probably identical in shape and kind. Out of the fog they would come, whirring, pausing while their wings beat a startled tattoo in the mists as their flight was stayed.

For a number of times whose exact count I have long since forgotten, the dream was repeated at intervals—which, as I grew older, came closer and closer together. The details never varied except in one particular.

The beating of the wings was greater in volume with each succeeding occurrence of the nightmare! First there had been one pair of wings, then two, then four—ever increasing in numbers until the air all about me, ever beyond my vision, was alive with invisible creatures whose wings whipped the air, caused the fog to swirl eerily—creating a medley of noise that became shortly a continual sound of beating wings, as though the creatures were advancing from the mists in companies and battalions, in regiments and brigades. One group would rush upon me and retire, only to give place to another group which charged me, only to retreat. How many minutes, hours or days I remained in the valley with its unseen walls I have no way of computing; but this I know well: after the first time or two the sound as of wings beating never paused, from my entry to the valley until the dream ceased and I awoke in my bed beneath the

eaves at home—with a cold perspiration bathing my body clammily.

And here is another weird circumstance. Even though I know in my dream that it is a dream; even though I know as I travel through the cleft what I shall experience when I have reached the valley at last, I am never able to cause myself to waken—nor am I able to cause the dream to change until it has gone through to its usual conclusion. As I traverse the cleft I try to stay my steps, try to face about and return; but find myself powerless to do so. Always I must go on until I have entered the valley and listened to the rustling and beating of the invisible wings!

Is it any wonder that I have come to fear the approach of nightfall? Is it any wonder that I watch the sun with dread as it slopes down the sky into the west? Is it any wonder that I walk the floor of my study until far into the night, fighting sleep until, from very weariness, I cease to struggle and my eyes close of their own accord? Is it any wonder that a fever has entered my blood, crimsoning my cheeks until I appear like a man far gone in consumption, until the flesh has shrunken on my face so that, except for the roses of fever, my facial appearance is that of a cadaver?

Too much worry and fear because of a tiresome nightmare, you say? A nightmare that comes because I fear that it *will* come and, so fearing, bring on the very dream I dread?

If it were only the beating of the wings! But many months have passed now since it was only the wings that frighted me!

Months, did I say? Months it is; yet it seems that whole years have passed!

For one night when I dreamed, straining my eyes to make out the creatures whose wings I heard, I saw a black blotch against the misty wraiths of the valley—a blotch no bigger than a man's head! The blotch was black, I say! Blacker even than "the raven tresses of midnight"! Just a glimpse it was, a glimpse that chilled me even as the dread coldness of the valley had never done. For there was a definite shape to that black blotch—a shape that spelled, to my disordered imagination, but one thing: that of a vampire bat with a death's head! I waited, my heart in my mouth, for the shape to show itself again. Shortly, then, I saw it—and knew that the creature I saw was not the same which I had first glimpsed. The outline was the same, but there was an indefinable, inexplicable difference which told me that this second glimpse was of a different creature, twin, perhaps, of the first.

But why continue? Night after night it was the same, until, mingled with the never-ending whirring of the silken wings, I stared, mute with a nameless fear, at a veritable wall of black, darting creatures—a wall that came toward me like a flood of blackness, like a sea of ebon smoke; a wall that was alive, that swirled and eddied, writhed and twisted, pouring in, over, and down upon itself, like heavy opaque oil in ferment.

Then came the other sound—a raucous croaking which told me what manner of creature it was that showed such interest in me.

These creatures were not bats, but birds of ebon blackness; birds that caused their wings to whir tirelessly, birds that increased with the speed of thought, birds that gave voice to raucous croakings that grated against the ear-drums as the rasping of a file grates against an exposed nerve.

The birds were corbies!

The birds were ravens!

But did the knowledge ease the feeling of tension which, night by night, seemed to clasp me the tighter? No! No! No!

Imagine it if you can. Try mentally to experience it but once. Then multiply that experience by all the

countless times that I, dreaming my ever-recurring dream, entered the vale of the corbies and listened to the beating of their wings, to their perpetual croaking—and watched them writhe and twist in the air, so many in number that their evolutions made one think of a sea of plastic ebony.

Do this and you know why I fight the descent of sleep as I would fight the temptations of Satan.

Yet it is but a dream, after all! But is it?

IT IS only two weeks ago now that, for the first time, I found myself unable to listen, undisturbed, to the beating wings of the corbies—for, as they were emboldened no doubt by my motionless attitude, the natural fear of me which the creatures must have felt began to disappear. I knew it certainly when I noted that the black wall of the darting birds had approached closer to me on all sides—had approached so close that I could feel the breeze caused by the wings, could feel the coolness on my cheeks.

Then I knew, with a suddenness which had the force of some eery inspiration, that the chill along my spine which I had always experienced had had a definite cause—and that cause was the antagonism which the corbies felt toward me! Don't ask me why, for I do not know; yet what happened afterward proves to me that I am correct in this surmise.

From the very first the corbies of the hidden valley hated me! Hated me with a hatred which nothing in the world could quell! Why, then, did they not, in all their countless numbers, overpower me like a resistless flood and smother me with the very weight of their numbers?

Something held them back! Was it the antagonism which I instinctively fostered within myself as a weird sort of protection? Perhaps. Then could these creatures have been creatures of flesh and blood? Or is it only creatures of the astral world that can sense these emanations? Have I not insisted that it is nothing but a never-ending dream?

But wait!

Two nights later, when the wall approached quite too closely, I could stand it no longer. With a cry of anger, a cry that was pregnant with fear and a nameless horror, I leaped to my feet and, for the first time, took active steps against the black creatures which were robbing me of what little reason I still possessed. I rushed pell-mell, my eyes closed tightly, into the thick of the wall of flying corbies—striking out on all sides with clenched fists! I felt my fists strike home in soft, feathery bodies; felt the bodies fall away from my hands. I gathered the creatures in armfuls to my breast, crushing out their little lives against my own body—and fiercely gloated in my power to do them injury.

But what were those little stabs of pain which I felt on my exposed hands, my face, and my neck? I felt them, but at the time did not realize their significance!

Finally, exhausted from my battle against these terrific, somehow intangible odds, I fell back from the fight and sank again to the ground.

But, fast between my two palms, I held a single one of the ebon ravens! He was still alive, and his little eyes seemed to stare into my own with an expression of saturnine, undying hatred—as though he dared me to hurt him. For many minutes I looked into the eyes of the weak, defenseless bird. Unblinking he stared back at me—unafraid.

Slowly his mouth opened, as though he sneered at me. Still with his eyes staring into mine, the raven ducked its head suddenly and drove its pointed bill deep into the flesh of my hand! The blood spurted from the wound! Then I knew the meaning of those stabs of pain I had felt when I had

fought against the vanguard of the corbies! The other birds, too, had driven their sharp bills into my flesh. I stared wonderingly at my hands, my attention drawn more closely because the bird between my palms had pierced the flesh—and as I saw the countless punctures I knew that what I had thought to be perspiration bathing my cheeks was not perspiration, but blood which the ravens had drawn!

What did I do then?

Deliberately, not knowing why, just as a small boy does not know why he takes pleasure in being cruel to animals, I looked back at the bird and into its challenging eyes; then, holding it fast in one hand, with the other I slowly twisted the ebony head from the creature's shoulders and hurled it into the mists!

The little body in my hand did not quiver; did not move once after I had cast the head free; but when I had hurled the body after the head it suddenly seemed to come to life, jumping here and there as does any bird which has been beheaded. Then, upright on its two feet, it darted into the fog. But before it had entirely disappeared, I saw it take wing and rise into the air!

My God, what ghastly croaking then came from the billow upon billow of corbies which still circled about me!

I pressed my hands to my ears to prevent my ear drums from bursting. Then, when I could stand no more, I leaped to my feet and started back the way I had come, while the ravens followed behind me, raucously croaking their wordless anger. I felt them on my shoulders and on my head; I felt them about my legs, retarding my retreat. I felt the slapping of their wings against my unprotected cheeks and face; felt the sharp stabs of pain in my flesh as their savage bills were plunged home.

And awoke in my bed at home with perspiration beading my body!

It was perspiration, too, not blood.

But on my hands, face and neck, there were many, many little red dots—dots which might have been tiny wounds that had healed, leaving fiery weals where the open wounds had been.

This then is why I fear sleep. When I sleep I dream, and when I dream I dream of the vale of corbies—and I know that, sooner or later, the ravens will slay me! Yet a man can not fight sleep forever—though for over a week I have not closed my eyes. I have imbibed strong coffee, fiery hot and black as the wings of the ravens; I have used many kinds of drugs, increasing the doses swiftly until I use more than any confirmed fiend that ever lived; yet I feel myself growing weaker hour by hour, and know that soon I must sleep. And when I do. . . .

* * * * * * * * *

I, HANS GOODMAN, brother of the man who wrote the above manuscript, must finish the story, for my brother is dead. What he saw beyond the veil of sleep I do not know—assuredly I do not believe all that he has written above, because I know that it was written in a fevered frenzy, was born of a mind that had been crazed by drugs and loss of sleep. Call it an insane obsession if you like.

But I found my brother dead in a chair in his study, his body literally covered with the blood which oozed from countless little wounds in his flesh—flesh that, between the wounds, was red with the roses of fever, or red because it had been beaten and pounded by something that was still not powerful enough to break the skin! And who shall say that whirring wings did not paint those roses there—whirring wings that beat an endless tattoo?

Every Hundred Years the Woman Stepped From the Portrait and Killed Herself

Midnight Realism

By WILLIAM SANFORD

Author of "Grisley's Reception," "The Scarlet Night," etc.

"MIGHTY glad to see you, old man," exclaimed my host, Jimmy Carson, as he extended his hand and met mine in a hearty shake. "Quite a little storm we're having. I'd have met you, only, as I wired, Dan doesn't get back until very late with the car, and the bus is far more comfortable on a night like this anyway. Guess it will be too wet for partridge shooting tomorrow, but I have plenty of books, and an old billiard table stands in one of the rooms here. You'll make out somehow, and day after tomorrow we'll make it warm for the birds!"

"Don't worry about me, Jim," I answered. "I'm always content under your roof and never have found a lack of pleasure. And then I've never seen your new home, you know, and I'll be mighty glad to spend a few hours tomorrow looking it over. Used to be an old tavern, didn't it?"

"Right!" replied my friend; "and pretty old, too, I can tell you: it is more than two hundred years since this place was built, but it has been kept in good repair. Most of the timber is as sound as the day it was put in. They used real lumber in those times—the profiteering sharks were not so numerous. I bought the place because my boy took such a fancy to it. He is everything to me since my wife died."

I nodded understandingly. "And I'll bet that's an old portrait over in the next room yonder," I remarked, indicating a large, full-length canvas of a beautiful young woman. "Know who she was?"

"Have a smoke," Carson replied, and extended the box. He selected a cigar himself and we settled ourselves comfortably before the wood fire, for I knew from the look on my friend's face that a story was forthcoming.

"Yes," he replied, "that beautiful creature was the wife, so the story goes, of the man who built this place. He was, besides the owner of the tavern, a painter of some ability, as that canvas shows. He died when still young, it is said, and his grief-stricken widow, unable to endure existence without him, ended her life with a dagger, in that very room where the portrait hangs. Soon after, so the tale goes, an old witch of the town made a prediction that once in every hundred years, exactly on the hour of midnight, the wife would step from the portrait and go through the act of killing herself, just as she killed herself on that fatal night so long ago. I suppose the prediction was believed by many, for the words of the so-called witches were not always taken lightly in those days."

"Well," I drew a cloud of smoke from my fragrant Havana and idly watched the rings float off toward the chimney, "at least one anniversary of the hundred years must have taken place. Did she step from the portrait?"

Jim laughed. "There is a tale that she did," he replied, "but of course in these days no one takes any stock in it. The story goes that a group of men were in this very room making merry with liquor and song when someone told the legend of the picture and the witch's prediction. Everyone got to talking about it, and the tale, with the liquor, worked strongly on their imaginations, for they claimed that on the stroke of midnight the woman *did* step from the portrait and stab herself. That's what liquor will do to some minds. I suppose they would have seen six women, if that had been in the story that helped to work them up." He laughed and relighted his cigar, which had gone dead. "And by the way," he added, "that was just a hundred years ago tonight!"

"A hundred years ago tonight!" I said. "Why, then, the portrait is due to come to life again in less than an hour!" And in spite of myself I felt a touch of goose-flesh creep over my spine.

Jim laughed again. "Yes," he said, "and a real act is going to be slated just for our benefit. My boy, Dan, as you know, is a vaudeville performer. His star act is a female impersonation scene, a tragedy scene, in which a woman kills herself with a dagger. He's putting on the act this week over at Kingsby, about ten miles from here. He'll be back any moment now. I've promised to turn off all the lights, and he is going to work up some phosphorus effect and pretend to step from the portrait just as the clock tolls midnight. He's going through with the act just as the woman was said to have done it, and he says he will make it so realistic we'll just about think it's the real thing. Dan has a lot of ability and will give us a real thrill. It's almost half after 11 now. Suppose I turn off the lights, and we can smoke here by the fire. It won't throw any glow into the next room to spoil the phosphorus effect. Dan will be here in a few minutes. He's going to come from the theater right in his stage costume, with his make-up on. He'll get in by the track way, and we'll never know he's here till we see him in the portrait act. It will give us a better thrill than if we saw him first in the costume, and talked with him."

"I'll say it will!" I answered with fervor. "Hear that rain beat down and those pine trees moaning in the wind! If there was ever a night made for ghosts and goblins this is one of them. We'll get the full effect all right!" And I can not say that it was with complete joy I watched my friend carefully turn off every light in the place.

THE minutes ticked by. Far away in the town below I heard a clock strike the half hour after 11.

"That's the tower clock," said Jim in a low voice. "It's always right to a second, and almost a hundred years old!"

"Everything around here seems to be old," I replied uneasily. "I suppose some witch predicted that the clock would always be right, and a goblin winds it every week with a key made out of witch-smoke!"

Jim laughed, but there was a bit of unsteadiness in his laugh. "Sort of gets you, that story about the woman, doesn't it?" he said. "And this being the anniversary of the night she is due to appear. Let's have a drink. It will steady us up a bit. That damned wind in the pine trees seems almost alive!"

"Thanks," I said.

Jim arose, and from a sideboard produced a bottle and glasses. We drank to each other's health, and then to Dan's success, and the success of the performance we were about to see.

"Just one more," Jim muttered, and commenced to fill the glasses. As

he did so the clock in the tower, far away, began to toll the hour of midnight.

With a muttered ejaculation Jim dropped the glass he was filling and it fell to the floor, breaking into a thousand tiny pieces that glittered in the firelight. "Look!" he whispered. "The light!"

Yes, a light was gathering out of the inky blackness of the next room, just where the portrait hung, but it was not as if created by phosphorus, but rather a weird, unnatural glow, unlike anything that could be created through human skill.

"Great!" Jim whispered. "Isn't he a genius? I'll bet that's something of his own invention. See! the portrait seems to be moving. Say, isn't that effect astonishingly real? That boy's fortune is made. He'll be recognized before long as the most famous in the business!"

Yes, the portrait was moving. Slowly the canvas seemed to open and fade away into nothing, and from the great frame there stepped the figure of a beautiful young woman. Her face was as clear and white as ivory, and a great mass of silken hair of yellowest gold flowed down her back, reaching almost to her waist.

I heard Jim's breath coming quick and short. "By Jove!" he muttered. "If I didn't know it was Dan, I wouldn't believe—isn't that a make-up, though? Talk about a star act! How the devil does he get that portrait opening effect? It ought to be worth a fortune, a trick like that!"

I muttered something to indicate that I agreed, and that the working out of the act was as great a mystery to me as to my friend. Then we both gasped. From the bosom of her flowing white robes the woman drew a bright, shining dagger, and her lips parted. "I come," she said softly, "I come, beloved to join you!" With a quick movement she sank the dagger to the hilt in her breast, and with a half-choking moan slipped gradually to the floor.

Jim and I leaped to our feet. "Bravo!" shouted my friend, and I echoed the word. "Some act, old boy; your fortune's made when you can do stuff like that!" I shouted. "For God's sake turn on the lights, Jim; there's goose-flesh enough on me to feed a whole poultry yard!"

"Me, too!" Jim answered, fumbling for the switch. "Let's catch him and make him show us how he did it with the light on. Here it is!" And the next instant both the room in which we stood and the portrait room were flooded with the electric glow.

"Come on," Jim shouted; "he's probably in the room beyond the portrait one—there are rooms enough in this place for half a dozen families. How in heaven's name did he get that dagger effect? I'll swear I saw something red staining that white gown just as she fell! Dagger blade must slide up into the handle, but it surely was realistic!"

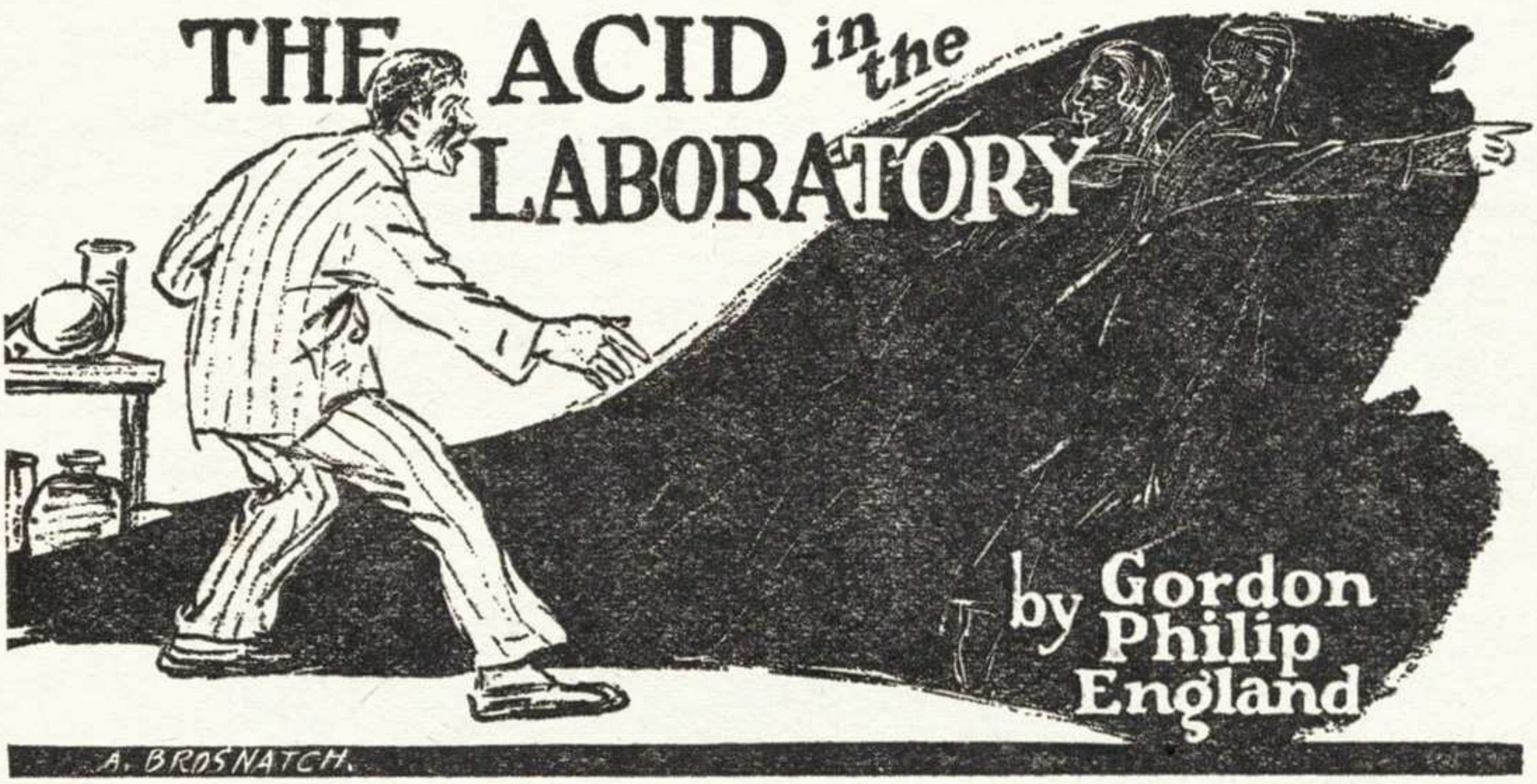
WE STARTED for the room beyond where the portrait looked down on us, calm and restful, as we had seen it earlier in the evening. Suddenly the telephone rang out sharp and clear.

Jim turned to a table and picked up the receiver. "Hello—yes—this is Carson's place — Carson talking — what—who did you say? My God—"

The receiver fell from Jim's hand, struck the table and rolled off, falling to the length of the cord, then dragged the telephone after it. The instrument clattered to the floor. Jim turned his face to me. It was soaked with great drops of perspiration and as white as death.

"That was Dan," he muttered thickly, speaking each word as if it were choking him. "It was such a storm—he decided to wait and come in the morning—*he didn't leave Kingsby at all!*"

THE ACID in the LABORATORY



Author of "The Master of Hell," "Adventures of An Astral," etc.

I AM writing tonight in a desperate effort to keep awake. During the past few weeks I have slept too much. I hate sleep, for slumber brings me not rest but torturing nightmares that are slowly driving me mad.

Nor are the awful visions the worst that could happen while I sleep. A more deadly menace is held over me—a threat that endangers my very life. So sleep I dare not, for it is a question whether I should ever again awake.

If I did not awake I should die, and how I dread death! I used to believe that death ends all—that the body returns again to dust, and that the soul is a mere figment of over-developed imagination. But I am no longer an unbeliever. Now I realize that there *is* a supernatural. I know now that there *are* spirits, and how I fear to face the infuriated spirits of George and Emily!

Nightly they have tormented me with hallucinations and terrifying suggestions, but tonight I will not sleep. My eyelids are heavy and I find it increasingly difficult to hold open my eyes, but I will not sleep! That I can not remain awake many more nights I know, but tonight, at least, I shall be free from those agonizing visions.

Now for my narrative.

IT IS five years since I, Harley Denton Grimsby, began practising medicine in this little town of Oaksden. I had spent five years at McGill University, graduating with high honors. They offered me a place on the surgical staff at the General Hospital, Montreal, but unwilling to forsake my native country I returned to the United States and followed my profession here at Oaksden.

I soon gained the confidence of my patients and at the end of two years had built up a considerable practise. Then like a flash from the blue came a stroke of unexpected fortune. A distant cousin had struck luck at the Australian gold mines, and soon afterward had accidentally lost his life. By his will I, as sole heir, received nearly £60,000 and became independently rich.

Upon hearing of my good fortune I immediately gave up my ordinary work, and equipping myself with an up-to-date laboratory, devoted my time to medical research.

At about this time the One Woman took up her residence in Oaksden. The

instant I saw Emily Lammerford I knew I had met my ideal. I loved her from her golden crown of hair to the soles of her dainty little feet. And I think she might have loved me in return had it not been for George Hannington.

Hannington was head surgeon at the Oaksden Hospital. A man of strong personality, laboring for the love of his patients rather than for mere fame and reputation, he was a heroic figure well calculated to fascinate such a woman as Emily, who was idealistic to the Nth degree.

Yet despite her friendship with Hannington, Emily admitted that she liked me also, and I felt sure that were Hannington's influence removed she would fulfill my fondest hopes. Believing this, I began planning how to effect his removal.

At first I thought of enticing him from Oaksden by offering him a position on the staff of a large Chicago hospital which friends of mine controlled. But after consideration, I realized that this plan was impracticable. He would correspond with Emily; would tell her his Utopian ideas, and though separated in person would be united with her in spirit. No, that would never do. Nothing short of Hannington's death could accomplish my desire. I began to plan how I might destroy him.

I thought over different means of death until my brain reeled. None of the things I thought of satisfied me. They were too dangerous. It was no part of my plan that I should suffer for my deed after slaying him. His death would effect only half my purpose; the other half would be the winning of Emily—no easy task.

I thought of poisons, of the knife, of disease germs—I dismissed all as unsatisfactory. I wanted something safer—something that would disintegrate and utterly destroy every vestige of my victim's body. But where could I find so mighty an implement of death?

It was by accident that I finally discovered what I had sought. I had been working in my laboratory one night and had mixed several compounds to form a certain acid which I intended using in an experiment. But when the acid was ready I found I had made a mistake while mixing the ingredients, and instead of the acid I had desired I had an altogether different kind. The new acid was transparent and colorless as water.

Picking up a dead frog which I had used in a former experiment, I dropped it into the vessel containing the acid, then busied myself with other work for a few minutes. Then I looked in the vessel to see what effect the acid had had upon the frog. The acid was no longer transparent but was like roily water in appearance. I got an iron spoon and fished about in the dish, but could find no trace of the frog. The acid had utterly devoured it.

A sudden thought rushed into my mind, and for a moment its possibilities almost stunned me. Then I decided I must pursue this experiment to the end. A frog's bones were too soft; I must try something better. But what?

Walking to the other end of the laboratory, I opened a small cage in which I had imprisoned several small animals which I used for dissecting purposes. Reaching in, I caught up a kitten and carried it over to the dish of acid. It squirmed for a moment in my grasp, then I lowered it into the acid. The body disappeared with incredible swiftness. Flesh and bone simply melted beneath the attack of the consuming liquid.

DURING the next week I conducted several other tests and was completely satisfied with their results. In this incomparable acid I held a positive means of destruction.

"Now for Hannington!" I jubilantly exclaimed.

It would not be difficult to entice my rival to my laboratory. Before the arrival of Emily we had been friends and often he had assisted me with some particularly interesting experiment. Indeed, so well had I concealed my true feelings toward him that neither he nor Emily realized my friendship had turned to hatred.

Feverishly I got ready for his reception. I made a large quantity of the acid, and carrying it into a little bathroom at the farther end of the laboratory began filling the bath. I had only poured in a few drops when a smell of burning rubber attracted my attention, and after examination I saw that the acid had destroyed the rubber plug of the outlet. But after searching the laboratory I discovered a round piece of steel which just fitted the hole. Then I poured in the rest of the acid.

Having made all preparations, I went to the telephone.

Hannington had bachelor quarters and his house was on the same street as mine. As I have already mentioned, we had been closely associated in experimenting along the lines of medical research, and to facilitate secrecy regarding these experiments we had run a private line between our houses. I now chuckled with glee as I remembered this.

Before giving Hannington a call, I glanced at my watch. It was 1 o'clock in the morning.

A moment later I was ringing Hannington. I rang several times before he came to the telephone.

"What's the matter?" he asked crossly. "I was just asleep."

"Come over at once!" I shouted. "I've got a surprize for you—something that will revolutionize your ideas!"

A new experiment was to Hannington what honey is to a bee. Eagerly he grabbed at the bait.

"I'll be right over," he called back.

Five minutes later he arrived, clad in his surgeon's uniform. I surveyed him critically.

"Good," I told myself. "Those clothes will dissolve almost instantly. There's no metal about them."

Aloud I said:

"You didn't see anyone on the street, did you? I'd hate to have this leak out. It's the most important experiment I've ever tried."

"I didn't see a soul," he assured me, "and the street lights are off, too."

"Then come on to the laboratory!" I exclaimed.

Quickly he followed me through the laboratory into the bathroom. I locked the door and put the key in my pocket. And then I turned and faced him. All hell must have shone in my eyes, for instinctively he realized he was trapped. With a cry of alarm he sprang at me. He might as well have assailed the Rock of Gibraltar. He was small and slight; I was a giant in strength. He fought desperately, but the end was never in doubt. After a moment he fell back before my heavy blows and screamed for help.

"Yes, scream," I laughed harshly. "It is pleasant to hear you. And no one else can hear. These laboratory walls are sound-proof!"

"Have you gone mad?" he cried.

"No," I quietly answered, "I am perfectly sane. But Hannington, I am also determined. You have stood between me and the choice of my heart for nearly two years, and by heaven! you shall do so no longer!"

I paused, while he frantically glanced about for a way of escape. Then I spoke again:

"I hate you, Hannington, yet I could almost pity you because of the agony of your death. Do you see that water in that tub? Harmless-looking, isn't it? Well, Hannington, you are

soon going to find out exactly how harmless and innocent it is."

Hannington glanced at the tub of seemingly clear water and his face paled. Some instinct, together with my cryptic words, told him of his danger and he partly guessed the truth.

And guessing it, he became like a madman. He flung himself upon me with a rush that actually bore me to the floor. But his triumph was not of long duration. My steel muscles soon told against him, and rolling him off I gripped him with both hands and raised him to hurl into the acid. But he struggled from my grasp and beat at me desperately with his fists. I smote him to the floor. He rose again, and again I knocked him down. Finally he stood facing me, his back toward the tub, and terror in his eyes.

"Are you through?" I asked coldly. "What a fool you were to think you could defeat me! What a fool to have come here tonight! You might have known that no man who loved Emily could ever be a friend of yours."

I taunted him, tried to provoke him to further resistance, but he stood silently staring at me. At last he spoke hoarsely:

"Grimsby, you win now, but this is not the end. I will return."

I laughed derisively.

"You fool," I said. "In a few minutes you will have ceased to exist. Your body will be entirely destroyed —not a fragment of it will remain. And yet you talk of returning!"

Hannington's gaze did not falter.

"It is you who are the fool, Grimsby. You can never kill the more important part of me—my soul."

His words fell over me like a cold shower. For an instant I hesitated, but only for an instant. With terrific force I shot out my fist, striking him full in his jaw. Lifted from his feet, he fell backward into the acid.

THE disappearance of George Hannington created much excitement. Many theories were advanced to account for it, but all fell wide of the truth. The police worked indefatigably, conducting a general search throughout the town. Armed with a search warrant, they even entered my laboratory, but they found nothing. What was there to find? The disintegrated body of Hannington had disappeared down the drain-pipes and not a trace of it remained to convict me. When the police inspected the bathroom they found nothing to arouse their suspicions.

Months passed and still the affair remained an unsolved mystery. How I used to chuckle to myself when the detectives would announce they had discovered some new clue—that Hannington had left town because of blackmailers, or for some equally improbable reason! What would they not have given to have learned the truth!

During these months I was not idle. Gradually, little by little, I overcame the resistance of Emily, and finally she agreed to marry me. But though she accepted me, she did not love me. By sheer will-power I had won her.

Six months after Hannington's "disappearance," I married Emily. That was my day of triumph. But that night I dreamed that George Hannington's spirit came and stood beside me and threatened me, and I woke with hair on end and cold sweat oozing from every pore.

A few weeks later I awoke to the fact that my marriage was a failure. I had married a woman whose heart belonged to a dead man. Gradually I came to realize that though dead, Hannington still held a mighty influence over my wife. And I became wildly jealous.

One morning about three months ago I had gone to my laboratory after breakfast as usual. While there, I remembered I had left my pocket-

knife on my bureau. Returning for it I saw a strange sight. Emily was standing with her back to the door, and in her hands was a miniature of Hannington. And while I looked she pressed her lips tenderly against his pictured face.

For a moment I watched, my fingers working convulsively, my features contorted with fury. And as I watched, all my love for her turned to implacable hatred.

She was still unaware of my presence. For an instant I was on the point of leaping forward and fastening my fingers in her soft white throat. Then another idea came to me, and mastering myself, I quietly left the room and went back to the laboratory.

"She loves him," I muttered to myself fiercely. "Well, so be it then. She shall go to him!"

For the next few hours I worked steadily. By noon I had the bath ready.

After dinner I said to Emily:

"Will you come to the laboratory for a few minutes, dear? I have a surprize there for you."

My honeyed tones utterly deceived her. Without a word she followed me. Not until she was within the bathroom with the door locked did I reveal my fury—and then it was too late for her to escape.

IF THE disappearance of Hannington had caused a sensation in Oaksden, then the equally mysterious disappearance of Emily raised a furor. Now I was openly under suspicion, and again coming with a warrant the police ransacked the whole house. They found no proof of my guilt, but they did find something which helped to prove my innocence. Pinned to the under side of my pillow they found a note from Emily saying that she could no longer bear to live with me and was going away. The note was dated on the day she had disappeared, and she had probably written it that forenoon while I was in the laboratory.

Nothing could have been more fortunate. Those dull-brained police never thought of arresting me after that. I posed as an injured, heartbroken husband and offered huge rewards for the return of my wife. Detectives searched for her all over the country while I laughed in my sleeve. What fools they were!

I now began to believe myself allpowerful. In my hands I held a secret by which I could destroy my enemies at will. After the excitement had died down, I filled the tub again with the acid, ready for the next unlucky man who should offend me.

But all this time I was oppressed with an indefinable dread. At night my sleep was troubled with hideous dreams—dreams in which my two victims would come and stand beside my bed and menace me.

As time passed, I realized that these were not ordinary dreams but were inspired by the spirits of my victims. I had always sneered at supernatural beliefs, but after a time I became convinced that death does *not* end all, and realized that malignant influences were encompassing me. And nightly my dreams grew worse.

Then my dreams became living nightmares. The spirits would come and beckon me to the laboratory and I would follow. I would not want to follow, but I could not resist them for long. They would lead me to the tub of acid and then sink into it and disappear, leaving me staring down after them in fascination.

As the weeks passed, I began wondering if these visions were not more than visions. They seemed so clear that it seemed almost impossible that they were mere dreams. I asked myself whether I really remained in bed while they were taking place or if I actually went to the laboratory.

Last Sunday night my questions found an answer. I had been dreaming as usual and was following the spirits to the bathroom when suddenly I awoke. Great heaven! I was standing in the middle of the laboratory. I was standing in pitch-blackness, my heart beating like a trip-hammer, my ears strained listening for a sound.

How long I stood like this I do not know, but all at once I heard a laugh. I recognized the voice—it was Hannington's! Then sounded another laugh, low and mocking, and I knew it was Emily's. And then I heard them speak: "Friday night, Harley. Beware of Friday night!" And then the dark laboratory was wrapped in the silence of the grave.

Uttering a frantic cry, I staggered to the electric switch. I snapped it. No result. The laboratory was still enshrouded in Stygian blackness.

I felt my way back to my room, hands before my face, knocking against different objects as I reeled blindly forward. Twice I could have sworn that a cold hand slapped my burning face. Finally reaching my bed, I crawled between the sheets and tossed in misery the remainder of the long night.

That was six nights ago. Tonight is Friday night. Since Sunday night I have not slept a wink. I dare not sleep. I know that if I sleep some danger will assail me. What that danger is I do not know—but I *do know* that it exists.

My narrative is finished. I do not intend that any mortal shall ever read it, however, and in the morning I will destroy it. I have written it in an effort to keep awake. My eyelids feel like leaden weights; my nights of sleeplessness are beginning to tell against me. What would I not give for one little hour of perfect rest—one hour of blissful unconsciousness! But I dare not sleep.

But how sore my eyes are—how they smart! Perhaps I had better close them and rest them a little while. That is what I will do. I will close my eyes and try to drive these awful thoughts from my mind. But I must not keep them closed too long, for if I did that I might fall asleep. And I must not sleep!

[*Extract from letter of Mrs. Pierson, Dr. Grimsby's nearest neighbor, to her niece in Boston.*]

Dear Ellen:

The most horrible thing has happened! You remember how George Hannington and Mrs. Grimsby disappeared. Well, Ellen, they have solved the mystery at last. It was Dr. Grimsby who murdered them. Oh, it was awful, awful! He discovered a terrible acid that would melt up a person's body just as you would melt up soap, and destroyed them with it. But Nemesis has overtaken the brute at last. For several days there had been no sign of life at Dr. Grimsby's, so this morning the police investigated. What do you suppose they found? Listen, Ellen, for this is terribly exciting! They found the table in his bedroom covered with sheets of manuscript—the full story of how he had done his fiendish work. Then they went to the laboratory and what do you suppose they found there? In a little bathroom at the end of the laboratory was a tub partly full of the acid *and it was the color of turbid water*. The police tested the acid and found it would melt things in a few minutes. They say that the doctor must have fallen asleep and while sleep-walking have thrown himself into the acid.

From the Land of Spirits She Came to Him—and He Was Afraid

CANDLE-LIGHT

By LOUISE GARWOOD

Author of "Fayrian"

DAVID closed the great oak door behind his departing guests, happy at last to hear their laughter and their footsteps mingle with the patter of the rain outside. How long they had stayed and tried him by their good-natured talk—and they could never have understood why he wanted to be alone! Now his silent house was left all to him and he might abandon his mind to the memories which seemed to creep like specters from the dusty corners and faded curtains; to the strange dream that he had borne in his heart so long.

He walked across the thick carpet to the fireplace where the embers were smoldering and casting a glow on the hearth. From overhead, on the mantel, the light of the candelabra flickered and danced down about his graying hair. He heard the drip-drip of the rain on the casement sills; then a gust of wind crowded the drops into a flurry. "Hush! Hush!" it seemed to say. Was it wind, or a sigh? He started. There was the odor of violets again! He walked to the window and opened it so that the damp air blew upon him; and his face twisted in his effort to speak aloud, but he could only whisper, "Eleanore!"

"Drip-drip, patter-patter," answered the rain.

He closed the window, and, sighing, went back to stare once more at the embers and press his temples with cold fingers. Yes, she would come! She would come back to the old house which had grown musty and dismal for want of her—to him, David, whose heart had grown musty and dismal for want of her. She had promised to come back again sometime in early spring: and he had waited through the years—so long that his hair had grown touched with gray and his face had become lined. But now it would be different. He knew that she was near. Else why that sound of muffled footsteps he had heard of late, sometimes following, sometimes going before him over the velvet carpet through the lonely halls? The swish of curtains that moved as if from a person passing by? The odor of violets here and there—her violets? And strangest of all, the little yellowed handkerchief he had found in the carven chair? The handkerchief belonged in the chest where he kept the trifles she had once used; around it, too, clung the breath of violets, together with the same odor that was given forth by the sunless rooms downstairs. The chest was always locked—yet he had found the kerchief.

"Eleanore! Where are you?" His own voice startled him.

He suddenly saw that the ashes in the grate were no longer smoldering rosily. They were getting gray. It must be time for him to go to bed. So after he had put the screen around the fireplace he began to extinguish

the lights on the mantel, taking one from its socket to guide him up the stairway. The last one of all, he left burning. "For her," he thought, and gave a whimsical smile. Then he turned and left the room to its fantastic shadows, to the whisper of the wind, to that soft laughter which was really the patter of raindrops against the sills. Above, on the high ceiling, danced the flickering light of the candle, while before him, gaunt and tall, moved his own shadow, and it fluttered ahead as he hastened up the steps. At the landing where the stairway divided into two smaller flights, he turned, and after ascending the one that led to the right wing of the house, crossed the narrow hall into his room.

Here with fresh tapers lighted, and his favorite armchair and books, it did not seem so lonely. Yet he did not wish to read—he wanted to open the small chest and look at its array of relics one by one. When he unlocked it a musty sweetness stole out. Sitting there he fingered the yellowed handkerchief, the silk fan with flowers painted on it, the gloves—yellow also now. The human hands that had worn them could never touch his again. Tears and prayers might bring her spirit back but they could never restore those warm hands to his clasp! Then he unfolded a scarf. How sheer and delicate it was—like her! How it breathed of her! He buried his face in it.

"Oh, my dear, you promised! I have waited so long—aren't you coming back? It has been lonely, Eleanore!"

The scarf fell from his hands. What was that noise? He rose, straining to hear, peering out into the darkness of the stair landing, then sank back again. Of course! The casement in the library; it had not been repaired, and the March wind was making it rattle. But he had best not worry to go down and fasten it. There were the other things to look at, as if he had not gone over them a thousand times before—the pretty brooch, the comb, the letters written in faded ink.

He was reading one of these letters when, as the wind died down, he heard through the steady pour of the rain a sound that was *not* the rattling of the casement. It was distinct and clear—"Click, clack." David wanted to go to the door, but he could not move except to rise and stand motionless in front of his chair as the kerchief, brooch and letters fell and scattered on the floor. His heart beat hard and sent a wave of red into his face. "Click, clack"—a footstep on the uncarpeted stair—the light touch of a woman's slipper! "Click." The rain came steadily down. He waited; the visitor seemed to have paused.

In a moment the steps began again and came up slowly—one, two, three, four, five—there were thirteen before the landing could be reached. "Click, clack, click." Eight, nine, ten. "Clack." At last he saw something. It was an aureole of light which, as the steps came nearer, grew into a semicircle: candle-light—but no shadow fell before it. Advancing within the light was the outline of a head of dark hair, then a white neck and shoulders, until finally upon the landing stood a slim figure clad in a pale robe. A hand rose to shade the candle, and slowly the figure turned and looked up toward him with large eyes. A thick braid fell over each shoulder.

David tried to hold out his arms. They were leaden. "Eleanore!" he tried to call. Only a gasp came from between his parted lips. And she stayed there a minute, smiling, then came toward him up the smaller steps —"Click, clack, click"—very slowly, and after crossing the hall she stood in the doorway of his room. There she paused again. And those tender

words of welcome which he had yearned to say through all the years would not come. A strange timidity held him back from her. He wanted to fall upon his knees and cry. At last he uttered halting words.

"You—you have come!"

"Yes, David; I have come!" Her voice was calm and sweet. She advanced. Her dainty slippers touched the carpet noiselessly and her long garment dragged behind with a sighing sound. When she had reached the table where the lights were, she put her candle in an empty bracket, then sat down upon a low stool facing David. It did not seem that she thought of coming nearer. How different this was from the meeting he had dreamed of! His own voice was calm as she said:

"Why did you not come before? I have waited so long, darling." He stepped toward her, but leaned back against the table as he saw that she shrank away. Her eyes grew wide.

"It has not been long. It has only been a little while." The wind whined through the gables outside. David watched her draw the white robe close around her while a new loneliness arose in his heart.

"Has it seemed short to you, then? Oh, the long, long years, Eleanore! They have made me old—and you say 'a little while'!"

Why were they so strangely calm? Why were they not in each other's arms with that sweet, warm embrace of old? The smile was gone from her lips now. She said mournfully:

"I have tried to come to you so many, many times—and I could not. Sometimes I was at your window whispering to you; then I would laugh and tap on the panes—but you never heard."

"How could I know?" He shook his head. She sighed and it seemed that there were violets in the room.

"I am glad to be here. I am glad to be near you, David, because" (she drew the robe close about her again) "it was lonely and cold."

David shuddered. "Where—where was it lonely and cold?"

She made a vague gesture that caused the open sleeve to fall back from her arm.

"Out there."

After a few minutes she looked down at the things which lay on the floor at their feet, and the open chest.

"What are these?"

Once more that queer loneliness!

"Don't you know, Eleanore? Surely you remember—"

"No."

"Why, they are your own! Your letter, dear, the comb you wore in your hair—"

How small and like a child she looked as she slipped down from the stool and knelt among the relics! She held up the yellowed handkerchief and looked at him with a question in her eyes.

"This, David," she said, "I think I—remember—"

He shuddered again. After that she looked no more at the things but straight up into his eyes.

"I like to be here," she said simply. "It is warm and sweet where you are, David." His heart beat faster as he looked down and saw something of the old light burning in those strange eyes.

"And I am old, Eleanore—I grew old when you left me—everything grew old and musty and dismal when you went away." He motioned to the ceiling with bits of cobwebs in its corners—to the faded carpet. "But you are young and beautiful—"

She gave a laugh that sounded like the patter of rain against the casement.

"No, no! It is *you* who are young: I am not young!" The eery laugh pattered again. "David, I—". She seemed to be groping for words she

could scarcely remember. "I—love—you!"

She rose; she stretched out her white arms; she was coming toward him. He shivered and grew cold as she came nearer. Her arms touched him. He shrank away. They encircled him. He tried to pull back but he was held by terror. Her icy lips were seeking his: the fragrance of violets was heavy in his nostrils, and deathly and heavier still, the damp, moist odor of the mold around their roots!

"Don't—don't!" he cried. "You are—oh, God!—go away!"

The white arms fell from around him and she cringed. He looked into eyes of unutterable sadness. Then she covered her face with her slender hands and rocked her body to and fro, moaning:

"Oh, oh, oh! I tried and tried to come—and I came to you at last and you were afraid. You are afraid of me!"

He could not speak: he clung to the table, weeping. The mournful voice went on:

"I must go away; and it will be lonely and cold and I can never come back any more."

Slowly she went over to where the candles burned and lifted one from the bracket, shading it with her hand. She turned her piteous face toward him again, crooning the words over and over to herself as if they were a weird song:

"You were afraid."

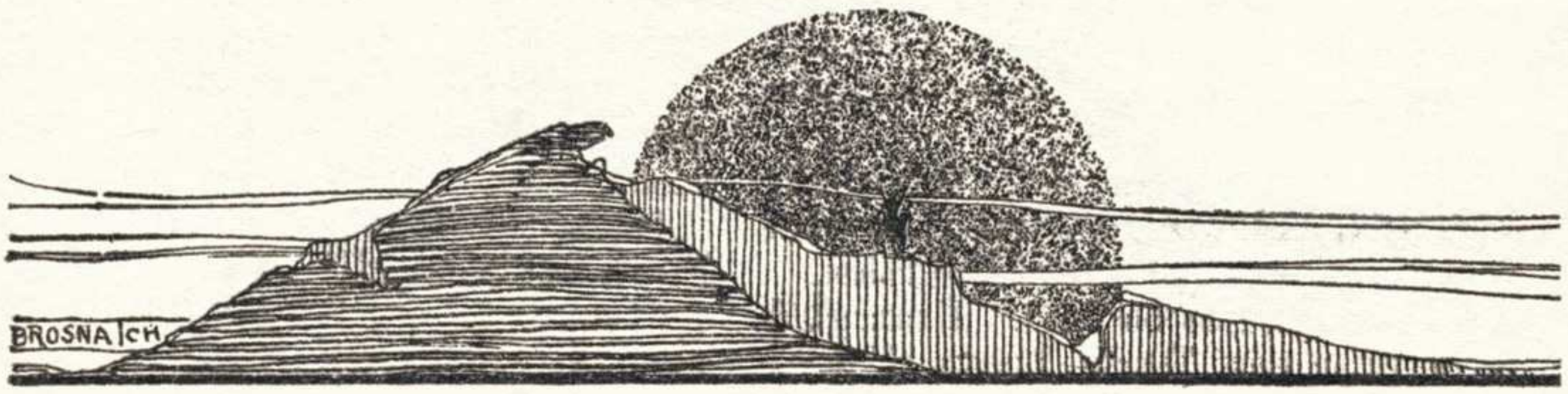
And now she was walking through the doorway, the long garment trailing behind her, the dark braids swinging loosely. David could not follow.

"Come back—come back!" he tried to call but the words were only a whisper. "Click, clack, click, clack." Then "Click, clack," again, farther and farther away. He listened and watched until the halo of light grew smaller and smaller and the footsteps died off in the silence; while the wind and rain outside sounded as if they took up the burden of her moaning:

"Oh—oh—oh! I came to you and you were afraid."

A SHARP pain—David jerked his head up: it had struck the wooden chest that lay on his knees. How strange! He could not remember having sat down again—or having gathered the things from the floor; stranger still, the candles which had been only half-burned when she was there, flickered fitfully in their sockets, ready to expire. One at a time the flames fluttered and went out.

The next morning was bright and sunshiny, the sky all blue, and the trees and flowers were fresher from last night's rain. As David looked out the window the air was sweet and he saw that the gardener had been putting out new violet plants. From all around the garden their blooms looked up at him with bright faces where drops of moisture lingered, shining like tears. Later, as he walked down the staircase, he found spots of candle-drip all the way—and the last socket of the brass candelabrum on the mantel was empty.



THE MAN-TRAP

by Hamilton Craigie

Author of "Midnight Black," "The Jailer of Souls," etc.

THE laboratory of Professor Pordenone was a strange and curious place. Entering it, you were immediately sensible of an odor that was like an emanation, rising, head-high, in an almost overpowering perfume, sickish-sweet; it was like the close smell of a hot-house, but magnified, as if a giant had dealt there in his strange garden of distorted smells.

For it was a place of giants: out of the loam, that was like a thing of life, there rose, gigantic, plants that towered to the height of a tall man, and beyond it; in the green gloom of a perpetual twilight they rose up, monstrous, misshapen, like a forest of fantastic shapes seen in the dim shuttle of a dipsomaniac's dream.

And there was this about it: you could hear the silence, if you were there to hear it, for it was like the silence of a vault, a singing silence, a silence as of waiting, heavy, like a weight upon the ears, until—you opened the door.

Then—as if at the quick whisper of a sudden wind, there would come a rustle, a murmur, a *movement* in that greenish gloom—but there would be no wind, although the sound followed always upon the opening of the door.

Now, with the opening of the door, there was revealed a grinning, hairless head, three-pointed; the eyes chill, with a fixed, unwavering, unwholesome brightness, like a painted flame. A moment it peered and grimaced in the doorway; then, sidling inward like a crab, Professor Pordenone surveyed his grim garden with a mirthless smile.

And now, as he stood there, the forest of viscid green seemed welcoming him; it swayed and rustled; head-high, at the height of a tall man, the giant fronds writhed and twisted as in a wind invisible, bending and swaying as in a dance of death.

But there was no wind. The air of the place, dead, heavy, lifeless, seemed brooding in a changeless calm as Professor Pordenone stood smiling and rubbing his palms. In the humid air the flame from the lighted taper in his hand rose upward in the dimness like a painted sword against that dim green background to right and left; like a licking, hungry tongue, it forked upward now as the professor turned, lean head thrust forward like a pointer at gaze.

Now his face seemed touched with a sudden, sly malevolence; his thin, spatulate fingers, reaching, had ex-

tended the taper with a little, flicking motion against a tall plant at his right.

Upon the instant, as if it had been a thing alive, the trifoliate frond had bent as a steel blade bends double; then, as a bayonet thrusts, soundless and swift, its spike-tipped lance had sprung level with his eyes.

Professor Pordenone chuckled, moving as a cat moves, for all his bulk. An inch—and the great spur had reached him, thrust in carte. The plant—*Hecate triformis*—was a hypersensitive, of course; heat acted upon it as the needle to the pole; but for a moment, fantastic as it might have been, it seemed as if it had been almost humanly endowed with motion, malevolent and swift.

The professor, moving forward, the taper still in his hand, halted now before a row; gigantic, dark-green they were, shading almost to black; ugly, as a toadstool is ugly, ten feet in air rearing their crested hoods like cobras—and, like sleeping cobras, nodding their heavy heads with a slow, swinging motion, to right and left.

The professor, taper held in his fingers like a baton, seemed like a man who walked now with wariness and care. Still with that secret smile edging his thin lips, he faced forward now, bowing as an orchestra leader bows before the curtain.

"My children!" he whispered, low. "Your time will come—even now is it at hand! I, Udolfo Pordenone, have promised you! And then—ah, then, we shall see!"

One, peering inward at that curious chamber, would see, but he would not have believed. For, indeed, as might be seen in any hot-house, there were foxglove, starwort, narcissus, orchis, crane-fly and cipripedium—but hideous, distorted, monstrous beyond all imagining, thrusting aloft with filaments that had grown to cables, stamens that were like writhing columns, pistils that were like gigantic swords.

The thing that had become a bayonet was fantastic and dangerous enough, but it was before a curious monster that seemed a cuttlefish rooted in black loam that the professor paused and gloated.

Beneath its soaring antennæ, quivering like the sentient fingers of a giant squid, there was a flat, white disk, a dead white, like the belly of a snake. Now, as the professor halted before it, this curious disk quivered, shook—moved of a sudden like a hungry mouth, subsided, as the professor, stepping backward a pace, extended the thin taper's flame, like the flicking of a whip, which in effect it was.

"Ah—not yet, my friend!" the low voice murmured. "Not yet awhile—but—patience—and it shall be a fact accomplished."

2

PROFESSOR PORDENONE was in his way a genius, though a perverted one. That plants could feel, that they could even see, he was aware, just as a schoolboy is casually conscious of the inevitableness of two and two. The East Indian sage who had, by an almost miraculous devising, been able to observe with his super-delicate instruments, the death throes of a flower,* stood merely at the threshold, where the professor had passed onward through the door.

Now, as he went outward from his laboratory, he smiled thinly as if in anticipation: an indwelling, secret smile that lingered as he closed shut the heavy door with its patent spring lock.

He stood now in a lofty, dark corridor leading to his bachelor quarters, a study and a bedchamber, where, alone, he slept and ate, poring over his formulæ like another Faustus, delving in the dark secrets of life and of death.

**A fact; featured in the newspapers of May, 1923.*

Passing, with his swift, silent step, into his study, and to an elaborate escritoire in the corner, he snapped on the light, for it had come on to evening, and took up a small vial from the desk. In a large, square tub to the right of this desk there was a plant; it was little more than a seedling; but even to its infinitesimal, flat disk, it was a perfect replica of that Gargantuan horror in the dim garden just beyond.

The professor, holding the vial to the light, shook it gently from right to left, removing its glass stopper, in his eyes a queer, greenish light seeming to be mirrored in the contents of that vial, milk-pale. One drop—a milligram of that candescent liquid—and, as he was wont to say, he could grow trees from grass-blades. That seedling now—well, in the morning he would—give it new life. Meanwhile. . . .

Propping the vial against a corner of the desk, he took from a cellaret at his elbow a goblet of old Faience, and with it a decanter. He drank, once, and again. . . . The vial, unheeded, tilted sidewise, so that, unseen, perhaps three drops of its potent liquid spilled over upon that Lilliputian seedling in its tub. Tomorrow—ah, tomorrow, as he had planned it from the first, he expected a visitor: Gammage, the orchis-hunter—Gammage, who had laughed at his assertions, laughed at him, Udolfo Pordenone, the great, cited innumerable precedents for his confounding, snapped his fingers at him, belittled him, scoffed at him times without number.

And tomorrow Gammage—would pay.

But first he would show him the proof; after that his enemy would disappear, and by an agency that was neither beast nor human; an agency terrible in its swift, silent vengeance that would indeed leave no trace.

Stoppering the vial with fingers that trembled in their eagerness, he rose, stumbling against the seedling in its tub. A large green-bottle fly, its motion swift as summer lightning, its drone loud in the stillness, evaded the slow sweep of his hand to dip in a bewildering, swift spiral downward across the tub.

Upon the instant there came a furious, frantic buzzing, and then—silence. The fly was gone. But the windows and doors were closed; it could have had no egress from the room. But if the professor had glanced downward at that tub he would have seen that that flat, white disk had strangely broadened two diameters even as he had sat there at the desk.

But he did not look. Those giant monsters in that garden of grim shapes had once been seedlings, some of them, indeed, scarce older than from sun to sun. . . .

The professor, snapping out the light, moved slowly, with a slow, noiseless chuckle, outward to his bedchamber, while behind him as he slept, separated from his bedroom by the width of a single door, there grew and continued a slow, stealthy rustle: Life, hideous, malformed, rising like a dim tide ceilingward, there in the murmurous dark.

3

PROFESSOR PORDENONE, awaking at his usual hour, dressed in a queer, fumbling haste, departing presently upon an errand which was to occupy the best part of his day.

He had been upon the point of returning to his study when, upon an impulse, he had wheeled, his hand upon the doorknob, in a curious, sudden indecision, which, if he had been superstitious, he might have called a presentiment—a premonition of a something felt but unseen, hidden yet half-revealed. The liquor that he had

drunk had been potent; that must be it; and his errand could not wait.

And so he had turned backward, striding from the house, to return at evening, an evening, after rain, of windy dark, with the wind like a lost soul wailing among the trees, the road like a ribbon of pale flame between black walls of ebony, along which his tall, dark figure with its flapping coat-tails went onward to that rendezvous with death.

The house of Professor Pordenone stood alone on a little rising ground about which was the marshland and the river. Now, as the lean scarecrow, with its veiled glance like a cobra's searching in the dust, went forward, there sounded close at hand the brool of the rushing river, like a sound heard in dreams; the cry of a loon sounded from the marshland; the melancholy boom of a bittern answered it.

The traveler's shadow in sable silhouette cut sharp beneath the soaring splendor of the moon that was like a leprous-silvered finger beneath the low-hung curtain of the dark; a little wind, pattering in the dust like the feet of an invisible army of the dead, followed him forth upon the way; it seemed to voice, a whisper, a summons, a command—but the dark figure was oblivious.

And then, between the nightfall and the night, he beheld a black shadow in the door.

It was Gammage.

THE orchis-hunter moved forward as the Italian came up.

"Ah, professor!" he said. "You are on time, I perceive. I was a little early. I've been waiting . . . five minutes . . . but—no matter; we've time, and to spare."

Professor Pordenone observed his visitor under lowered brows.

"Ah, yes," he made answer, with a precise, hissing sibilance. "Quite so, my friend: you have—all the *time* there is."

The accent upon the word was of the faintest. He paused, his face a white, glimmering oval against the background of the night.

"What is it your Shakespeare says?

Time hath, my Lord, a wallet on his back
In which he puts alms for oblivion.

"Is it not so, my friend?"

His dark, Italian face, with its high cheek-bones, showed in a darkling glimmer beneath the tall, shapeless hat; with his wide, foreign cloak, and the white, slender hands moving against the black, there was about him a sinister air, a something hooded and malign, his glance upon his visitor as if the very soul of the man had arisen, deep down, to peer for a moment out of his cold eyes in a sudden, sardonic flicker of unholy mirth.

The orchis-hunter may have been aware of it; perhaps something of this may have been reflected in his look, his tone. Moving outward from the doorway, he shivered slightly in the humid air, for it was not cold. Yet it was as if a bleak wind of the spirit had touched him, and passed on.

"Ugh! Someone's walking over my grave!" he muttered, turning aside as Professor Pordenone moved forward to unlock the door.

The wind, rising, clamored at eave and shutter as the door fell open with a slatting clatter; it shrieked in the chimney on a rising note as the two men, the professor in the lead, went inward to the house.

Here in the bedchamber all was darkness and silence, save for the measured ticking of the hall clock, like the beating of a heart; the squeak and scurry of rats in the wainscot; else was it a silence upon which these empty sounds beat and were lost as rain-drops upon velvet.

The professor, his finger upon the wall-switch, snapped on the light,

pointing forward to the closed door leading to his study.

"In there, my friend," he said, "I have a surprize for you; it will take but a moment; through the study, and into my garden; for you must see—you must—ah—*feel* before you will believe. But—*che sara sara*—what will be will be, my friend; is it not so?"

He ceased, and the long, wild laughter of the winds fled past the dripping eaves. Under the lights his face, with its high-arched, broken nose, showed in a Rembrandtesque shading of high light and shadow, like a Savonarola debased.

Then, with his hand upon the door-knob, he paused. Under the light his face, stripped for a moment of its mask, showed for a fleeting instant, like the face of a satyr, satanic in its ultimate suggestion of sheer, feline malevolence; the words purred in the silence like a cat's:

"Now—my friend—in a moment now—you will see. Have I not promised you?"

He flung wide the door to a black velvet wall of Stygian dark, out of which there came on a sudden a rustling as of invisible pinions, and with it an odor, strong and almost fetid; it swept out upon them in a dim tide of soundless flood.

The professor hesitated, wrinkling his nose with a delicate pinching of the thin nostrils, an odd look of surprize upon his face. But the darkness was like a wolf's throat; the single light but emphasized it; it was smothering, opaque, like the thick darkness of a vault.

Then—he disappeared into that velvet black even as Gammage, following, heard his quick foot-falls padpadding in the dimness of the study just ahead.

THE orchis-hunter froze suddenly in motion. There was a light-switch at the door; his fingers were reaching for it even as, from that midnight black, there came a sound inhuman, beastlike, such as nothing he had ever heard, or would hear, by God's grace, while he might live. Once, on a stricken field, he had heard that sound, or something near it: the scream of a horse in its last agony; it rose now even as he fumbled for the light-switch—died to a choked gurgle, a long, shuddering sigh.

Then—he snapped on the switch, and as the light sprang to full flower, at what he saw or thought he saw a weakness seized upon him, and a quick horror turning his bones to water. For there, towering to the lofty ceiling, uprose a thing, monstrous, unbelievable, a thing that, with its waving tentacles of viscid green, stood like a giant squid, rooted in black loam. And then, beneath the flat white disk that was its mouth, the orchis-hunter saw, and seeing, fled outward, trembling, blind and dumb, to the clear air of heaven.

For the thing that he had seen, agonized, contorted, ere it disappeared forever, sucked downward in that insensate maw, had been—the face of Professor Pordenone!

The Fly-Trap, magnified ten thousand diameters; the seedling, grown overnight to the monster that it had become; the fleshless Frankenstein had found its victim.

The Man-Trap had made its kill.

A Bizarre Story of Weird Surgery

The Seventh Devil

By F. DOUGLAS McHENRY

IT WILL not be my purpose in narrating the events which follow to enter into a technical discussion of the scientific principles involved, nor to attempt to prove the statements I shall make. It may be that at some later date I shall prepare a more academic treatise on my work at the Island of the Seven Devils. The scientific mind, however, is too prosy, too lacking in romantic appreciation to make any great appeal either to my sympathies or to my ambitions. I am, I will say, primarily an adventurer, and not a scientist; it was only because I perceived within the narrow confines of the laboratory possibilities of adventures which surpassed those of the seas or the deserts or the jungles—of all of which I have had a taste—that I supplied myself with an array of books, microscopes, and miscellaneous apparatus sufficient to carry on the work which I had in view.

I had been liberally educated in my youth, and knew that I should not be permitted to practise in my native land, nor, for that matter, in any civilized country, the one branch of science which made its greatest appeal to me. So it was that on the eighth day of November, 1908, profiting by the tale of the celebrated Dr. Moreau, I betook myself and my equipment to a rock-bound Pacific islet which my sea rovings had discovered to me some years before. This island is labeled on some few charts as "The Island of the Seven Devils," but on the majority of maps it will be sought in vain.

I honestly believe I am the only human being that ever set foot upon this isle. The nature of its coast is such that at only one spot is a landing at all possible. On three sides the waves lash against sheer rock walls, and a close approach would mean certain destruction to even the most experienced navigator. Than the fourth side, however, extending for a quarter of a mile, a more inviting landing could hardly be desired. The long, gentle slope of the single hill which composes the island is, at this point, almost devoid of rocks, and supports but a few stunted trees. It is quite grown over with scattered underbrush and tall grasses which at high tide grow almost to the water's edge. When the tide is out, however, about sixty rods of the most inviting smooth yellow sand bask in the warmth of the tropic sun as it shines over the crest of the green hill.

Yet of the four parts into which I have divided my island shoreline, this fourth is by far the most dangerous, the one offering the surest destruction to whoever accepts its alluring invitation. For this sixty rod stretch of inviting beach is in reality sixty rods of treacherous quicksand. This fact I discovered through the loss of two of my black fellahs, who, when I had made my first discovery of the island, had attempted to land in search of water. Their cries as they felt themselves sinking were terrible to my ears, but they were of short duration; almost before they realized their peril, the men were buried.

The only possible method of approach, I discovered, was to wait until the tide had reached its very highest; then, at a point marked by a single large boulder, the seventh of those which gave the island its name, a landing could be made in safety.

Such, then, was my island. This was the spot where for six years I labored at a work which, because I was more an adventurer than a scientist, no other, I believe, has ever dared attempt.

I SHALL not occupy space with the details of my endless experiments, with accounts of my repeated failures and rare successes. Yet I do not deplore my unsuccesses; for it was only by being repeatedly shown the wrong paths that I finally hit upon the ways which led to the marvelous truths I am about to disclose.

There are those who will censure me as cruel and heartless, for I know well the popular prejudice against the vivisectionist. Yet the problems I was solving required an intimate knowledge of the functions of certain organic parts, and it was only by experiments conducted upon living animals that I was enabled to obtain this knowledge. After all, I was in search of truths which were to benefit the race and ease the toil of man—and why am I more to be censured than the surgeon who hurts so that life may be saved or eased, or the butcher who kills so that men may live?

Three times every year I was visited by a faithful servant who brought to me the supplies which I ordered by means of the wireless telegraph—for even in those days this instrument was sufficiently developed to be of use to those who could afford the cumbersome paraphernalia, and to me it was a necessity. Each visit of the yacht added to my collection of instruments and specimens; so that at the end of five years I had a very considerable laboratory and a good-sized museum. In the latter was a great collection of dogs, pigs, monkeys, and birds. Many, which you will call examples of my inhumanity, were to me but the results of successful experiments and evidences of my growing skill as a vivisectionist. Many of them were existing without certain of the vital organs, others were without portions of the brain. One dog, from which I had removed certain of the super-motor centers from one side of the brain, spent all his time walking in a circle, under the impression, I believe, that it was proceeding in a straight path. Another, in which the cerebellum had been mutilated, was unable to maintain its balance, and was forever getting to its feet and toppling over again. Here was a monkey that walked sluggishly about on four feet, kept its nose for the most part buried in the mud floor of its cage, and seemed insensible of its ability to climb, or to perambulate upon two feet; for the brain of this monkey had been removed, and in its place I had transplanted a portion of the brain of a pig.

These animals were my text-books (for my experiments had now passed beyond the range of published books), and often I studied them far into the night. I analyzed their actions, correlating their abilities with the anatomical parts which I had removed or substituted. In this way I obtained an astounding knowledge of the functions of the bodily parts.

I often worked, as I said, far into the night; for to me day and night were as one. This was the case upon the 25th day of December, the beginning of my sixth year of exile. The only significance which the date held for me was that it was to show the success or failure of my latest and most daring experiment.

Two weeks previously I had killed three Diana monkeys. From each I had extracted that portion of the brain which experiment had shown

me contained the reasoning centers. These three portions I had then combined and inserted into the empty brainpan of a living monkey from which the brain had been entirely cleared out. I had allowed fourteen days for the parts to grow together and the wounds to heal. During that time I had kept the animal in a cast, which prevented the movement of a single muscle that might interfere with successful healing. Now, on the 25th of December, I was about to unpinion the animal.

The night was the most disagreeable I had experienced at any time on the island. A terrific storm, which had been raging for two days, must now have reached its apex. Never before had such great volumes of water, foam-capped, lashed themselves to atoms upon the rocks; never before had the scream of the wind been as high-pitched and menacing as on that awful night. I had built my laboratory upon the highest promontory of the island, for I delighted at night to hear the fury of the winds about me, and at day to survey on all sides the empty sea. It filled me with a sense of security, for in renouncing all my friendships with men, I had taken the elements for my companions, and in them I reposed every confidence.

On this night I alone, of all the life in the laboratory, was calm. Even the birds beat their wings in fright upon the bars of their cages; and my giant gorilla, known to me by his label number as "143", screamed furiously and rattled the huge chains by which he was bound.

Amid all this tumult, my mind had never been clearer, nor my hand steadier. With infinite caution I cut away the plaster and the straps which bound the object of my latest experiment. In calm but real suspense I watched the little fellow for an hour or more as he discovered the use of one muscle after another. For life to him was now as a rebirth. He possessed his own knowledge no longer, but within his cranium was stored the accumulated learning of the three brains I had transplanted. With intense interest I placed him in a maze, but he learned it in no time; I gave him a puzzle box, and he had it open in an instant. In fine, I put the animal through a series of tests and rated his ability upon a rude scale which I had formulated and I found that his reasoning power was equal, not to the sum of the powers of the brains he now carried, but to the square of that number. That is, I now had a monkey nine times as intelligent as the average monkey!

For a long time after that I sat staring into the darkness of the wild night, and dreamed of the possibilities which I had unearthed in that night's work. Perhaps by eliminating more unessential portions, I could place four or five brains in one cranium. Think of it! A monkey sixteen or twenty-five times as intelligent as an ordinary monkey! An achievement like that was worth six years of exile, even on this God-forsaken rock stronghold. As I meditated on this, an unusually violent gust shook the island at its very base. I stepped to a window to gaze into the starless night.

Starless, did I say? Surely not, for almost on the horizon I saw a single gleam of light. It took a moment for my senses to adjust themselves to the meaning of that lone star. Some ship, unable to hold to her course in the furious gale, had been blown within a few miles of my treacherous coast. I knew well the strong undertow which flowed toward my island, and as far as I could determine, here was a ship directly in its path. There was just one chance to save it, and that one I chose. I gathered every available lamp in the place and, backing the lamps by a large mirror, placed them in a window facing the direction in which I had seen the light.

"If they have any sense at all," said I, "they'll know enough to steer clear of my light."

I then returned to my reflections.

"Think of it—a monkey with the reasoning power of a man! Or even —" But here I halted. There were lengths which even I, zealous as I was at the moment, halted before. I do not know what devil put the thought into my mind, or if I even realized what I was thinking, but I found myself unable to keep my eyes off No. 143, and each time I perceived the gorilla's distending muscles, his perfect physique, the thought intruded itself a little deeper into my brain.

I went again to the window and peered into the storm. There was the light, its position changed but very little. For a full quarter of an hour I stood there, studying its battle with the waves. It was moving westward, there was now no doubt of that. By this time it must be nearly out of the path of the undertow. They had seen my light and were steering clear.

Of a sudden I returned to the laboratory, took from the shelf a bottle labeled ethyl alcohol, and mixed a powerful draft in a beaker. Again and yet again I filled and emptied the beaker. Then, with the hot stuff still burning in my throat, I stumbled to the window and extinguished every light.

I SHALL pass as quickly as possible over the events of the twenty-sixth of December. Not only is the recollection of that day revolting to me, but I fear that a detailed account of my acts would prove equally repulsive to any who may read this tale.

The storm, as I had expected, had lost all its fury. The sea was still much agitated, however, by choppy waves, and put me in mind much to my discomfiture of the last tremors of a dying man.

It shall suffice to say that when with the sunrise I ventured to the edge of my rock-bound islet, I found the coast strewn with the debris of a wrecked vessel. I stripped myself and without further ado set myself to my task. When the day's work was finished, I deposited on the floor of my dissecting room three dripping corpses.

The transplantation of these three brains into the cranium of No. 143 was a task which occupied my attention almost undividedly for the next six weeks. I found that in order to prevent the struggling of the gorilla, which would have been disastrous to proper healing, it was necessary to keep the animal almost constantly in a stupor, depriving him of the use either of mind or of muscles.

On the fourth of February I deemed that the rupture had sufficiently repaired itself. Accordingly I restrained from administering further drugs, removed the casts and bandages, but secured the animal firmly by heavy chains.

For three days I did not sleep, and scarcely ate, as I watched, fascinated, while the creature awoke to a realization of his powers.

In some of his feats I was delighted beyond my highest hopes; in others I was disappointed. I had expected that, possessed as he was of human knowledge, and because of the almost human structure of the gorilla's larynx, the creature would be able to speak; but try as I would, I could obtain no sounds other than unintelligible gibberish. Nor did he have sufficient control of his muscles to write; but when he was placed before a typewriter, I was amazed at the dexterity with which he plied the keyboard. But what a task I found it to translate his writing! It was made up indiscriminately of *English, German and Spanish!* It was by his inability to differentiate among these three languages—one of which he had acquired, apparently, from each

brain—that I explained his inability to speak intelligibly.

But these details will be of more interest to the scientist than to the general reader, and have little to do with the story in hand: the story of my adventure with three human beings in the carcass of one animal—for such was truly the creature I had created.

He seemed from the first to be what I had designed him to be—a purely intellectual machine; for all the centers of emotion—of fear, of lust, of envy—had been removed to make room for other parts.

But I was soon to be made aware that upon this score I had miscalculated, and that some fragment of emotion had been left in one of the transplanted brains. And this fragment was—black hatred.

I first discovered this when No. 143 was seated before an English translation of Bergson's *Creative Evolution*.

The creature's acute senses and quick brain had been taking in page after page of this somewhat ponderous work, and I had perceived, somewhat to my surprize, an appearance of evident displeasure slowly setting over the usually immobile features. Of a sudden the animal uttered a wild shriek and sent the volume hurtling through a reagent cabinet. The book was followed by a chair and the typewriter; and when the infuriated beast arose from his chair (for I no longer kept him in chains, the better to observe him) and began to pace madly about the room, finally settling his black eyes upon me, I became indeed alarmed. And with good reason, for after a momentary hesitation he made a rush in my direction. It was only by the use of chloroform that I saved my own life and succeeded in subduing the creature. While he was still unconscious I again manacled him and chained him to the strongest pillar in the building.

Would that I had killed him then and there! Several times afterward the thought of doing away with him entered my mind, but try as I might, I could not bring myself to destroy this creature of my art. Emotions contrary to hatred were entirely lacking in his remarkable brain, and so it was but a short time before I found him entirely governed by this one passion.

He spent the greater part of his time screaming madly and rattling furiously the chains which bound him. True, upon occasion, when I placed a typewriter before him, he sat down to it and pounded off the most scathing criticisms—of Kant, of Darwin, of Spencer, of Einstein—such as man had never read before and probably will never read again until the coming of the Superman of Nietzsche. He had not the slightest tolerance for those whose intellectual powers were less than his own. But usually when I presented the creature with the typewriter, it was hurled back at me, and from it I sustained more than one injury.

EVENTS had been proceeding so for some time, when one evening in the latter part of March I determined to put an end to the creature's miserable life. I was seated at the time in my study, smoking interminable cigarettes of an Indian drug that had the effect of partially anesthetizing the senses while rendering the brain remarkably acute. I was turning this resolve over in my mind and watching the cigarette smoke as it ascended in an almost unbroken stream nearly to the ceiling. While I was thus absorbed, I saw the tiny stream of bluish vapor break suddenly at a height of about three feet above the table. It took but an instant for me to grasp the meaning of this—that somewhere behind me a door had been opened. I believe I turned pale. I know I trembled, for I knew not what to expect.

Or, rather, I knew but dared not face the thought.

Mustering my courage I turned and faced the door. There I beheld, crouched as for a spring, No. 143, with a heavy, long-bladed amputating knife in his hand. In an instant I had put myself on the other side of the table—and not an instant too soon, for he made his rush and crashed into the table, burying in the thick wood the knife which was meant for me.

While the animal leaped over the table, I scrambled around it and made for the door. A quick glance over my shoulder showed the brute not four feet behind me, the murderous knife raised high, ready to strike. I slammed the door behind me. But I had felt a sharp sting of pain, and looked down to find part of my right arm left in the room with No. 143.

By great good luck I succeeded in getting into an adjoining room and bolting the heavy door before the gorilla had made his escape from the study. I was thankful, too, at the time, that because of the great number of animals I kept I had constructed many of the rooms, the one I was now in included, without windows. For forty-eight hours I lay with my ear at the door of this room—weak from loss of blood and fevered from pain.

You who read this narrative can imagine but little of my sensations during those terrible two days. I know that at times I was delirious, but for this I was thankful; for anything was better than to contemplate my predicament with a clear mind. My safety during this period I attributed only to a sort of apathy which must have come over my captor. But when fierce rage again controlled him, what might not happen? Of what devilish schemes for my destruction was his monstrous intellect not capable? Perhaps he was even now concocting some devilish method of doing away with me!

So far as I could determine, however, No. 143 seemed to have relapsed into indifferent sluggishness, and was content to keep watch outside my door without attempting to get at me. I knew that in physical combat—there were no weapons in the room—I should stand no chance of success. But I knew also that whereas the gorilla had access to food and drink, I had none. Necessity, then, forced the evolution of the plan which I put into execution at the earliest practicable moment.

•

IT WAS at the beginning of my third day of confinement that I heard at last the sound I had been waiting for —the footsteps of my jailer dying away into the back regions of the building, where he must have gone in search of food.

With infinite caution I slid the bolt and ventured on bare feet into the hall adjoining my room. Cautiously, slowly, I made my way to the door at the end of the hall. But alas! I had underrated the cunning of my foe. As I swung open the door, a huge metal plate crashed to the floor. At once I heard a great slamming of doors and a mad rush of footsteps in the back regions. I rushed out of the door and sped with all my strength toward the open sea. I had crossed but a quarter of the distance when an animal shriek behind me announced that my pursuer was on my path. Ahead of me —but oh! so far ahead!—I saw my goal—the landing rock, the one safe spot on my beautiful, treacherous stretch of shoreline.

A dozen times I stumbled, and my pursuer seemed upon me; a dozen times I cursed myself for my foolhardy scheme. I was no match for the brute in speed or in agility, but I knew the ground as he did not, and it is due to this fact alone that I am now able to write this tale. While the

gorilla was beating through the underbrush, I was speeding straight over the path I knew so well. On the last short stretch, when we were on even terms, I thought more than once to give up. But with strength I can not account for, I reached the devil-rock and scrambled up on it.

Not ten paces behind me was the gorilla. I still had but a chance. I made as if I were going to dash on to the smooth sand on my left. Six paces away the brute saw me and divined my intention. He turned to head me off. Not ten feet from me he entered the treacherous sand, uttered a final mad scream of hatred defeated, and sank from view.

As soon as my arm was sufficiently healed, I left the Island of the Seven Devils—I hope forever. But the fascination of my work is strong upon me, my laboratory is still intact, and maybe some time—. But who can say what the fates are mapping for the future?

The Ghostly Lovers

By WILLIAM JAMES PRICE

I sit within the haunted house
Which stands upon a hill.
Its rooms, once merry with carouse,
Tonight are weirdly still.

Yet now, as midnight tolls in town
From bells of old St. Paul's,
A maiden clothed in silken gown
Her gallant lover calls.

And shortly, through the oaken door,
One enters, young and fair.
His footsteps echo on the floor
And up the silent stair.

He folds the girl in loving arms;
His lips to hers are pressed,
While she conceals her virgin charms
Upon his manly breast.

But while they love, an angry face
From eery closet peeps,
And from his haunted hiding place
A jealous lover creeps.

I see, in swiftly moving fist,
A flashing dagger gleam,
When suddenly, from out the mist,
Resounds a piercing scream!

They vanish—I no more behold.
And yet the early dawn
Reveals two mounds above the mold,
Although the ghosts are gone!

UNDER THE HAU TREE

by
Katherine Yates

THE woman was stringing scarlet wili-wili seeds into a barbaric necklace. The man was tossing over a basket of unmounted kodak prints, with now and then a perfunctory comment. The drooping branches of the hau tree shut out the glare of the late afternoon sun, and the fluttering leaves were backgrounded by a purple-blue horizon from which long lines of white surf came rolling in, curling nearer and nearer until they washed softly up the sand to the very foot of the hau tree, and then slid silently back beneath the oncoming white edge just behind. Four or five wee, tawny Hawaiian children had gathered under the shoreward end of the pier where, with much giggling and splashing, they had discarded their holokus and overalls and were paddling joyously in the clear water, carefully out of range of the hotel office.

The man continued to toss over the prints idly. Suddenly he stopped and bent forward over one of them with a gasp of astonishment. "Where did you get that?" he exclaimed, turning quickly upon the woman.

She glanced up from her beads. "I took it," she said carelessly.

"No, no, I mean this one!" and he thrust the picture almost into her face.

"Certainly. I see," she said, still carelessly. "I said that I took it—photographed it."

"You couldn't have." The man's eyes, full of incredulity, stared at her and then at the picture, and then back at her again.

She nodded her head. "I *did*," she said.

"*When* did you take it?" he asked harshly.

"When? Oh, about three weeks ago, the morning they went away." The woman tied the thread of the necklace and then wrapped the long line of red around and around her white throat like three scarlet gashes.

The man leaned nearer. "Here? They were here?"

"Yes. See, they posed under that coconut tree over there, the one with the monstera vine swinging down."

The man turned and gazed at the tree and at the great leaves of the swinging, swaying vine, and his finger touched the picture where the same giant spray swayed over the heads of the two. His face showed utter incredulity.

Again he turned to his companion, trying to curb his excitement. "What was their name?" he asked.

The woman opened her lips to speak, then stopped. "That is odd," she said. "I supposed that I always thought of them by name; I was just going to speak it and then," with a light laugh, "it didn't come. I shall think of it in a moment. Wait. It was—. It was—. Let me see. It began with an A. No—. Yes—. I think it began with an A. Oh, well, I can't recall it now. I'll tell you when it comes to me. There's no hurry, is there?"

"Yes, there is, there is!" said the man vehemently. "I want to know the name."

The woman put up her head. "Then you will have to go to the office and ask; I can't remember. What in the world is there so exciting about them, anyway?" The woman was not accustomed to sharing attention with anyone, least of all with a mere photograph.

The man got up, dumped the basket of prints into the chair, and started across the lawn, under the banyan tree, toward the hotel entrance.

The woman looked after him and then at the basket. Then she arose quietly, placed the box of red seeds upon her own chair, picked up the photograph from the basket and followed him into the hotel. At the desk she found him sputtering. The quiet, efficient, Chinese clerk was unable to recall the persons whom he described. "There are so many coming and going all the time," he explained, shaking his head and spreading his hands deprecatingly.

The man began to sputter again, whereat the woman approached and laid the print upon the desk. "What was their name, Ah Fat?" she asked.

"Ooh—oh, yes!" The clerk smiled with recognition. "Why, that was Mr. and Mrs. — ah-h-h—" tapping the desk impatiently with his pencil; "Mr. and Mrs.—. Wait, it's here on the register. They came here about—let me see—about the middle of March. Let—me—see—" fluttering the leaves of the register and running his finger down the columns.

The man fidgeted, the woman wrinkled her brow in thought, pressing a loop of the wili-wili seeds against her lips. The man glanced at her and turned his face away.

"That's queer," said the clerk; "I don't find the name. I'd know it if I saw it," and he turned the pages back again, doubtfully. "I wonder what boat they came on."

"They came from the Orient," said the woman.

"Yes. Then they came in on the —on the—" and he turned to the schedule of the March boats from the Orient. "They must have come on the *Korea.*" And then to the register again: "Here are the *Korea* people: Foster, Martin, Cudahy, Abercrombie—. Now what is this name?" bending closer, "I can't make out the writing."

The woman leaned forward. "Tourtillotte. No, those were not the ones; I remember the Tourtillottes."

The clerk's finger continued on down the column, to no purpose; then he called the Number One bell-boy. "Ming, what was the name of these people?" holding up the photograph.

The boy shook his head. "Don't remember."

The man turned upon him. "Then think. Try." He rattled the silver in his pocket and the China boy's face took on an expression of real effort—vain effort, it was evident.

"What room did they have?" asked the clerk.

Again the boy shook his head. "I think second floor—no, third floor—312 maybe. I don't know."

"You remember them, don't you?" asked the woman, impatiently.

"Oh, yes, oh, yes! Don't know what room. I think third floor somewhere."

The man turned angrily back to the desk. "Where's the manager?" he asked.

In a moment the manager stepped smilingly from the private office. The woman, at last finding the man's eagerness infectious, bent forward, holding out the print. "I can't, for the life of me, remember the name of these people," she said. "Who were they?"

The manager took the print and nodded his recognition. "Oh, yes, that was Mr. and Mrs.—. Well, that's funny. Ah Fat, what was the name of these people?"

The quiet clerk smiled and shook his head with a little protesting movement of his slender yellow hands.

The manager snapped his fingers. "Oh, I know the name just as well as I know my own; but I just can't speak it for the moment;" and he began to flutter the leaves of the register. "They came by way of the Orient and were here for three or four weeks;—why, they just went away a short time ago. Well, isn't that strange, that I can't think of their name? The woman had a white scar on her neck. A queer, old-fashioned little thing, she was, and sort of sweet-pretty, too. Let me see, we must have passed that name a half dozen times here, and I was sure that I would recognize it at a glance."

The man turned and looked at the woman strangely, then he faced the desk again. "You can't any of you remember their names nor where they roomed, nor find it on your books; and they gone only three weeks!" he said with exasperated incredulity.

The manager began to speak, but the woman broke in: "But I can't remember, either," she said; "and I don't have nearly so much to think of as they do—not nearly."

The strange look remained in the man's face; it was a whiteness, almost a grayness, and his eyes looked curiously dusky. He turned to the woman and took hold of her arm. "Never mind," he said, in a strained voice; "Let us go back to the hau tree."

PRESENTLY the woman's white fingers were playing with the scarlet seeds again; raising them and dropping them in red drops into a white fold of her dress, with a little drip, drip, drip—over and over and over. The man, leaning far back in the low chair, his eyes away beyond the purple-blue horizon, shielded them from the shimmer of the red drops and was silent. After a long time he spoke, and his voice had returned to its habitual level calmness. "Tell me about those people," he said.

She raised a handful of the seeds and let them fall in a slow stream from her fingers. "There isn't much to tell," she said; "only they were queer people. They came from the Orient, as I said; had been around the world, and reached here about the middle of March. They saw everything and 'did' everything, just as all of the tourists do: went to Haleiwa for a few days, and to Hauula to see the sacred gorge, and to the volcano; and then they went away, just as the rest do."

"In what way were they 'queer'?" asked the man.

"Well—they were sort of Rip Van Winkles," said the woman. "That is the only way that I can describe them. They had been asleep for exactly twenty years."

"Twenty years?" said the man, sharply.

"Yes, just twenty years. I know, because her clothes were exactly like my aunt's wedding clothes; and Auntie was married just twenty years ago, and kept her whole trousseau for sentiment's sake. She let us take some dresses once, for an 'old

times party', and they were exactly like this woman's clothes; the same sleeves, shirred in two places and with a wide lace ruffle at the elbow, and the skirts gathered all the way around the waist, and the same bolero jacket effects, and little ruffly things; and she wore her hair in the same little smooth waves like Auntie's pictures; and her face was small and sweet, and she spoke in a soft, thin, rustly little voice; and little things were so important. I remember she had some spots on the shoulder of her gray traveling suit—there, you can see them in the picture, that carnation lei doesn't quite cover them;—and she wouldn't send it to the cleaner's for fear he would spoil the dress; but she must wait until she got home, so that she could take them out with some sort of a cleaning fluid that her grandmother had given her the recipe for. And the spots worried her so; she kept dabbing at them with her handkerchief as if she could wipe them off."

The man shifted his position. The woman was again dropping scarlet seeds one by one, through her fingers into the scarlet pool on her dress. The man watched them, strangely. Then he covered his eyes with his hand. "Go on," he said.

"She wasn't young—thirty-four or thirty-five, I should think; and for all that her face was sweet and happy, yet she always had an expression of—of—." The woman hesitated.

"Of waiting!" said the man.

"Yes," said the woman; "that was it, always an expression of waiting—patiently, not anxiously,—just waiting, as if it had grown to be a habit. I think that is all there is to tell. I talked to her now and then, and she was always ready to talk, in her quiet, quaint little way; and sometimes she would be a bit embarrassed and her thin, white little hand would go up to her coral necklace; such an odd, old-fashioned necklace made of festoons of tiny red coral blocks caught together here and there to hold the many strands in place, and a curious large pendant of overlapping coral leaves. It must have been very old. She said it had belonged to her grandmother."

"You talked to her often?" asked the man. "What did she talk about?"

"Oh, I don't remember. She was the kind of woman who never says anything to be remembered. We just talked."

"And the man?"

The woman tossed a handful of scarlet seeds into the air, to fall back and slide down among the others. "Of just the same period," she said. "Twenty years back. He had a sort of drooping mustache and wore his hair brushed up like Uncle's when he was married. And his trousers were too short and too tight, and the toes of his shoes were thin, and his neckties were—funny."

"Did they tell you where they came from?" asked the man.

"Why, yes, from the Orient, I told you. They had been around the world."

"I mean, what was their home town?"

"Oh, I don't remember. I don't know that they ever said;—but I think that it was a small Middle West town somewhere in—Ohio—Illinois—I don't know."

The man sat still with his eyes shaded. The woman arranged the scarlet seeds in patterns on her dress where it drew smoothly over the knee. The surf washed softly up the sand and slid silently back. The little children had gone away and the shadows of the coconut fronds were long and very quiet.

Presently the woman spoke. "Well?" she said.

The man was silent for a few minutes longer; then, without lifting his shading fingers, he began.

"They lived in my town. He was my uncle, my mother's brother. His father kept a small bookstore—books, pictures and plush goods—you know the sort."

The woman nodded her head reminiscently.

"He took charge of the store when his father died; he was sixteen then. His mother died two years after. He was the only one of the family left. He had always intended to marry Jennie. She was his sweetheart when they were mere babies, before he was eight years old. When he was eight, his uncle had come back from around the world and the boy sat on the stiff black haircloth sofa and listened. When his uncle caught the look in his big eyes, he drew him over and stood him between his knees and asked him what he was going to do when he was a man. 'Marry Jennie and go round the world on our wedding tour,' he answered.

"And that was his one end and aim from that time on. He and Jennie discussed the trip then with gravity and eagerness and perfect confidence; for they *knew* that they were going, when Joseph was grown up. No one ever called him Joe; he was too earnest. He was my Uncle Joseph.

"When the store was all his, he began putting away every possible cent toward the tour; for he and Jennie had made up their minds that no matter how long they had to wait, they would not marry until they had saved enough for the journey.

"It is slow saving much money in a little store in a little back-number town; but they never faltered. Jennie did 'hand-painted china' which sold in the store at Christmas time; and hot-poker work; and taught classes to do prim little water-colors with green woolly trees and white woolly waves, and gray woolly rocks, and wooden sheep and cattle and Noah's ark sort of people. I have some of them at home."

The woman tossed the beads together in her lap. "And then?" she said.

"And between times they studied maps and itineraries, and read history and travels, so as to be prepared to get the most out of the trip. There were years and years of this; good years, when quite a lot was added to the little hoard in the bank; bad years, when there were floods and fires and the need of new roofs, when the hoard was drawn upon. When Jennie was thirty she began making her trousseau. They thought that it would be only about two years more; and I used to go and sit with her and watch her work upon the dainty challis and summer-silk and lawn dresses. She made them all herself and—and gathered the sleeves in little lines of gathers with puffs between, and gathers in the skirts all around, and little ruffles for the trimmings on the shoulders."

The woman stopped playing with the beads and leaned forward. "And then?"

"Well, it wasn't just *two* years, it was five. Uncle Joseph was sick for three months and had to hire a clerk and pay doctors' bills and—it was five years. I helped Jennie pick out the gray alpaca for her traveling dress. I was fourteen then; I am thirty-four now; and she and Uncle Joseph were my dearest friends. I had spent hours with them over maps and railroad guides and steamship schedules, ever since I could remember; and now to be really helping to pick out the traveling dress for that wonderful journey—wedding dress and traveling dress in one—it was marvelous."

"And they went then?"

"They were married one morning in May; Uncle Joseph gave me Grandfather's watch that morning; and I bade them good-bye at the church door;—I didn't dare to go to the station with them, but I ran home and hid in the orchard for hours,—

long, long after I heard their train whistle for the crossing. By and by I heard a horse come galloping wildly down the road. I sat up in the grass."

The man straightened in his chair. The sun was setting out by the point of the Waianae Range and the water had turned to orange and crimson, and there were orange and crimson flecks in the clear sky above the gray-black streak on the horizon, and on the woman's white dress, and in her eyes as she bent forward.

"The rider said that there had been an accident to the morning train. Some of the cars were burned. They were sending a wrecking train.

"I ran to the station and flung myself aboard just as the train pulled out. There was no time to stop to put me off." The man waited a moment. "There had been a collision with a freight train. The cars had all burned but one, the passenger car, and that had been wrecked. Those who had been taken out were lying on the smooth grass along the side of the right-of-way. I found Uncle Joseph propped against a big rock and Jennie was half leaning, half lying against him. There were three red gashes across her throat, and she was trying to wipe the spots from the shoulder of her traveling frock, with her handkerchief—weak, ineffectual, artificial little movements,—with no expression in her eyes."

The sun had gone down, and the early gray twilight lent to the scarlet hibiscus blossoms behind the hau tree that strange, innate red glow of scarlet at early twilight; lent it to them, and to the lines of scarlet wili-wili beads across the white throat, dripping down into the pool of scarlet in the folds of her white dress. The man's eyes rested upon them, fascinated. "She made only a few movements after I came, such poor little useless movements—and then—it was over."

"You mean that she died?" said the woman, in a strained voice.

"Yes, she died then."

"And the man?"

"Uncle Joseph was leaning back against the rock and breathing only once in a great while, and looking at her—just looking at her. And when the little movements stopped, he looked up at me; he hadn't looked at me before, but he knew that I was there. He spoke just once before he died."

The woman leaned nearer and the loop of red beads dripped from her neck. "And he said?"

"He said, with a little half smile and a movement of his finger against her cheek:—'It—it isn't the end. I—I've got to begin all over again somewhere—somehow—but—*I'm going to take Jennie around the world yet'.*"

The woman shivered. The man drew out his watch and opened the back of the case. "The picture was taken on the way to the station on their wedding day," he said. "The photographer turned it over to me."

The woman bent forward and took the watch and turned it to the last gleam of the afterglow. The loop of cold scarlet beads fell against his hand and he drew it away sharply.

Presently the woman laid the watch on the arm of the chair and glanced about quickly at the gathering shadows in the twisted trunk of the hau tree and along the wet sand. "Let us go in," she said, breathlessly; "let us go in where the lights are."

A Short and Terrible Tale of Murder

The Headless Spokesman

By IRVIN MATTICK

Author of "Red and Black"

FOR the sixth time Slater looked at the clock on the shelf. He took the ax from his knees and tip-toed across the rough floor of the cabin to a door of an adjoining room. Listening intently he heard the deep breathing of a drunken man sleeping within.

Twenty minutes had passed now, since his son Drayton and old Settler Hurt had tottered across the big mess-room of the hut and each gone, dead drunk, to his own room to sleep off the hootch they had guzzled. The three men had celebrated the lordly haul of pan gold they had washed from the river that winter.

In little cloth sacks the dust and pebbles of the precious metal were stacked under the boards of the mess-room floor.

Slater had put up to his son the proposition of removing old Hurt, but the son had refused to kill, had even winced at being an accomplice to any such affair. So old man Slater gathered the three of them that night in a drinking bout.

Himself sipping tea from a bottle, Slater had watched his son Drayton, who was unaware of his father's murderous plan, drink the hootch with Settler Hurt from the big jug until the two men were beyond their senses and had reeled to their separate bunk chambers.

And now, the ax in his hands, Slater stood before old Hurt's door, listening.

Why should Hurt have one third of the gold when Slater and his own boy could have each one half of it?

What if Drayton was afraid to kill Hurt? A shot—a gun accidentally discharged—a razor-lipped ax falling from a bracket—and old Slater had chosen the ax.

Twenty minutes was ample time for a boozed man to be fast asleep.

Slater was now inside of Hurt's room, closing the door behind him as cautiously and soundlessly as he had opened it. The room was inky black with the darkness, but a bit of good fortune was with Slater.

Through a tear in the window-shade of heavy paper a single strip of moonlight shone, and this fell straight across the sleeping bunk. The sleeper's face was turned from Slater, and the moon lay appropriately on the sun-browned nape of the drunken man's neck, just below the unkempt fringe of hair on his head.

Slater raised the keen ax to his shoulder and stepped toward the snoring man on the rough wooden bunk, to within a full swing of the weapon. Like a huge chalk mark the moon drew its white death-line across the sleeping man's neck, and the next second a purplish froth bubbled in that line of light.

Slater yanked the heavy ax from its dent in the bunk board. With another swing of the chopper he left a blood-weltering slot between the head and body. Then he stepped back to watch the gore from the torso mix with that oozing from the head arteries. A coagulating mass boiled and spurted about in the ribbon of moonlight where Slater had struck and beheaded a man.

Then Slater turned to re-enter the big messroom. He wanted to pull up the floor boards and estimate very carefully the gold which now belonged half to himself and half to his son.

Someone knocked outside on the door to the cabin.

Slater viewed the decapitated body on the bunk, then stepped back to the messroom. He saw the bottle partly filled with a brown liquid next to a fat-bellied jug on the table.

He started to take these away, when the knock on the door was repeated.

"Who's out there?"

"Me, Slater; I just came up from the forks to borrow some of your flour."

Slater opened the door and admitted Yank DuPerret, another prospector in the rêgion, who camped three miles down-stream.

DuPerret walked straight to the table with the jug and bottle, and with a smile of greeting on his weathered face he tipped the bottle to his lips and sucked one big mouthful from the neck, then turned and spouted the liquid from his teeth.

"Dammity, what a swill! Phew!"

Slater saw that DuPerret had taken a swig of the stale tea.

"That's tea, neighbor. Whisky's in the jug."

"Tea?"

"Yeah—I drink it sometimes."

"And do you bottle it?"

"When I make too much at a time, yes."

Slater fidgeted a bit, trying hard to conceal his agitation. In the dim light from the single oil lamp on a bracket near the fireplace, the men looked silently at each other, only as men can look at each other in a country where gold is scratched from the earth and hidden again in rude huts where other men can not find it.

A door was banged shut in the cabin and Slater stole a guarded glance in the direction of his son's bunkroom. Then DuPerret laughed.

"I know you've got a fortune hidden here somewhere, but I'm not after it. Flour is what I want. And I'll test the jug, too."

DuPerret put the nose of the jug to his lips, turned back his head and let a few gulps of the hootch gurgle into his throat.

"That's more like," DuPerret exclaimed as he put down the whisky, satisfied.

Slater shifted uneasily. He tried with his nostrils to smell if there was a trace of gore in the cabin.

"Now, Slater, you let me have some flour and I'll clear for home. My stuff's comin' up from the post in three days and I'll fetch it back to you then. And say, by the way, I dropped my ax into the slough this morning, and I'm out of wood. I see you're supplied for a time. Can you give me your chopper a few days?"

Slater went to a covered box in the messroom and dipped some flour with his hands into an empty cartridge box. He was trying to think of a way to get the ax cleaned in Hurt's room before handing it to DuPerret, when . . . Why, here was opportunity! The devil spawned a scheme in the prospector's brain.

DuPerret, here at Hurt's cabin just after the murder—his wheel tracks in the mud — the ax, red with Hurt's blood, found in DuPerret's wagon . . . They weren't so technical up here in the pan country: everybody knew that DuPerret was

poor and that there was gold aplenty in Hurt's cabin. The ax and the murder and DuPerret's wagon tracks —it would look mighty funny.

A smile crept through Slater's countenance but died again before it reached his eyes.

"Sure thing, DuPerret; you can have my ax, as soon as I tie up this box. By George, there's no string in the house. I strung it all up on a nail out in the stable. Take the lamp out there and get me a couple of pieces for this box. I'll put the ax in your wagon while you're gone."

DuPerret took the oil lamp from its bracket and went to the stable for a length of string.

Slater made sure DuPerret was far enough toward the stable not to catch sight of the smear on the ax blade when he should run out with it to the wagon and put it under the seat. In the darkness Slater ran to Hurt's door. As he opened it he looked instantly toward the bunk where he had left the murdered man bleeding.

Settler Hurt's body was gone from the bunk!

IN THE full glare of the moon, now that the paper shade had been torn away from the window, Slater saw a pool of black glistening matter stain the bunk boards at about the spot where the man's head had been severed with the ax. But the bunk was unoccupied!

Slater backed through the door, away from Hurt's room. As he reached the center of the messroom, Hurt's voice came deeply with a grave tremor from the shadowy doorway of the sleeping chamber.

"Milton Slater!"

DuPerret, returning now from the stable, the chimney lamp flickering in the wind, called to Slater as he neared the door of the cabin.

"There ain't no string out there, Slater."

"Milton Slater!" Settler Hurt's deep-toned voice boomed again in the darkness.

DuPerret came in and put the lamp on the table. He saw Slater in the middle of the room, pale and trembling.

Then DuPerret looked toward the doorway from which Settler Hurt had just called. In that oblong of darkness, the light from the smoking lamp-chimney dimly lighting the gruesome thing, stood a headless body.

It dangled heavily and awkwardly, as if weary from being propped up on its limp rubbery legs. The top of the neck, a raw stump butting up from the bloody-shirted shoulders, was a horrible mass. A gigantic mushroom it seemed, with the pasty coagulation of its life blood swollen and fringed about the headless stump.

Just beyond the doorway the awful thing swayed unsteadily, and then from its invisible throat came Settler Hurt's stentorian voice.

"Milton Slater. I have returned from the dead. I have come back from hell, from my bunk where you slew me. I have risen to accuse you of murder."

DuPerret saw Slater fall to his knees, saw his face turn stony and his body shiver with a terror that transformed the brawny prospector to an abject shriveling coward.

"Milton Slater."

Hurt's words came as from the pit of a grave.

"I come to throw the proof of your crime at your feet, here in the presence of one who will see that you are punished. Milton Slater, stand up!"

Slater was groveling now, clutching at the floor as one saving himself from drowning.

"Milton Slater," the headless body shouted, "stand up! This is your hour of judgment."

Terrorized, DuPerret beheld Slater. Slowly the man raised himself from the floor but shut his eyes, put his

arms before them, and stood shuddering against the far wall of the messroom straight across from the specter that confronted him.

"Look at me!" the headless corpse commanded.

Slater kept his eyes covered.

"Milton Slater, you coward—look at me now!"

The man took his arms from his face but held his eyes shut.

"Look at me!" the headless specter screamed.

Slowly Slater opened his eyes and gazed at the awful thing. Then he picked at his face with ungoverned hands.

"Put down your hands, Slater," the decapitated corpse shouted. "I can see you, without my head. Put down your hands!"

Slater put his weaving arms down at his sides. DuPerret beheld the sinister tableau.

Then the voice of Settler Hurt boomed forth again with a finality of conviction.

"Milton Slater, now you shall be punished. Stand still, and look."

A moment of silence hung in the dimly lit cabin room. Then an ax swung out from Hurt's room. Through the air it flew and clattered to the floor at Slater's feet.

"That's the ax you killed me with, Slater. Let DuPerret use it, but ask him first if he wants an ax that you swung clear through my neck—through this neck you see now. Ask him, Slater."

DuPerret saw the brown stain on the ax wedge. Another minute of silence ensued. Then Slater put up a whimpering.

Suddenly a spherical thing, a lopsided ball with a matting of hair, was shot out over the headless body. From the doorway of Hurt's chamber it came, flying straight at Slater.

The thing hit with a thud on the wall just above Slater's head. It came down, bounced on Slater's shoulder and bumped to the floor. As the unwieldy shape hit the hard floor boards, it split open like a melon.

DuPerret cried out.

"Slater! For Christ's sake, that's Drayton's head on the floor—that's your son's head—Slater!"

Slater shrieked and covered his eyes.

When DuPerret again looked toward the doorway, the headless corpse was on the floor. Settler Hurt, gigantic, black with rage, his knotted arms bare and menacing, stood in the messroom beside the body. Slater was on the floor whining, clutching the hair on his son's shattered head. Then Settler Hurt let loose his words.

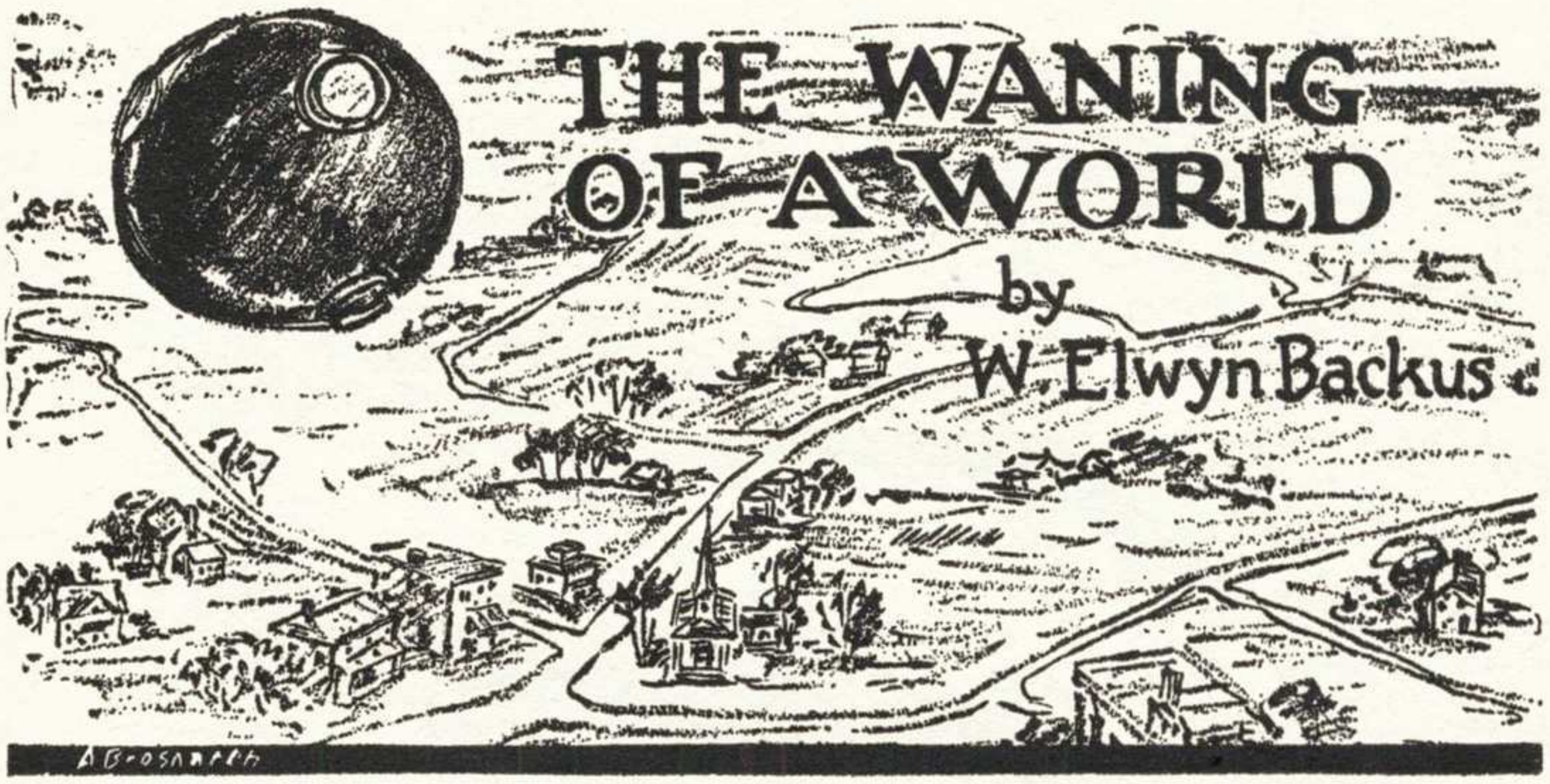
"DuPerret, he wanted the gold for his son and himself. He got us drunk tonight, drank some fake booze, tea or coffee, himself. I and his son were so full of hootch we got our own room doors mixed. Drayton went into my room, I into his. I woke up and saw my mistake. Going through the door between our chambers, in my own room I found Drayton's body on my bunk, his head severed. I tore down the paper shade to make sure I wasn't snaky from the hootch, and there I found Slater's ax. Then I knew. Slater meant to kill me, and killed his son. It sobered me, that did. After I heard you were here I did the rest with Drayton's body in the doorway. And now, Slater—"

Hurt curled his lips for a final imprecation upon the murderer, but the sight before him stifled speech.

Old Slater, brushing his son's head, was singing a soft lullaby with a breaking tune that betrayed departed reason. Fondling the horrid shape, he planted kisses on his son's ghastly lips.

Settler Hurt groped for the whisky jug and gulped as he watched the man on the floor.

"Leave some for me," DuPerret whispered as he put his hands on the upturned jug.



Author of "The Hall Bedroom"

IT ALL started over Professor Palmer's book, *Man and the Universe.*

Out of this grew the Palmer-Margard controversy which attracted such wide-spread interest. Profusely illustrated magazine articles abounded on the subject, while Sunday supplements, with imagination rampant, were in their glory. The upshot of this literary duel was the publication of a volume by Professor L. R. Margard, F. R. S., etc., in critical review of his contemporary's deductions.

Public opinion was divided into two camps, each with its chosen champion. The explanation of certain geographical features on a planet some thirty-five million miles away absorbed more of the fickle public's attention for the moment than the outrageous price of a pound of sugar or a dozen of eggs.

In spite of the tax upon credulity which Professor Palmer's theories demanded, they inspired belief among the majority. Perhaps this is because most of us are gifted with an oversupply of imagination; and the Palmer theories appealed strongly to the imagination.

But the majority is not always right; rather the contrary, all of which Professor Margard promptly pointed out. "A challenge to the thinking world," he branded the Palmer theories. To which the eminent Professor Bernard Palmer, A.B., LL. D., retaliated that even Columbus was ridiculed. No doubt, he stated, an astronomer on Mars would have equal difficulty in convincing a Martian public of the possible existence of inhabitants on our earth.

Man and the Universe was written by Professor Palmer after nine years of intensive personal study of the planet Mars. Even his opponents accorded him admiration for his unremitting labors, his perseverance and successful observation.

All of these observations were made from the lonely Palmer observatory constructed near F———, California, 8,000 feet above sea level. Equipped with a giant equatorial telescope having a 48-inch object glass, and situated ideally as to atmospheric conditions, Professor Palmer was excellently prepared to observe our much-discussed neighbor.

One result of his observations was the careful recording and mapping of curious straight lines visible on the planet. Running from the polar caps

down to and across the equator, crossing and recrossing, these lines formed a veritable network over the planet's surface. Here and there round spots appeared at junctures of the lines. Some of the lines were discovered to be double, although these were few, the great majority of them appearing singly.

By continually observing the planet during ensuing seasons, a marked decrease in the size of the polar caps during the Martian summers was noted, with a corresponding darkening of the "canals", as Professor Palmer designated the lines. The spots, or terminals, he called "oases." His deductions were, that owing to the admitted scarcity of water on the arid planet, the Martians transported water from the vast, melting polar snows by means of canals. It was this question of canals, and the much mooted question of sufficient heat to sustain life on the small planet, which caused contention between the two renowned experts.

2

Despite many years of concentration on technical things, Professor Palmer was a surprizingly human and ordinary-appearing man. The fact that he was considered one of the world's foremost authorities on astronomy, and was a lecturer of world-wide renown, did not detract from his naturally benign disposition. Yet there was something compelling about his personality. Students before whom he delivered lectures accorded him marked attention, and went away with a graphic picture in their minds of the things he wished to convey to them.

"Henry," he remarked quizzically to his young but capable secretary one morning, having just read a particularly seathing criticism of his pet theories, "these gentlemen at least take my hobby seriously. That in itself convinces me that my deductions are worthy of consideration."

"They take advantage of the fact that you have no means of definitely proving your deductions," defended Henry, loyally. "As you have remarked, even Columbus was ridiculed; but he, at least, had means of obtaining concrete proof to silence the scoffers."

"Well put, my friend. A few more earnest advocates of my theories like yourself, and I should require no proof."

"That reminds me," resumed the grateful Henry G. Simms, "there was a young chap in here yesterday who claimed to be an ardent champion of your views. He was extremely anxious to see you. Said he had a matter of great importance to take up with you."

"He'll return?"

"Grant's army couldn't keep him away. He will be here at 10 o'clock."

"So? What sort of a chap is he?" curiously.

"A well set-up fellow of about twenty-four. About six feet tall; light hair, pleasant features, refined manners. Impetuous sort of fellow."

That was how Robert Sprague happened to meet Professor Palmer a half hour later.

A pleasant thrill possessed him as he shook hands with the professor. The kindly, though keen, gray eyes met his encouragingly. This was contrary to Robert's expectations, for he had assumed that he would be fortunate if he succeeded in seeing so busy and prominent a man for a few minutes. He was prepared even for a curt dismissal. What he did not know was that his evident earnestness and enthusiasm had obtained for him an interview through the redoubtable Henry where others would have failed.

Without realizing how he had commenced, he found himself conversing easily with this learned man as if

such interviews were everyday occurrences with him.

The professor was impressed with equal favorableness by his caller. The frank, winning countenance and earnest manner created a profound impression upon him in spite of an extraordinary story.

"Let me get this right," said the professor, finally. "You say that the machine is virtually perfected—that you have succeeded in accomplishing the aim for which your father unsuccessfully spent his life?"

"Not unsuccessfully," defended Robert, quickly; "without what he had accomplished I could never have constructed a machine of its kind."

"But it can actually be controlled as you suggest?"

"It can."

"Pardon my insistence, Mr. Sprague. The idea is so—ah—extraordinary."

"I realize that, professor. I should be happy to have you see for yourself."

Professor Palmer pondered. The young man's story had impressed him, notwithstanding its unusualness. At any rate, he concluded, he would investigate. He could risk no more than disappointment. If there was anything in it, the possibilities for research and discovery were boundless. He found his own enthusiasm rivaling that of his caller as he momentarily allowed it free rein. Why—he might yet prove his own weird theories to the world!

The next moment he smiled at his own indulgence. First he would humor this young man by investigating his wild claims: time enough for dreams afterward.

"Well, Mr. Sprague," he said, "this is an age of strange accomplishments. I'm going to look at that machine of yours. How will tomorrow evening do?"

A feeling of relief and exultation swept over Robert as the professor spoke. At last his absurd-sounding claims for the life-work of his father had been taken seriously, and recognition of his labors was within reach.

He stammered his thanks, shook hands with the amused professor, and departed.

"That boy believes in the machine; and he is no fool, either," remarked Professor Palmer after Robert had left.

"The world is full of them," observed Henry sagely.

Henry even openly questioned his employer's theories at times. Not that the latter minded, for the ensuing arguments furnished interesting debates, and fresh ideas sometimes; and in the end he usually succeeded in silencing his intrepid secretary—if only temporarily.

But today, Henry's caustic comment irritated him. He wanted to believe in the weird claims of his caller regarding a strange, gravity-defying machine, in spite of his saner judgment to the contrary. He subconsciously resented any expression of his own disbelief.

Professor Palmer slept poorly that night, though he rarely failed to sleep soundly. Try as he would, he could not dismiss from his mind the hope which struggled so persistently with his natural skepticism.

But he was not alone in his sleeplessness. Robert slept not a minute that night. Over and over he reflected on just how he would best explain the intricacies of the *Sphere* in order that he could convince Professor Palmer of its practicability. The fact that he lacked the necessary funds to complete the apparatus gave him considerable concern. For much, therefore, depended upon his ability to convince the professor of the feasibility of mere theories.

3

IT WAS with considerable relief and expectancy on both sides that Robert and Professor Palmer shook hands in the big, high-ceilinged parlor of the old Sprague manor.

Their footsteps echoed eerily through the house as they tramped back through the long dark hallway to a big barnlike addition which had long served as a workshop. Here Robert's father had spent countless weary hours, to the despair of his good wife, who had already followed him to his reward.

As they entered the doorway the professor became aware of an immense gray-black sphere in the dusk of the far end of the shop. The top of this sphere reached within a few inches of the lofty ceiling. It was probably twenty-five feet in diameter, and rested upon a short scaffold. What appeared to be curious round windows in its side, like portholes in a ship's hull, gave it the appearance of a gigantic diver's helmet.

Robert approached the *Sphere*. Without hesitancy he selected and pressed upon what appeared to be an ordinary rivet-head like hundreds of others over the *Sphere's* shell. A round hatch, large enough to admit a man, swung open, disclosing a black and uninviting interior. Flustered, he courteously invited Professor Palmer to enter first.

For an instant the professor hesitated. The weirdness of the whole affair suddenly struck him forcibly. This young man's queer claims, the big manor with its eery echoes and atmosphere of dismal loneliness—all seemed to cry out to him to beware. The dull gray shape looming above them in the gathering twilight looked disquietingly like some freak prison, such as a madman might invent.

Robert, sensing the professor's misgivings, apologized for not having considered his difficulty in negotiating the unfamiliar interior in the darkness, and relieved him by entering first. A sharp click, and a comfortable glow of light suffused the interior. They passed up a brief, winding stairway into a long chamber.

"This is the gyrostatic control which neutralizes the force of gravity," Robert began, calmly, as if this assertion were the simplest thing in the world. He indicated a complicated mass of glittering machinery in the center of the compartment in which they stood.

He reached for a small lever, and pulled it toward him. Simultaneously there was a soft whirring sound. For a moment the floor tilted slightly, then steadied again.

"And the power for this?" queried the professor.

"Furnished by storage batteries," Robert explained. "The batteries are recharged by petrol-driven dynamos."

"But your supply of petrol? Where have you sufficient space for a supply that will last any considerable length of time?"

"All round us."

The professor swept their surroundings with his sharp eyes. No receptacle was visible. Two full-size doors and several small ones appeared in the partitions; but nothing suggested a receptacle for a large supply of fuel. Then quite suddenly it dawnd upon him that there was a vast amount of space unaccounted for between the partitions, floor and ceiling, and the *Sphere's* outside shell. His respect for Robert's claims was growing. So far, at least, the young inventor seemed quite confident.

"What is this?" asked the professor, indicating what resembled the breech of a dreadnaught's gun protruding from the floor. Electric wires, dials, and other curious devices were connected to it.

"That's the Norrensen Tube, so named by my father after its inven-

tor, an old friend of his, now deceased. It is capable of terrible destruction. It will produce a bolt of lightning rivaling the elements, which will strike up to twelve miles away—and it can be aimed with startling accuracy. I remember seeing a giant oak blasted into pulp with it in a test across a valley four miles wide, when I was a boy."

"But, how is it that the world has never heard of this remarkable invention?"

"Norrensen was an eccentric character whom the world had wronged grievously. He insisted on conducting the tests with greatest secrecy. Overtaken suddenly by a fatal illness, he exacted a promise from my father to retain the secret of this weapon till his death."

"What a terrible weapon that would make in the hands of a man bent on destruction!" mused the professor.

The compartment they were in looked to be about twelve by twenty-five feet, and some ten feet in height. There were three round ports at either of its rounded ends; these, being located below the bulge of the *Sphere's* greatest girth, enabled one to obtain a good view downward as well as outward. The straight sidewalls and ceiling were windowless, but a vertical well extending from the floor, beside the controls, to the outer shell, with heavy, circular glass panes at either end, enabled the operator to see out directly below. The compartment was flooded with soft, mellow light from a dozen frosted incandescent lamps.

"Deducting for this compartment, two small storerooms, the cupboards, and the water and oxygen tanks," Robert was saying, "the net capacity of the petrol reservoirs is more than 40,000 gallons. That and the full storage power of the batteries is sufficient to operate the high-speed, but delicately balanced gyrostats, more than fifty days and nights continuously."

"You say that gravity is completely neutralized?"

"Almost entirely so, even with all reservoirs filled to capacity. The stability of the gyrostatic device is so powerful that weight becomes a negligible factor. If you will follow me I can prove this to you."

THE professor quivered with suppressed excitement as he followed Robert down the flight of steps leading to the outer manhole through which they had entered. At last he was about to know beyond doubt whether the remarkable claims made by his guide had any foundation. If they had, a new era would be unfolded. Again his common sense reacted against hope, blasting his short-lived credulity. That either this boy or his father should have mastered the problem of the fifth dimension after experts of centuries had failed, seemed unbelievable. And yet—

In the deepening twilight the *Sphere* seemed to loom above them larger than ever. Its lighted portholes, contrasting strangely with its shadowy bulk, gave it a weird, fantastic, almost unearthly aspect.

"The *Sphere* is now in almost perfect equilibrium from every direction," Robert explained, pride creeping into his voice unconsciously. He indicated two iron rungs near the bottom of the *Sphere*. "If you will take hold here, you will be able to move it in any direction without effort. Softly though—keep a firm hold upon it."

Doubting still, Professor Palmer grasped the rungs, fully expecting to find the vast bulk an immovable weight.

To his intense surprize it rose from the floor as if it were an air-filled balloon! He had exerted himself not the slightest bit. The *Sphere* had simply risen at his first slight lift, and had continued to rise until a slight tug

upon his arm stopped it. He extended his right arm, still gripping one rung. The *Sphere* followed easily, its only resistance apparently that of the atmosphere surrounding it.

"Now release it," suggested Robert.

The astonished professor did so, half expecting to see it crash to the floor.

But nothing of the sort occurred. For several seconds the giant ball continued to rise very slowly, like a sluggish soap-bubble. Doubtless he had unwittingly allowed his hand to waver slightly when releasing it.

Then very, very slowly the *Sphere* began to descend, finally settling softly and with scarcely a sound. Though it had been but a few feet above the floor, it required fully a minute to come to rest. One noticeable feature was its vertical stability. It neither rolled in its descent nor wobbled in settling, but simply came down with a paradoxical combination of majestic ponderance and zephyr-like softness.

"Remarkable!" ejaculated the professor, feeling the inadequacy of the word when applied to this marvelous achievement.

"The rigid stability," Robert explained, "is automatically controlled by a delicate device attached to the central upright gyroscope."

"I was under the impression that the entire apparatus was unaffected by gravity."

"This device is the exception. The *Sphere's* weight is neutralized to an absolute minimum by the gyroscopic control, but it was necessary to maintain one point of gravitational contact in order to establish some permanent upright stability; otherwise, the *Sphere* would revolve at random when in midair."

"Manifestly."

"This device also makes it possible to maintain the observation ports at the ends of the main compartment in any desired direction horizontally. It may surprize you to hear that this device was the last part perfected. My father's final prostration was largely due to its intricacies. He passed away just as he was about to achieve its perfection." A slight quaver in Robert's voice betrayed his grief and his deep regard for his departed parent.

Professor Palmer's eyes kindled sympathetically.

"On the contrary," he replied, "I can readily understand the difficulties encountered."

A silence ensued during which each was busy with his own thoughts. Robert was thinking of the most important feature of all—the propulsion of the *Sphere*, and its control. This principle had been worked out on a small scale, but owing to its prohibitive cost on a larger scale he had been unable to perfect its application to the *Sphere*. Professor Palmer, with his personal resources and backing, could finance it, but even then, Robert estimated, it would tax his total resources heavily. Robert held no illusions on this point, and he was wondering how best to present his plea for financial aid.

PROFESSOR PALMER was trying to visualize the possibilities in the *Sphere*. In it he saw a possibility of proving his own theories regarding the planet Mars, and this brought him round to the very feature on which Robert's thoughts were concentrated at that moment.

"Hm-m," mused the professor. "And you claim to have worked out a scheme of magnetic propulsion requiring a minimum of internal energy?"

Robert drew a full breath and prepared to retrench.

"Only on a small scale, professor. I have a miniature model over here, illustrating the practicability of the idea."

He switched on the light over a work-bench, revealing a curious con-

trivance about five inches high. A dull black rod, terminating in a tiny blunt bell-like device, hung suspended from a universal joint. The whole was supported by a small frame bolted to the table. Examination of the bell-like bulb showed that its larger end was flat, and composed of a dull, whitish metallic substance similar in appearance to aluminum. Its outer surface was a brilliant silver. This bulb seemed of extraordinary weight for so small an object, swinging heavily back to its former position when released, where it came to rest quickly over the center of the disk almost as if bound in that position with a strong, invisible elastic band.

"This pendulum," Robert explained, in response to the compelling and unconcealed curiosity in the professor's eyes, "contains a rare, and hitherto unknown, element which my father named 'mythonite.' A good part of his life was devoted to the accumulation of this small quantity for experimental purposes. It was obtained bit by bit through a difficult and costly process from vast amounts of river-gravel, in conjunction with platinum, to which, strangely enough, it has a strong antipathy. This condition is responsible for the most curious discovery of all. The effect of gravity upon mythonite is almost entirely annulled through platinum!"

"Remarkable," said the professor; but there was a trace of incredulity in his voice which was not lost on Robert's alert ears.

"This casing," resumed Robert, tapping on the polished side casing of the pendulum, "is a very thin layer of platinum. With the pendulum inverted, the earth's attraction is intercepted by the casing. At the same time the attraction of any other heavenly body within the radius of the uncovered surface of the mythonite is unchanged. Further, I have discovered that the free attraction of mythonite is greatly intensified by electricity, without any corresponding increase in its gravity through the film of platinum."

He clicked on a small switch attached to the base of the frame. An odd phosphorescence suffused the disklike surface of the pendulum.

"Now, professor, will you raise the pendulum to a vertical position? Take hold of the insulated rod, here."

Professor Palmer raised the pendulum slowly. Its original weight, extraordinary as it had seemed before, was now several times greater, to his astonishment. It now seemed almost as if it were riveted into position.

But gradually, as the glowing disk was pointed upward, its weight decreased. At an angle of ninety degrees its weight had virtually ceased to exist. As it neared an upright position it felt as light as a feather. In an upright position it seemed poised between the professor's fingers as if about to take flight.

He released it softly. It wavered unsteadily for a moment like a flower balancing in a light breeze, then steadied. The professor's fingers, clumsy from pent-up excitement, collided with it. With a sudden swoop, it dropped heavily into its former pendent position, coming to rest abruptly.

Professor Palmer drew a sharp breath excitedly.

"Young man," he said, extending his hand, "you have convinced me, even as I hope to convince a lot of other doubting Thomases and scoffers some day. Apparently you have evolved the greatest discovery of all time; I congratulate you."

There was no doubting his distinguished visitor's sincerity. Robert's voice was husky as he stammered his appreciation.

"Now, let's get down to brass tacks," continued the professor. "This device installed on a large enough scale in the *Sphere* would make it possible to propel it anywhere in

space. The possibilities for research would be virtually boundless. Have you estimated the probable cost of such an apparatus?"

"Often. Even with the aid of improved equipment and sufficient workmen, it would require considerable time and a great expenditure. Fifty thousand dollars is a low estimate—and seven months' time."

Professor Palmer looked thoughtful. Though he was known to be comfortably fixed, his total resources did not quite meet this sum. Slave to science though he might be, he hesitated to gamble his entire fortune on a visionary venture that might prove to be impracticable. As to the deficiency, he could get that as a loan or a gift from one or more of his many wealthy friends who had every confidence in him. Should the scheme fail, he would be penniless —possibly friendless.

"Do you believe a flight to another planet and back could be made successfully in the *Sphere* so equipped?" he asked.

Robert considered carefully. He did, but the professor's question renewed many doubts. Most of all, he hesitated to involve his would-be benefactor in a disastrous venture.

"I do," he answered truthfully, at last.

"So do I," supplemented the professor, stoutly, as if to help convince himself. "Would you be willing to undertake such a journey?" he asked suddenly, fixing his eyes keenly upon his host.

"Yes, sir!" responded Robert quickly.

His prompt reply and evident sincerity convinced Professor Palmer that he was in earnest. The professor had decided. Nothing risked, nothing gained. As for Robert, nine months of trench warfare in France had steeled him against fear of anything except women and the devil.

"It is settled, then," concluded the professor, unconsciously authoritative. "You will come to my home, and together we will supervise the completion of the *Sphere*."

"But the *Sphere*—," began Robert, surprized by the professor's quick decision.

"We will have it conveyed to my estate, where the light and space will be much better; and where I can look after you better, my boy." His face softened. Ah, an old bachelor had not all the advantages. What would he not give to have a son like this!

Something about Robert's hesitation reminded him abruptly of an important consideration.

"I am forgetting," he apologized. "Your interest must be fully protected. We will draw up a contract whereby full possession of the *Sphere* and all its equipment, now and always, will remain yours. I will undertake to complete it, defraying all expenses, in return for which I ask the use of the *Sphere* in a flight to Mars and back if possible."

"That is more than fair," Robert replied, feeling ashamed of a short-lived, though natural, apprehension.

4

ROBERT found Professor Palmer's homestead vastly more cheerful than his own gloomy quarters.

The *Sphere* was placed in a large, well-lighted barn, which had been carefully prepared for its new purpose. The barred windows were frosted to defeat the curiosity of possible busybodies, and reliable locks put on the heavy doors.

Removal of the *Sphere* from its original quarters presented difficulties, because no provision had been made for its exit. It had been constructed piece by piece inside the four walls which housed it so long. It was necessary to hew an opening through the wall, to the acute curiosity of the neighbors.

However, their curiosity went for naught, as a large tarpaulin and protecting crating disguised the object of their interest, which was removed at night. Professor Palmer and Robert were agreed in their decision to keep their project to themselves as much as possible until they had succeeded in perfecting the *Sphere*.

The hauling of the *Sphere* proved an extremely simple task. With the gyrostats running quietly at half-speed, its weight was rendered to almost nothing. Nevertheless a large, heavy truck was provided for any emergencies. They wisely avoided any unnecessary chance of destroying, at the very beginning of their task, the intricate work of many painstaking years.

A small brick building was put up and the necessary machinery installed for the production of mythonite. Here the tedious process was soon directed by Robert. Eleven skilled metallurgists and chemists labored day after day under his supervision, without knowing for what purpose the curious metal they were producing was to be used.

Weeks passed, and vast quantities of waste material were hauled away daily; but the quantity of the precious mythonite accumulated with discouraging slowness. An addition was built adjoining the first plant, and the corps of experts increased to an even two dozen. By improving methods and increasing deftness, the former production was trebled.

Nevertheless, it soon became apparent that the desired quantity could not possibly be produced at the present rate within the period which Robert had estimated. The first month's operation had resulted in but two small ingots, each an inch square and three inches long. This was before the plant was enlarged, however. This had been eventually increased to seven ingots a month. But even at this rate, it would require almost four years longer to produce a sufficient quantity. Obviously, the project was doomed to failure unless some means of greatly increasing the production could be devised.

It was four months after the completion of the original plant that Robert and Professor Palmer were discussing this matter with a view to deciding finally whether or not to abandon the project. During this time Professor Palmer had come to look upon Robert as a son. His untiring energy, his frank, cheerful personality and intelligence, had made a profound impression upon the professor.

"I am going to see this thing to a finish, Robert," he was saying. "But if we are to take advantage of the next favorable apposition of Mars just eight months from now, we must make some radical improvement in our program. Not till fifteen years later will it again approach so close to the earth. Have you any new plans to suggest?"

"This," replied Robert. "We might have the crushing and the crude processes done elsewhere. By concentrating upon the finer processes alone, we should be able to increase our production of mythonite considerably. But we should have to replace the crushing apparatus with additional equipment for the final processes. We must take advantage of every available bit of space and every man's time."

"Our total expenditures to date are what?"

"Approximately $33,000. But, the sales of excess platinum have reduced that to about $32,000."

"Not so bad," mused the professor. "However, it is clear that we can not reach our goal without a vastly greater rate of production."

He knit his brows, pondering silently for a little while.

"Robert," he broke out suddenly, "we've got to take a big gamble!

We will not only follow out your suggestion, but we will double the present size of our plant."

Robert gasped. He thought of the professor's dwindling resources, wondering if he were suddenly gone mad.

"Why, that would bring the total cost round $60,000!" he cried.

"Quite so," replied Professor Palmer, calmly; "but a four or five year program would be far more expensive—to say nothing of its impracticability. It's win all or lose all, Robert."

So the Palmer laboratories were enlarged and arrangements successfully made for the crushing and partial separating with a near-by rock plant. The little force of experts was augmented to thirty, and work began in earnest. The next month resulted in a production of forty-one ingots of mythonite!

The following month a minor improvement discovered in the process increased that month's production to fifty ingots. Even this production was bettered somewhat during the following months. At the end of the sixth month after the enlargement of the plant the total production of mythonite had reached more than three hundred ingots—all that were required! A month remained in which to prepare for the great venture into the unknown.

IT WAS with a feeling of overwhelming elation that Robert and the professor gazed upon the little stack of dull, silver-gray bars in the dusk of an early July twilight. Winter and spring had come and gone while they labored. These three hundred tiny ingots were the result. Not entirely, though; for in addition to a sufficient quantity of platinum reserved for their own requirements, the Palmer laboratories had produced and sold enough platinum to defray all expenses incurred. Little wonder that they felt elated.

Professor Palmer put his arm across Robert's broad shoulders with fatherly tenderness.

"My boy," he said, softly, "whatever the *Sphere* accomplishes, it has at least brought us together. To me, our perfect companionship has come to mean more than anything else. I did not realize what a lonely old man I was before you came."

"Old man!" chided Robert. "Fifty-seven years young."

"It is well for me that you had the *Sphere* to occupy you, or some sweet young vision would have taken you in hand ere now. But forgive an old codger's selfishness, Robert."

"Time enough to think about that, professor," smiled Robert.

"Careful. Don't let them make a bachelor out of you. An old bachelor is a superfluity for which no one really cares. Even an old maid has her cat."

"Very well. We'll each make love to a moon-maiden," laughed Robert, and Professor Palmer joined him heartily.

The following day the small ingots were melted and forced into the big, flattish, circular, platinum-lined and studded mold. Before the pouring was attempted, the mold was securely fastened down as a precaution against the lifting power of the mythonite when freed from the earth's gravity by the interruption of the platinum beneath it. As an additional precaution, a disk of platinum was suspended over the mass, thereby neutralizing the attraction of heavenly bodies.

With great care, the platinum-incased mass of mythonite was installed in the *Sphere*. A stout steel rod and universal joint connected it to the gyrostatic center, and the wiring and other details of its proper control were quickly completed. The petrol and oxygen tanks were partly filled, the gyrostats tuned up, and the

Sphere at last was ready for a trial trip.

5

HENRY SIMMS, much interested, but skeptical to the last, was shown the interior of the *Sphere* on the afternoon set for the first trial. He crawled through the manhole after Robert and the professor, firmly convinced that he was about to witness a flat failure of the *Sphere* for which the professor claimed so much. To do him justice, though, it should be stated that Henry's expectations were not without keen sympathy for the disappointment to which he felt certain the professor was doomed.

"She looks more like a submarine than a blimp, professor," was his first comment as they reached the main compartment.

Indeed, the interior of the *Sphere,* with its intricate mass of machinery and its bull's-eye windows, its riveted partitions and curved walls, and the incandescent lamps, did suggest a typical underseas craft.

"She goes up, Henry, not down," the professor laughed.

"Deal me out, then," cried Henry. "I am not prepared to go up for keeps yet!"

"Rest easy," said Robert. "It will be much easier to drop back, if in doubt, than to continue upward."

Robert proceeded to explain the *Sphere's* important features for Henry's benefit.

"Here is the gage that registers the pull of the disk," he said, finally, after having explained the rudiments of the *Sphere's* operation. He indicated a dial attached to the rod which harnessed the powerful mythonite disk to the core of the *Sphere.*

He pushed the first of a row of switch buttons on the controller. Poor Henry's heart fluttered as a faint scraping sound heralded the mere opening of one of the three cameralike platinum shutters over the mythonite disk's highly magnetic surface. He was already regretting his consent to accompany them on a trial flight. The handle on the dial of the lifting gage suddenly raced from zero and steadied at 605 pounds. The *Sphere* remained at rest.

All three men were now keyed to the highest pitch of excitement. This was the first time the completed apparatus had been tested, and upon its results depended entirely the success of the *Sphere* and its remarkable project planned by the professor.

The registered tension on the strong steel arm removed all doubt from the minds of Robert and Professor Palmer regarding the success of mythonite as a practical power of propulsion. A feeling of wild exultation gripped them both.

"Danger from shock of sudden great pull is avoided by gradual uncovering of the disk's surface," resumed Robert as he pushed the next button, sending the hand on the dial up to 1,420. The third button swung it to 3,475, accompanied by a slight tremor perceptible in the floor of the *Sphere.* Their startled glances through the nearest porthole satisfied them, however, that the *Sphere* still rested on *terra firma.*

Robert pushed all three of the corresponding row of buttons directly over the first three, and the hand again registered zero.

"I don't want to lift the roof off your barn, professor," exclaimed Robert. "I'll start the gyrostats now to neutralize the *Sphere's* weight, and we will get out and push it outside the stable."

A few minutes later the now thoroughly convinced Henry watched his companions disappear within the *Sphere's* shell while he debated with himself as to whether he should follow them. A moment later Professor Palmer appeared at a porthole and beckoned him; but Henry shook his head vehemently.

The professor unlatched the window and swung it open.

"Hurry in, Henry," he called. "Voyage is about to commence."

"Not I, professor! This suits me real well, right out here."

"Come on, Henry," the professor urged. "You aren't afraid?"

"Not afraid—just a little bit careful. I'm just beginning to find out how nice and solid this ground feels. I'll watch you do it."

And no amount of urging would change his mind. He politely but firmly maintained that he felt much healthier outside.

"Stubborn chap, that," the professor commented to Robert. "Can't say that I blame him, though."

"Simply a difference in the values we set on our own carcasses," suggested Robert. "Henry just takes his more seriously than we."

They laughed. Both, somehow, felt relieved afterward. Henry had furnished a welcome diversion. The former nervous tension was broken.

"Well, so long, old man," Robert called out the window, as he prepared to close it.

"Give my regards to Saint Peter," shouted Henry.

"Cheerful cuss," contributed the professor, as the heavy glass slammed shut.

Robert stopped the gyrostats.

A deep silence reigned within the heavy walls as he examined carefully the delicate machinery upon which so much depended. Then he pulled the lever, setting them in motion again. Their steady purr was a relief from the oppressive silence.

Professor Palmer's keen eyes followed him as he moved about. Robert's excitement of the previous minutes was forgotten as he expertly, almost lovingly, ran his eyes over every detail of the perfect, whirring machinery, most of which his father had produced. His throat contracted strangely as his thoughts dwelt for a moment on his beloved parent. His mother he could scarcely remember, for she had died when he was but a baby of three years. But his father had been his constant companion—his pal. What would he not have given to have him standing by him at this moment, on the eve of his triumph, of the realization of his dreams!

Being a shrewd judge of human nature, the professor rightly guessed his thoughts at that moment. A suspicious moisture in Robert's eyes confirmed his guess.

Robert's next move was to adjust the direction of the disk's covered face toward the zenith. The gyrostats were revolving smoothly. With bated breath, he again pushed the button which partly bared the disk.

The *Sphere* gave a slight lurch. This was followed by a sensation like that felt in an elevator rising suddenly. A faint shout from below. With one impulse Robert's and the professor's glances swept eagerly through the ports.

There they saw just what they had expected to see; but the actuality affected them curiously. Oddly enough, they had subconsciously expected till the last moment that the *Sphere* would fail.

The landscape seemed to be dropping from under them. Even the horizon was receding alarmingly.

ROBERT'S hand shot out to the control board, closing the disk's surface. A slight tremor evidenced the abrupt cessation of the disk's pull.

"Six thousand feet," read Professor Palmer from the altimeter.

Robert joined him. A few minutes later it registered seven thousand. They were still rising, but not nearly so rapidly as before. The closing of the disk had checked their speed at once.

"A little more and I'd have boosted her right off the earth," said Robert, breathlessly. "I'll have to use the disk more sparingly on ordinary sight-seeing excursions hereafter."

"You had it opened only to first power, too, hadn't you?"

"Yes; and without the 'juice' turned on. Jove! We didn't realize how much reserve power of propulsion we had. It's well that I experimented first with the minimum. And the current almost quadruples the magnetism of mythonite! Phew!"

Robert paused and read the altimeter again. Eight thousand. He gripped the gyrostatic control, and carefully moved it to half speed.

The *Sphere* seemed to pause a moment, then they could detect its beginning to settle earthward as the neutralization of gravity was modified. Six thousand; five thousand; they were dropping steadily at a rate of nearly a thousand feet a minute.

Robert shoved the lever back to full speed and the *Sphere's* downward momentum was quickly checked. With the disk safely throttled, the *Sphere* became as a rubber balloon. They merely drifted in midair.

Together they peered through the observation well in the floor. Through this they could plainly see the landscape, some three thousand feet below, sliding by sluggishly as they drifted with the light air current. From the side ports they could discern the big Palmer homestead and the laboratories about a mile and a half to the west of them. It was an ideal day for observation. The sky was cloudless, and the air of crystal clearness.

"Well, professor, shall we run back to our stall, or take a little sight-seeing jaunt?" queried Robert.

"Let's see some of the country, by all means," decided the professor, his face aglow with boyish excitement and anticipation.

"All right; here goes," Robert sang out as he deflected the disk to a horizontal position, pointing due north.

The next instant he switched open the first shutter from the disk's surface. There was a jerk, and the landscape suddenly began slipping away to the south with accelerating speed. Another click, and their speed was further increased. Once more the switch clicked, releasing the last shutter from over the disk. The *Sphere* seemed literally to leap ahead. A muffled roar without indicated the great speed at which they were rushing through the air.

Town after town flashed by beneath them with astonishing rapidity. The fact that they were flying at a comparatively low altitude made their speed seem terrific. Robert wisely decided to seek a safer height. He elevated the disk several degrees and the *Sphere* promptly soared higher. At eight thousand feet he checked its upward trend.

Far away to the east they could see a solitary big biplane bound in the same direction as they—probably a fast mail express; but it was quickly left behind, and lost from view in the afternoon haze.

For twenty minutes they roared northward. Then, to their surprize, a vast body of water appeared against the horizon ahead.

"Lake Erie!" gasped Robert, after a moment's reflection. "Two hundred miles in less than half an hour. Why — that's about five hundred miles an hour! And without the aid of electric magnetization of the disk!"

"Marvelous!" exclaimed the professor, enthusiastically.

Already they were soaring over the expanse of water. On the horizon the distant Canadian shore was rapidly taking shape. Beneath them several long, slim lake craft could be discerned, crawling at what ap-

peared, from so great a height, to be a snail's pace. No doubt the *Sphere* would have presented a much more curious sight to those below had its luminous gray shell been more than a faint speck against the brilliant, cloudless sky.

It was at this juncture that Robert's alert ears detected a subtle change in the hitherto soft whir of the gyrostats.

"What is it, Robert?" whispered Professor Palmer, as he observed Robert's suddenly tense attitude.

"Wait!" anxiously.

Outside, the muffled roar sounded in strange contrast to the still air within. The bright sunshine streamed across the gray floor in mock cheerfulness. A single captive fly buzzed drowzily against a windowpane.

These commonplace details registered on Robert's mind indelibly in those fleeting seconds as he listened with palpitating heart for he knew not what.

Taking his cue from Robert, Professor Palmer was listening with equal intensity to the drone of the machinery upon which their lives depended. Even he could now detect the change. The drone was gradually, unmistakably, decreasing in volume. The gyrostats were stopping!

Unconsciously they gripped each other's hands an instant as they realized the seriousness of their plight. Should the gyrostats stop, the *Sphere* would plunge to its doom!

Frantically Robert tortured his mind for a possible solution, or a reason for the unexpected interruption. The altimeter already indicated that they were falling at a steadily increasing speed. The formerly tiny ships below were no longer tiny. The water seemed to be rushing toward them at a terrific rate. Robert remembered afterward a sudden inane conjecture as to how big a splash they would make.

It was at this moment his numbed senses returned to him. Cursing himself silently for a rattle-brained idiot, he spun the wheel madly, thus adjusting the vertical position of the disk. To his tortured mind it seemed an eternity before it finally pointed toward the zenith.

Their downward rush was noticeably checked, but the lift of the disk was not equal to the weight of the *Sphere*. They continued to fall at a dangerous rate. The altimeter registered but two thousand feet!

Fully recovered now from his former temporary inertia, Robert jammed over the switch which connected the disk to the powerful storage batteries. This was the reserve that he had not ventured to utilize before. Thus the lift of the *Sphere* should have been increased more than four-fold, and its descent checked at once.

As the switch swung over, the gyrostats stopped completely. In a flash the explanation of it all occurred to Robert. The batteries were exhausted!

6

THE world was rudely shaken from its customary lethargy.

Having lapsed into a monotonous, smooth-running order of events, the public had long since resigned itself to such. Not since the Great War had newspapers had such an opportunity. Even the steady development of trans-Atlantic and trans-continental air traffic had become commonplace.

Of the myriad readers, perhaps none was so keenly interested in the article which appeared on the front page of every paper in the United States on the morning of the eighteenth as Henry Simms.

Since the *Sphere* had disappeared from his astonished gaze the day before, he had anxiously awaited its return. As hour after hour passed, his

fears for its little crew of two grew proportionately. He had little faith in the curious invention to which the professor and his companion had entrusted their lives.

So it was with little spirit that Henry sat down to his breakfast that morning at the Palmer homestead, where he lived. He picked up the morning paper listlessly, hoping it might contain some report of the *Sphere*. He feared that if it did contain such news, it would be fatal news. Henry was a pessimist.

The big heading escaped his notice at first because he was looking for some smaller notice regarding the *Sphere* and its failure to return. Then suddenly it caught his eye. Breathlessly he devoured it.

SENSATION

CAUSED BY FLYING SPHERE

Curious Metal Blimp Seen Floating Above Lake Vessels' Mast Tops

STRANGE NEW AIR TRIUMPH

Heavier than air machine with no visible means of ascension or propulsion possesses marvelous speed

(Special Dispatch to the Morning Chronicle)

ERIE, Pa., July 18.—The freighter, "Mary Ann", arriving here tonight, reported a remarkable incident.

About 4 o'clock this afternoon a member of the crew descried a small speck over the southern horizon. This speck grew in size rapidly until it became apparent that it was not only approaching the "Mary Ann", but falling with great velocity from its former immense height. It looked to be a large grayish globe.

During the ensuing moments, it seemed as if a huge cannon ball were launched directly at the vessel. Her destruction seemed certain. Consternation seized the crew and officers, who, by this time, were all aware of the pending disaster.

At a critical moment, however, the big ball was seen to slacken in its downward rush, until finally it hung suspended in the air directly above the mast tops, drifting slowly astern.

At this close range several round windows could be seen in the heavily riveted walls of the sphere. A glimpse of the operator was caught as he busily maneuvered divers levers.

Although evidently of considerable weight, and without visible means of support or propulsion, the sphere seemed to float in midair as lightly as a balloon. It appeared to be nearly thirty feet in diameter.

Suddenly a deep humming was heard. A moment later the sphere rose with gathering speed until it appeared to have reached a height of about half a mile. Then it shot abruptly off toward the south at great speed, disappearing rapidly over the horizon.

While this was of great interest to Henry, it but served to increase his uneasiness. He could think of no good reason for the failure of the *Sphere* to return from its trial trip but a fatal re-occurrence of the mechanical trouble suggested in the freighter's report.

It was at this point in Henry's gloomy reflections that a hearty laugh outside startled him. The professor!

A moment later Robert and Professor Palmer entered. Both were in fine spirits.

"Should have been along, Henry," boomed the professor. "Missed the time of your young life."

"Been reading about it," Henry replied, tapping the paper. "Were you really trying to drop into the lake, or couldn't you help it?"

"Fast work, Robert," laughed the professor, as together they read over the article; "private trial trip in the afternoon—front page headlines next morning! Not so bad, eh?"

"Just missed the freighter," gasped Robert. "We didn't have a chance to see her until we had checked our drop and drifted off astern. Phew!"

"Never mind," soothed the professor. "Can't be helped now. Anyway, they will probably conclude that we were merely playing with them."

His mood would not be denied. He seemed more like a boy at that moment than a dignified professor of fifty-seven.

"You folks seem to have had a dull trip," remarked Henry, ironically. "Where were you last night?"

"Must we tell you? Had you accepted our invitation, you'd know," retorted the professor. "Man, don't ask us so many questions. We're as hungry as wolves."

They sat down before the appetizing, crisply fried bacon, and eggs that Jarvis, the peerless, smiling butler had brought in.

"It was this way, Henry," resumed the professor, after he had partly satisfied the inner man: "Robert and I didn't expect to be gone long, and unfortunately failed to take any provisions along. Had it not been for a cake of chocolate in Robert's pocket, which we shared, we should have had nothing to eat since we left."

"But you haven't told me where you were last night," persisted Henry.

"Tell him, Robert."

"Well, after we ran out of power because the storage batteries had not been fully charged, and narrowly missed sinking that freighter, we had just enough current left to suspend the *Sphere* in midair. Then we started the engines driving the dynamos, and soon had sufficient power to start back. But boy! It was a close shave." Robert paused reminiscently.

"We started back, but changed our minds and decided to see some more of the country first. You see, at five hundred or more miles an hour, it is quite a temptation to look around a bit."

Henry's countenance registered a curious combination of astonishment and disbelief.

"Fact," put in Professor Palmer. "Could have done much better than that, but didn't want to heat up the *Sphere* uncomfortably by excessive air friction."

Henry looked very much as if he thought he might be the victim of a little spoofing. Such wild claims, uttered so coolly, confused him and aroused his natural skepticism.

Robert resumed his narrative, with a touch of pardonable pride. Behind him Jarvis stood spellbound, mouth half open, drinking in every word.

"So we flew over to New York, Boston and Baltimore, and looked them over. Great sport. We became so interested that twilight was upon us before we had given it a thought.

"It was pretty dark by the time we got back this way. We forgot, too, that the sun is visible considerably longer from a great height than it is from the earth's surface.

"The result was that we could not find our way back here in the dark, without lights to guide us. So after a fruitless attempt, we gave up and landed in a large field. There we stayed until dawn, when, upon ascending again, we discovered that we were only a couple of miles from here."

"Moral: Carry a searchlight, and ye shall find," contributed the professor.

"And some sandwiches," added Robert, returning to his interrupted attack upon the bacon and eggs.

7

THE following weeks were crowded ones for the Palmer household. The account of the *Sphere* and the activities at the laboratories were quickly connected by the sharp newspaper world, and acknowledged by Professor Palmer.

A deluge of newspaper reporters followed. The first were a diversion; the rest quickly became a nuisance. Once more did journalistic imagination run wild. Though both Robert and the professor refused to commit themselves on the subject, the Palmer-Margard feud was revived, colored with a wealth of imaginary data concerning prospective trips to Mars in the *Sphere*.

The *Sphere* was photographed and sketched countless times, as were Professor Palmer and Robert. Even Henry came in for a share of publicity.

But the professor had long since determined to attempt the trip to Mars in the *Sphere*. With this in mind he set about mastering the intricacies of its apparatus.

The prospect of venturing into the unknown regions beyond the Earth's attraction is not one that appeals to the faint-hearted. Even Professor Palmer frequently had moments of indecision when he all but decided to drop the project. It would be so easy, reasoned his weaker self, to drop the matter entirely. The *Sphere's* scope on the Earth was sufficient to make them both a vast fortune, and to bring them great fame.

Nevertheless, he remained stedfast in his decision, in spite of the advice and warnings of his friends, which were anything but reassuring. He was willing to be a martyr for the possible enlightenment of the world.

It was Robert, though, who strengthened the professor's determination, for he insisted upon accompanying him on the unusual journey.

"I am but an old man, Robert," Professor Palmer argued, "while you are a young man in your prime, with a long, promising career before you. The chances of the *Sphere's* reaching Mars safely and returning, in spite of its remarkable powers, are extremely uncertain. Who knows what strange phenomena it may encounter in the depths of space? Suppose its apparatus should fail midway. Think of the fate that may await us. Even if we reached Mars, and found it inhabited with intelligent beings, how do we know we should be permitted to return? Take my advice, my boy, and remain here. You may lose the *Sphere*, but you know its principle, and have proved its practicability. You can command the services of the world's best mechanical skill in the rapid construction of another *Sphere*, and still others. In addition, I shall leave you my entire estate and possessions."

Robert was deeply moved by Professor Palmer's concern over him and by his generosity.

"You have been very good to me," he said. "I appreciate it deeply. But I am going with you. We will share the dangers together, and together we will also share the glory of achievement. I believe we are going to succeed."

And so, with these two declarations was sealed the pact of partnership which was to carry them together on the perilous journey.

WHEN their final intention of attempting to reach Mars was announced, the journalistic world fairly seethed with excitement. Every magazine issue contained portraits of Robert and Professor Palmer, accompanied by cuts of the *Sphere* and the professor's latest maps and photographs of the red planet. Never had any human undertaking even mildly approached theirs in magnitude. They were hailed as the heroes of the hour.

It was agreed that the secrets of the *Sphere* were to be set down and placed in a safety deposit box with a certain great trust company, to be opened and read only in case Robert and the professor failed to return after two years' time. Thus, the

world could not lose the secret of this remarkable invention.

Professor Margard, at this point, proved that his opposition to Professor Palmer's theories was entirely impersonal. In published interviews, he highly commended his worthy contemporary's courage, as well as that of his companion; but he deplored the dangerous project in the face of what he considered conclusive evidence against the possible existence of inhabitants on Mars. "Misdirected courage; misplaced martrydom," he termed their intentions.

"Misdirected fiddlesticks," snorted Professor Palmer when he read this. "We'll show these people a thing or two."

Two weeks were devoted to final preparations for the remarkable adventure. A powerful, adjustable searchlight had now been installed within a socket in the bottom of the *Sphere* to facilitate night travel and landings in the future. Petrol tanks were filled to capacity, and a supply of water taken on, some of which would be used in the cooling coils of the engines. A liberal quantity of life-giving oxygen was forced into the high-pressure tanks. Without this to constantly freshen the air within the *Sphere,* they could not live, as, after passing beyond the Earth's envelope of atmosphere into the void of space, they would have no means of replenishing their air supply. A small supply of nitrogen was also added as a precaution against the total loss of the little ball of atmosphere guarded by the walls of the *Sphere.*

While oxygen had to be replenished as their respiration consumed it, the supply of nitrogen would remain virtually the same except for a slight seepage through the sealed walls when the protecting pressure of the Earth's atmosphere was removed. The atmospheric pressure within the *Sphere* would be about fifteen pounds to the square inch, with the absolute vacuum of space hungrily enveloping the exterior. An apparatus for absorbing the carbonic acid gas thrown off by their lungs was also a part of the *Sphere's* equipment.

Robert tinkered about the *Sphere,* constantly inspecting every part with painstaking care. The resilient rubber window strips, insuring against the loss of the precious atmosphere, were looked to with especial care. The heavy glass panes were examined minutely for possible signs of fracture, or flaws. Such a defect would prove disastrous if it should give way under the pressure within when they were in space. They would then be placed in a vacuum in which no living body can exist. So sudden would such a disaster be that they would have no opportunity, nor means, of saving themselves. All windows, however, were equipped with double panes for safety as well as warmth. They were also fitted outside with guards of heavy wire net.

The lubricating reservoirs of the gyrostats were filled carefully; the bearings were cleaned perfectly. Engines were tuned, and, in short, every bit of mechanism was tested and regulated to a point of perfection.

On the first day of August everything was in readiness for the start of the momentous journey.

Provisions, chiefly of the non-perishable and concentrated variety, had been generously stored in the *Sphere's* food chests. There was a sufficient quantity to last them for months.

Although the world at large understood that the *Sphere* would start on its trip about this time, Robert and the professor had decided to withhold information as to the exact day or hour of their departure. Neither one desired a public demonstration. In spite of the pleas of divers reporters who besieged them, they refused to divulge the time set for their departure.

As the last day of their stay on Earth approached, Robert was torn by conflicting emotions. At one moment the venture stood forth in all its glory of achievement and adventure; the next, with appalling realization of its vastness, its unknown terrors. From time immemorial, man has instinctively dreaded the unknown, and Robert was plainly afraid. But, though the possibility of backing out did naturally occur to him with devilish persistence, he always rejected it promptly, determinedly. He would not countenance the thought of deserting the professor.

It had finally been decided to start on the following day, the second of the month.

Anxious reporters hovered about the place, each eager to make a "scoop" for his own paper. The more enterprizing tried to wheedle some information out of Henry or the taciturn Jasper.

"Now, young mon, ye'll kindly bate it. I've no time to bother with the likes of ye," the good-natured but sorely bothered Jarvis finally told them, one after another, as they approached him.

Henry, equally annoyed, decided upon cunning.

"I'm not certain," he was repeating, confidentially, for the third time that day, "but I understand that they plan starting on the sly tomorrow night."

The young reporter with the brilliant red hair listened with apparently keen interest. He thanked the secretary politely, and departed. But a curious smile on his face as he turned away would not have exactly reassured Henry had he seen it. Evidently the red-head retained some ideas of his own. His sharp, intelligent features did not give him the appearance of one easily fooled by subterfuge.

And indeed he was not. Hugh Taggert had a trait of always trying to out-think the other fellow—and he usually succeeded. Probably it was this that had made him the most valuable man on the *Morning Chronicle's* staff of reporters.

That the secretary had tried to mislead him Taggert felt certain. But as to when the *Sphere* was scheduled to start, he knew no more than before. However, Henry's statement had a significance which suggested something to his alert mind. The night start did not seem unlikely, but that a man of the character he keenly judged Henry Simms to be should readily give his employer's secret plans away, did seem unlikely. He determined not only to redouble his vigilance, but to remain on watch that very night instead of waiting for the next night.

Henry's mistake was in mentioning anything about night at all. His idea, of course, was merely to induce the troublesome reporters to lose a whole night's sleep uselessly.

As a matter of fact, it mattered little to Robert and the professor whether their departure was observed or not. It simply amused them to evade the persistence of their besiegers if they could.

8

Despite their determination, and the intense interest in their great project, it was with many secret misgivings that Robert and Professor Palmer stood without the improvised hangar on that memorable night. They were about to embark on the strangest journey that man had ever attempted.

Henry Simms alone accompanied them to see them off. Till the last he had tried to persuade them to abandon the dangerous project, but without avail.

To Robert, the stars had never seemed quite so brilliant, the night so bewitching. The very air seemed to have a special tang and sweetness

which he had never before noticed. The myriad sounds of the night possessed a magic power of enchantment over him. He caught himself wondering inconsequently whether he should ever again hear the soothing voice of the crickets and other denizens of the summer twilight; whether such sounds might be heard on Mars if they reached it.

Quietly they took leave of Henry and filed into the *Sphere*. The trap slammed shut, and Robert and the professor were enveloped in the dead, black silence of the *Sphere's* interior. It was at this point that Robert's resolution reached its ebb. Had Professor Palmer turned to him at that moment and again begged him to remain safely on Earth, he could not have resisted the temptation.

Never had a glow of light seemed so comforting as that which flooded the *Sphere* a moment later. The temptation of the previous minutes fled. In its place Robert felt only an eagerness to be on his way. Nevertheless, when they had mounted to the main compartment, he opened one of the windows and leaned out, thirstily drinking in deep breaths of the keen night air.

Toward the east a silver tinge on the horizon heralded the rising of the moon. The two tall stacks of the laboratories were silhouetted sharply against the brightening sky. Their black outlines were registered indelibly in Robert's memory for years afterward. It all seemed like a grotesque dream. Somewhere the shrill scream of a screech-owl cut into the night, breaking the spell.

Final farewells were passed with Henry below, and the window slammed to into its soft rubber-stripped socket. The air-purifying devices were put into operation.

With Henry's aid they had already removed the *Sphere* from its stall. Its machinery had been carefully inspected that afternoon. With a final glance over everything, they prepared to start at once. For the first time the full electrified lifting power of the disk was to be used. Storage batteries had been charged to capacity.

"All ready, professor?" called Robert.

"Let her go."

There was a soft jar, and the Earth began dropping away. The altimeter registered three thousand feet when Robert opened the second shutter. Immediately the landscape began receding at a disconcerting rate. With a moment of involuntary hesitation, Robert pushed the third button, entirely baring the disk's surface. An answering roar from without indicated the terrific speed at which they were leaving the Earth's surface.

"Twenty thousand," read Professor Palmer.

Almost as he finished speaking the instrument registered another thousand feet. They were rising at virtually the same rate as they had been traveling parallel to the Earth's surface during their original trial trip.

The moon, nearly full, was now in full view because of their height. It had also risen sufficiently to cast long, grotesque shadows of trees and other objects on the Earth's surface. Roads appeared as narrow, winding ribbons; houses as mere faint blots.

A minute later they had reached a level of 62,000 feet. Doltaire's remarkable and recently established airplane record of 46,800 feet was already eclipsed by more than 15,000 feet! The dusky landscape began to take on a blurred appearance. As yet Robert had not turned the current into the disk, fearing excessive air-friction. Time enough for that when they had arisen beyond the belt of atmosphere which enveloped the Earth some 200 miles deep. This figure had been approximated from observations of falling meteors, which become white-hot from air friction as they

fall with terrific speed from space into the envelope of atmosphere.

"AH—pardon me, gentlemen," a quiet voice said suddenly.

Robert and the professor wheeled sharply, thoroughly startled.

To their astonishment, they beheld a man walking toward them!

"W-where did you come from?" stammered Robert, the first to recover his speech.

The newcomer, however, did not seem to share their surprize in the least. Rather he appeared to be very much at ease. His brilliant red hair, the easy and pleasant smile on his intelligent features, stamped him as an ordinary, normal person. But how had he come there?

"My apologies, gentlemen," spoke the stranger. "I determined to cover this trip for *The Chronicle*, and hid in a storeroom. Hugh Taggert's my name."

He advanced and shook hands with them both heartily.

"Thought I might as well get acquainted right away," he ran on, "since we are going to be companions all the way to Mars. Nifty little ship you've got."

Until now their astonishment had kept Robert and the professor speechless. With the disclosure of the identity of the nervy young reporter, however, the humor of the situation struck them both.

"We hadn't counted on company," said the professor, "but now that you're here, I can't say that I'm sorry. Kind of livens the trip up, eh, Robert? Not so lonesome. But you've got your nerve, young man!"

"You're certainly welcome, so far as I'm concerned, Taggert," said Robert, agreeably. "Only you might have to share some scanty rations before we land."

"Shan't mind that," was the reply. "Brought some myself to help out."

He picked up a good-sized cubical package from where he had set it down a few minutes before.

"Bouillon cubes, malted milk tablets, and chocolate," he explained, tapping the parcel.

"Fair enough," said Robert.

"Boys," interrupted the professor, "take a look at old Mother Earth now."

With one accord they hurried to the windows to gaze upon the receding Earth, which for a minute they had almost forgotten.

The wavering altimeter indicated a height of more than 125,000 feet—almost twenty miles!

The semi-luminous Earth far below them now presented a dull, nebulous appearance, devoid of landmarks, except that far to the southeast a faint thread of lighter color wound its way irregularly across the country; this they judged to be the Ohio River. One other distinguishable mark was a small, dimly illuminated patch indicating the city near the laboratories.

"Good old Earth, good-bye," said Taggert.

His customarily cheerful voice contained a note of awe. Indeed, the sight was sufficient to strike awe into anyone's heart; but then, Taggert was thinking, too, of a certain dark-haired and brown-eyed lass who would be waiting anxiously for him to return to her.

At the end of a fifteen-minute wait, basing his estimate on their former rate of ascension, when the altimeter was still registering accurately, Robert calculated that they had reached a distance of approximately 150 miles above the Earth. At this distance the atmosphere should be sufficiently thinned to eliminate it as a factor of interference with their course or danger of air friction. He could now safely utilize the disk's full magnetic power. With the resistance of the atmosphere reduced to nothing, their speed was doubtless already increas-

ing, and with the maximum pull of the disk developed by the current from the storage batteries, their velocity would quickly double and redouble until they were rushing through space at a terrific rate. Thus would they continue exactly like a planet until checked by the attraction of some other body or a readjustment of the disk. Just how great a velocity they might obtain they had been unable to determine accurately, but it was considered not improbable that the *Sphere* might reach Mars within a month.

Under Professor Palmer's guidance Robert now laid their course for Mars, carefully focusing the disk upon it. The full propulsive force of the disk was about to be used for the first time. All three watched tensely through the windows as Robert prepared to throw on the switch that would charge the mythonite with electricity.

An answering jar was felt as contact was made with the first terminal. By degrees, their velocity was increased until the full energy of the powerful batteries was diverted into the disk.

"Why, the old gourd's shrinking like a toy balloon!" gasped Taggert, watching the Earth intently.

Indeed, the rapidly changing appearance of the Earth was evidence of the remarkable rate at which they were shooting away from it. Gradually the entire continent took shape before their eyes, presenting an appearance startlingly like the relief maps one sees in every geography. Here and there, however, fields of clouds hid sections of it.

It was at this point that Robert was possessed with a temporary but almost overwhelming impulse to rush the *Sphere* back to the Earth. He suddenly recalled its many comforts and pleasures; its wonderful scenes, sunsets and countless other beauties. All these things seemed a thousandfold more desirable than the cold, cheerless and mysterious void through which they were rushing. It would be such a simple matter to return now while he knew they could; but later—who knew what would be their fate? A moment later the temptation was gone. The possibilities of the curious planet toward which they were bound filled his imagination. He became anxious only to reach it as quickly as possible.

"Ugh," he shivered, suddenly realizing that their air in the *Sphere* had become chilled.

"B-r-r," echoed the professor and Taggert.

"Why, it's down to freezing," exclaimed Taggert, as he caught sight of the thermometer near him on the inner wall.

"Forgot all about our stoves," chuckled the professor, turning on one of the two electric heaters with which the chamber had been equipped.

"The cold is one of our greatest dangers," the professor told Taggert. "Out here in space the cold is absolute. There is nothing to reflect or retain the heat from the sun's rays. Even if the gyrostats should stop, the disk is powerful enough to keep the *Sphere* from falling back into the Earth, or on any other planet if we lightened it by throwing out excess weight as we neared the planet where gravitation would be much stronger than it is at this distance. We have enough food to last us for weeks. But we must have warmth. Should our current fail us we should be in danger of freezing to death. Fortunately we have a petrol heater for emergencies."

"Oy, and me with my overcoat at home!" wailed Taggert, in mock consternation, backing up close to the heater.

By this time the Earth had shrunk greatly. No longer did it constitute the greater part of their view. Suddenly a ribbon of fire appeared along its western rim! Steadily it widened,

lighting up the *Sphere* brilliantly. Then the explanation of this phenomenon dawned upon them. The *Sphere* was carrying them beyond the Earth's shadow into view of the sun, whose pleasant, warm rays shone cheerfully through the windows, buoying up their spirits considerably.

As the time passed the Earth appeared smaller and smaller. Its farther edge, still obscuring a slice of the sun, produced much the same effect as a partial eclipse of the sun by the moon when seen from the Earth. The physical features of the Earth were no longer visible against the glare of the sun. It simply looked like a black disk, slightly larger than the moon.

About this time their self-invited companion seemed a good deal perplexed over something. He stood shifting his weight from one foot to the other with a look of comical mystification on his ruddy countenance.

"What's the matter, old man?" asked Robert, much amused at Taggert's curious antics. "Cootie?"

"Something wrong here," giving a little hop.

"I'll admit you show symptoms of it, young man," remarked the professor, dryly.

"Feel kind of lightish. Maybe I'm going to become an angel when we get a little higher," went on the redhead, still engrossed in his private calculations.

"Come to think about it," said Robert, standing up, "I feel somewhat that way myself. It must be contagious." They both looked toward Professor Palmer keenly, as if expecting him to show similar symptoms.

The professor laughed long and heartily, until the pair became convinced that there was something wrong with him, too.

"Well, boys, it's this way," he said at last; "the farther away from the Earth we get, the weaker its attraction for us becomes. Of course you feel lighter—you *are* lighter—and that's not all. Before we reach Mars, we shall all weigh nothing. We'll be floating around in here like toy balloons."

"That's a fact," said Robert after a moment's reflection. "But I hadn't thought of it until now."

"Well, you fellows can swim around like goldfish if you want, but I'm going to find an anchor," declared Taggert, looking round for a likely object of promising bulk and solidity.

"No use," replied Professor Palmer. "When you float, everything else that is loose floats, too."

Taggert scratched his red head thoughtfully.

"All right, then," he said finally, in mock despair, "float it is; we'll all play tag."

A little while later the sun appeared unobstructed. The Earth had shrunk so small this time that it could no longer be seen on account of its close proximity to the sun. Well beyond it the moon hung serenely, though considerably reduced in size. Seen from this angle it was now nearer half than full. Oddly enough, in all directions the heavens presented the same appearance as when seen from the Earth at night, though the sun shone brightly upon the *Sphere*.

"But why?" Taggert wanted to know, looking in perplexity toward the blazing sun and then at the stars twinkling in cold, brilliant splendor.

"On the Earth we were enveloped by a layer of bluish atmosphere many miles deep in which minute particles of dust are suspended," explained Professor Palmer. "When the rays of the sun shine through this, it produces the luminous, azure sky with which we are so familiar. It is this brilliancy in the Earth's atmosphere during the day that makes the stars invisible. Out here, with no envelope

of atmosphere or dust particles, there is nothing to produce a luminousness to outshine the stars.''

''Guess it's all okeh,'' mused Taggert, doubtfully, gazing out into the black sky, which lacked even the softening indigo of our terrestrial nights.

THE stowaway proved a welcome recruit. For instead of dividing the twenty-four hours into two watches, they could now have three, of eight hours each.

The trip had settled down into dull monotony. One condition, however, partly relieved the tedium. This was the ever decreasing weight of their bodies. The adventurers found walking a novel sensation. A giddy feeling possessed them, and there was an unsteadiness in their gait which was difficult to control, resulting in a comical semblance of semi-intoxication.

It was the more reckless and experimental reporter who discovered and demonstrated proudly that he could step the entire length of the chamber, with little effort. Robert and the professor quickly and easily duplicated his feat, but he continued blithely to remind them at intervals of his initial discovery. From that time he supplemented his experiments by jumping up and touching the ceiling, and other gymnastics, proclaiming each noisily to the amusement of his new companions. He seemed to be enjoying himself immensely and to have entirely forgotten his original idea regarding an anchor.

But even this soon ceased to be a diversion and the three of them finally settled down as best they could, to look over the various latest editions of the newspapers which Professor Palmer had brought along. These all contained articles about their venture, and furnished quite interesting sidelights to the daring adventurers themselves.

''Here's a cheerful fellow who has figured out that it will take us two years to cover the thirty-odd million miles to the Martian deserts,'' announced Taggert from a precarious perch on the back of a chair with his feet on the seat. Ever since his initial gymnastics he had evinced a preference for birdlike attitudes.

''That's nothing; here's one that makes it five years,'' contributed Robert cheerfully. ''What does your paper say, professor?''

''The lowest estimate has it seven months. We, who know more of the *Sphere's* powers than any of them, had figured on about a month; but at the rate we are going now, and faster every second, we ought to reduce our own estimate by half.''

Taggert heaved a sigh of undisguised relief.

''Gosh, professor, that was close. I began to have bright visions of yours truly alongside a harp.''

''No telling what you'll find yourself alongside when we pull into Mars,'' remarked Robert encouragingly.

''I'd rather be by a plate of 'ham and' right now than anything else,'' answered the scribe. ''You gents made me miss my nightly feed.'' He felt in his coat pockets and presently fished out a cake of chocolate.

''Why in bedlam didn't you say so sooner?'' admonished Robert, getting up and making his way wobblingly toward a locker. ''You might not believe it, but we've got a regular restaurant here. I can fill your order right now.''

''Haven't got a chicken run on board, too?'' bantered the reporter.

''Young man, while you and your brethren were busily writing why we would never reach Mars, we were preparing to do it in the right way,'' broke in the professor.

''We not only have a substantial supply of fresh eggs put up in silicate of soda for preservation, but cheese,

ham, coffee and a number of other good things that you might not have suspected.''

''And you're going to turn loose a hungry stowaway scribe on all that?'' asked Taggert.

''Certainly,'' chorused Robert and the professor.

''Do you think we are going to let you starve?'' added Robert. ''You know we've got no undertaker handy.''

''Oh, thanks, thanks!''

A spirit stove was pulled out from a niche in the wall, and presently a generous slice of ham and a couple of eggs were sizzling in the frying pan. An appetizing aroma filled the chamber, causing Taggert to sniff the air hungrily.

''I call this handsome, now,'' he commented, gratefully. ''I always was a lucky stiff, though. Just let me know when I can save your lives or something and I'll be there.''

This simple repast was supplemented by a round of quickly brewed bouillon.

With their stomachs satisfied a feeling of drowziness came over them all. Taggert stoutly insisted upon standing first watch, but Robert was adamant in his refusal. He explained that it was important that he maintain watch over the machinery for the first shift until the most likely period for development of mechanical trouble was passed.

Professor Palmer also offered to take the first watch, but owing to Robert's greater familiarity with the mechanism he allowed himself to be prevailed upon. First, however, he carefully inspected the heavens, correcting the *Sphere's* course by various constellations, as it had swung a few points away from its objective.

The sun glared in at the windows at the back end of the chamber. The blinds were drawn, darkening the interior to facilitate sleeping. Professor Palmer and Taggert spread the pallets of bedding obtained out of one of the storerooms, and settled themselves to rest.

Through the long hours Robert maintained his lonely vigil.

The machinery continued its musical purr uninterrupted. Once he started the dynamo for a while, causing the temporary opening of a sleepy eye or two. He wished to keep the batteries charged to fullest capacity until they were well on their way, after which their velocity through space could be maintained with a very little expenditure of current.

The prolonged excitement of the past weeks, particularly of the last few days, together with loss of sleep, proved too much for Robert. Several times he caught himself dozing. Lulled by the hum of the machinery, he finally slipped off into oblivion.

Grotesque and confused dreams followed one after the other through his uneasy slumber in seemingly endless fantasy, causing him to mutter incoherently. These finally gave way to a curious vision of a conjured Martian landscape.

Huge cacti and other polypetalous growths formed a dense, forbidding background. As he looked about him it seemed that they had formed a menacing circle round him, which appeared to grow smaller and smaller. Hideous dark growths pushed their thorny leaves up through the loose sand round the edge of the circle, writhing into distorted shapes.

Desperately but fruitlessly his eyes sought some escape from the shrinking circle. The dark wall presented an impregnable barrier. How he had come there he did not know.

Suddenly he was startled by a rustling of the stiff foliage. The agitation of its tops heralded the approach of some being. He momentarily expected to see some dreadful *thing* leap out from the forbidding jungle—just what, he knew not!

Then, to his intense relief and astonishment, a girl of rare, exotic beauty emerged. Her eyes were like the cool depths of a shaded brook, her really golden-hued hair a delight, the perfection of her soft-clad figure goddesslike. Yet she repelled rather than attracted.

Then, indeed, it seemed as if the doors of paradise had opened. Gone was the aloofness of the moment before. She was smiling—at him.

But even as he took a first eager step toward her and she toward him, a mist seemed to come between them. The amazing loveliness of her faded into the drab desert background. He was alone!

Strange to observe, the threatening jungle was no more. Before his bewildered gaze a trackless desert swept from horizon to horizon. Then this, too, faded.

9

How long he had slept he did not know, but he was awakened suddenly by a blow in the face!

In a flash he was wide awake. His hands groped out in front of him, coming into contact with a smooth, metallic surface. He seemed to be lying on the floor, and immediately formed the conclusion that he had fallen off his chair while sleeping.

As he endeavored to rise to his feet the floor began to recede from him slowly! It was then that he remembered the steadily decreasing attraction of the Earth as the *Sphere* shot farther and farther away into space. He quickly concluded that the "floating" stage had been reached. The *Sphere* would be maintaining its established momentum just like a planet which hurtles through space century after century, impelled by its original momentum by reason of the complete absence of any obstruction in space to hinder it; and of course their bodies followed serenely with the *Sphere* in its interior. They were as a component part of it—little worlds of their own.

As the metal surface continued to recede from him, he suddenly discovered that the engines and dynamo were missing! Yet the steady purr of the gyrostats was plainly, reassuringly audible. Then abruptly the solution of it all dawned upon him. He had fallen on to the *ceiling*—not the floor!

Suddenly a realization of his danger confronted him. He was drifting slowly toward the gyrostats! Should he be caught in their racing mechanism his body would be whipped into shreds!

Desperately he strove to jerk his body over into a convenient position to assist him in grasping one of the four perpendicular rods surrounding the gyrostats. With nothing to brace himself against, his efforts were strangely akin to those of a cat falling through the air, though, for lack of practise, they were not nearly so adept. Luckily they sufficed to turn his body over facing the gyrostats. Fortunately too, one of the uprights was within reach. He clutched this as a drowning man clutches a tossed rope, and the danger was over.

He lowered himself breathlessly to the floor. For the first time he noticed that he was perspiring freely.

"Close shave, that," he muttered, mopping his face nervously. "Have to rig a guard around this."

He looked sharply toward where the professor and the reporter had lain. Strangely enough they were still in the same spot. Then he became aware that there was still a slight pull toward the floor. The Earth had not yet entirely released its hold upon the *Sphere* even though it had long since ceased to be visible to them. Evidently he had made some abrupt move in his sleep with sufficient force to send him slowly upward to the ceiling against the dwindling force of terrestial gravity.

THE following days were interesting ones for the adventurers, but inconvenient—though amusing.

With the passage of each day the Earth's attraction for them became weaker until finally it was completely neutralized by the counter attraction of Mars.

This point was reached by the ninth day out, when, according to Professor Palmer's reckonings, the *Sphere* had traversed more than half the distance between the two worlds.

Ordinary movement about the compartment became an impossibility. Walking was an accomplishment of the past. In order to move from one end of the chamber to the other it became necessary merely to place a hand against the wall and push. Immediately they were propelled across the room through space as if suspended by a well-oiled trolley conveyor. The chief requisite was a careful sense of direction and control of strength exerted. Otherwise they were apt to find themselves precipitated roughly into one corner, against the ceiling, or headlong into the whirring machinery.

The reckless Taggert was frequently the cause of much merriment, because of his careless or awkward antics. Once he brought their hearts into their mouths by narrowly missing the smashing of a window pane when his shoulder was brought up sharply against the glass. After that even he exercised extreme caution in his movements.

It became necessary to lash each other to some stationary object for protection so that they could sleep safely. When on watch, Robert was obliged to keep hold upon some stable part to maintain any single position for a time.

The managing of fluids was at once ludicrous and exceedingly difficult. The mere task of drinking a cup of coffee called for more skill than the biting of an apple in a tub of water at a Halloween party. One was apt to have more of the beverage applied externally than internally.

A cup of fluid could be kept safely intact only by a centrifugal motion, as by whirling it round in a circle, bottom outward. Otherwise, at the critical moment the contents would drift off in an irregular, pulsating sphere, like a soft little world of its own held together merely by the slight affinity of its molecules.

A scheme of drinking through a tube from a covered bucket by means of a hole drilled through the cover proved fairly successful and became temporarily the vogue.

During the first of these days the *Sphere* evinced a tendency to revolve slowly and at random because the delicate but sensitive stabilizer could no longer find a central point of gravity. Here, then, was a grave danger confronting them; for with the growing inclination of the *Sphere* to revolve at random it became apparent that they would not be able to hold it to any one course. This because, as the *Sphere* revolved, it would be necessary to constantly shift the direction of the disk; and thus it would be almost impossible to continue constantly with accuracy. Consequently they were facing the possibility of drifting about in space through eternity!

Their predicament might have been likened in a way to that of a sailing vessel caught in the doldrums; but in the *Sphere's* case there appeared to be no chance of relief. Curiously enough, this problem had not occurred to Robert and Professor Palmer in their preparations for the journey. In fact, to their minds, there seemed no possible solution.

Even Taggert's hitherto unfailing good spirits deserted him as the three gloomily faced the dreadful prospect of slow death through starvation or suffocation. The fact that they were millions of miles from the Earth in

the midst of a great black void did not make their fate any easier to consider.

Professor Palmer now divided his time between frequent corrections in the *Sphere's* wavering course toward Mars, and the writing of the log.

"Who knows," he remarked resignedly to his companions, "some other more successful adventurers may attempt this venture some time. There is just a chance in a billion that they may find the *Sphere* and this document; or the *Sphere* may finally gravitate back to the earth."

Almost constantly he watched and guided the *Sphere* on its intricate course, insisting upon doing the major part of this difficult task, which only his expert knowledge of the heavens made possible to such a degree of accuracy. But even he was beginning to find it almost impossible to keep the *Sphere* on its true course, as it continued to swing more and more widely from its former stability. Loss of sleep and the terrific strain were beginning to tell upon his iron constitution. It was clear to all three that theirs was a losing struggle. The professor's faint hope that they could decrease their distance from Mars sufficiently to establish a substantial stability upon its attraction faded more and more as gradually the little *Sphere* began to swoop in ever-increasing deviations from its course.

Realizing with sinking heart the hopelessness of the situation, Professor Palmer endeavored to conceal the sureness of their fate from Robert and Taggert. But they sensed it intuitively and each bravely sought to steel himself against the realization of the end.

The thought of conserving their energy by stopping the gyrostats occurred to Robert. For with gravitation virtually equalized from all directions, their operation was scarcely of any assistance at this point.

And then came the thought that caused his heart to halt an instant in its beat. Could it be that both the professor and he overlooked the one possible solution? Was it too late?

"Fool—fool!" he expostulated bitterly as he realized the opportunity that had all but slipped away from them by his failure to think of the solution sooner.

"Robert!" cried Professor Palmer, fearing for his mind. "What is it?"

"Can you hold her to the course steadily for a minute?" Robert almost shouted in his excitement, not having heard the professor's question.

Professor Palmer suddenly realized with a flash of hope that Robert had thought of a possible way out of their predicament.

"Yes, yes," he answered eagerly. His waning strength and alertness rallied temporarily under the inspiration of hope. His tired eyes became as keen as ever as he carefully nursed the drunkenly rolling *Sphere* back to its course and managed with supreme skill to steady it there for several seconds consecutively.

"How long, boy?" he cried hoarsely in desperation, gripping his voice as he realized that he could not balance the *Sphere* accurately on its course more than a few seconds longer. He felt his control slipping. Too bad—too bad. The boy had had the idea, and he had failed—failed. He felt suddenly broken, as a very old man. His gray head nodded wearily. Too bad!

"Professor — professor," someone was whispering huskily. He recovered from his lapse of semi-consciousness as he felt a hand placed nervously upon his shoulder. He turned to see Robert's eager young face behind him, smiling! That might mean—but he hesitated even to hope, stifling its ray of comfort almost before it

came to him. He waited dully for Robert to go on.

"We are holding our course now," went on Robert, controlling his voice with an effort. "See?" he pointed to the glittering heavens visible through the observation windows.

Instead of the dizzily swerving canopy of lights with which they were already too familiar, the stars hung stationary.

"How did you do it, Robert?" gasped the professor. As he spoke he was suddenly aware that the gyrostats had stopped!

"You see, it came to me like a flash," explained Robert, "that it all hinged on velocity. If the disk was suddenly shut off — covered — the *Sphere* would at once cease to be pulled around in various directions. Instead it would then rush ahead only in the direction in which it was last moving when the disk's power was shut off. Beyond the forces of gravitation and with nothing but void on all sides, we would shoot forward forever until stopped by nearing some planet."

"Of course, of course," murmured the professor. "Why didn't I think of that before? Dunce that I am!"

"That is why I asked you to try to hold the *Sphere* in its course for a little bit—long enough to maintain its momentum toward Mars, when I would stop the wavering interference of the disk. First, I stopped the gyrostats. Then, as I clicked the shutters to cover the disk's face, the *Sphere* became simply a dead weight already launched with terrific velocity toward our goal. With the influence of the gyrostats removed, the heaviest or bottom side of the *Sphere* became the head of our velocity. Result—the eccentric revolutions of the *Sphere* ceased at once. We have established a temporary stability of our own—velocity."

"Robert," said the professor, after a pause, "we owe our lives to your keenness of mind. You thought of what it was my business to have known in the first place. With the *Sphere's* course automatically maintained now, it remains but to wait until we are near enough Mars to establish stability based on *its* attraction. Then we can again control the *Sphere* at will. In the meantime we conserve all our power."

"Just as simple as A-B-C," broke in Taggert, who had been roused from his sleep by their excited talking, and had been listening interestedly for some time, unobserved.

"But," interjected Robert, struck by a fresh disquieting thought, "if we are now rushing directly toward Mars, won't we be left far behind by the time we reach its present location because of its rapid movement along its orbit?"

"Oh, what's a few million miles or so to us?" said Taggert with extravagant nonchalance.

"Your deductions are partly correct, Robert," answered Professor Palmer, smiling at their guest's sally. "There is a curious thing about moving bodies in a void: they will continue in *one* direction indefinitely until attracted or propelled, by some other force. In the case of a propelling force, unless it is in a directly opposite direction, it will simply result in the body going off at a tangent, still maintaining its original rate of velocity in the original direction in conjunction with its new direction. For example: Mars and the Earth moving in virtually parallel directions in their respective orbits at present, it was a comparatively simple matter to lay a straight course for Mars, as the Earth's orbit velocity was imparted to the *Sphere* when we left it. But since the Earth moves somewhat faster along its orbit than Mars, we would gradually forge *ahead* of Mars if we had laid what at

first appeared to be a direct course toward it, and would only have arrived finally by continually correcting our course, and having swung round in a vast curve. Instead, by calculating the difference in the known orbit velocities of the two planets, and accordingly laying a course which at first appeared to be toward a point already passed by Mars, we promptly found ourselves on very nearly a direct course toward the planet."

Notwithstanding his comparative ignorance of astronomy, Taggert unconsciously echoed Robert's sigh of relief over this assurance that they were on the correct course. It was clear, even to him, that with no basis of stability they would be in a bad way should they pass Mars at a distance too great to establish gravitational contact with it. With their limited reserve of power and provisions they could not afford to knock around the universe at random.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

In WEIRD TALES Next Month

WHEN THE GRAVES WERE OPENED

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

A tale that is startling in its strangeness—that carries a skeptical American back through the centuries to view the Crucifixion—a reverent tale that tells what the dead did when they went into Jerusalem after the graves were opened.

In the DECEMBER Issue

On Sale at All News Stands November First

THE GARGOYLE

A Novel of Devil Worship

by Greye La Spina

Author of "Invaders From the Dark," "The Tortoise-Shell Cat," etc.

The Story So Far

LUKE PORTER, a young painter, and Herbert Binney, alias Cagliostro Moderno, an occultist and pseudo-magician, are held virtual prisoners in Fanewold Castle by Guy Fane, the Master, who is a devil-worshiper and adept in black magic. In the castle is Sybil, a beautiful girl, with Alden, her maid, who is in reality Sybil's mother.

Guy Fane is a hideous monstrosity, whose soul has been dedicated by his mother to Lucifer in revenge for the unfaithfulness of Guy's father. He is prevented from sacrificing Sybil to Lucifer by Cagliostro's interference, but the devil-worshiper proceeds with his plan to change bodies with Luke Porter—a plan which seems to Luke preposterous and incredible.

Luke has fallen in love with Sybil, and Guy Fane, for his own purposes, promises that Sybil and Luke shall be married that night. The servants are sent way and Cagliostro shut out of the castle, while the devil-worshiper perfects his plans for his great work of black magic.

CHAPTER 11

THE MASTER PREPARES

"WILL Mr. Porter be kind enough to step to Mr. Fane's study for a minute?" asked the suave voice of Madam Fane, as her tall, black-garbed figure appeared in the doorway.

Luke and Alden, standing close together, exchanged a look of apprehension. Could Madam Fane have heard their conversation with the occultist outside the castle? Whatever she might have realized, Madam Fane's chalky face was impassive with what must have been a deceptive composure, for her smoldering eyes all at once flamed at Luke's momentary indecision.

"Are you aware, Mr. Porter, that my son is awaiting you with considerable eagerness?" she demanded coldly. "The failure of the plans he laid so carefully for you has disturbed him immensely and he wishes to learn your desires in the matter, now that you and my niece can not be married tonight. You stand in your own light, with your despicable suspicions."

Luke reached out in the dusk to give Sybil's hand a reassuring pressure.

"I'm with you, Madam Fane," he said briefly, and followed her down the corridor, pulling every faculty into alertness for the coming ordeal, be it what it might.

The door of the study was closed, but it opened silently at their approach. The ominous glare of that sickly red light streamed out into the corridor, flickering across Madam Fane's ordinarily pallid face until it appeared transformed, as if writhing with unmentionable emotions.

The black-veiled figure of Guy Fane stood before the crystal globe, facing the door. At the entrance of

Luke and Madam Fane, he held up both hands to check their further advance.

"Mr. Porter, I beg of you, no words now on the subject which I know is burning on your tongue. Your marriage must be postponed until tomorrow, and if Sybil then wishes to go on with it"—there was a smooth something in Guy Fane's voice that sent Luke's heart to beating irregularly—"I shall let you both go, with Alden, early in the morning."

"'*Let*' us go?" exclaimed Luke hotly.

"Poorly chosen words, my dear Mr. Porter. Believe me, just poorly chosen. Forgive me for my maladroitness with language. I am not as stupid and awkward in other ways, I assure you. And as proof of this, and of the harmlessness of my innocent ceremonials, I am asking you to accompany me to the chapel with my mother as well, and observe one from start to finish. It can not but be instructive to you, who have said that you believe in magic, under certain conditions. . . ."

"Supper is being served to Sybil and Alden, in my niece's boudoir," murmured Madam Fane. "Do you mind waiting until later for yours, Mr. Porter?"

"Yes, yes, Mother, that will be best," agreed Guy Fane, eagerly. "First our ceremonial and then the feast to celebrate its success! Ah, Mr. Porter, little do you dream what all this means to me, tonight! To have you present — young, handsome, strong, vital." — Guy's voice died away as if in an ecstasy of pleasure; it affected Luke unpleasantly.

"I would like to know, Mr. Fane, why that harmless little Binney has been shut outside the castle by ruse," Luke demanded, his gray eyes darkening.

"Harmless? Why, my dear Mr. Porter, that charlatan threatened to ruin one of the most astonishing experiments mortal man has yet made along magical lines. When you have witnessed—and shared—the tremendous thing that is fated to come to pass tonight, you will realize that I could not risk having Herbert Binney"—what infinite scorn over the poor little man's name!—"get excited in his ignorance, and ruin everything! Too risky, my dear young man. But come, let us be on our way to the chapel!"

The squat figure of Guy Fane swept in its rustling black garments ahead of Luke and Madam Fane, who followed in the direction of the chapel. Luke hastened his steps a little and reached the side of the Master.

"I warn you, Mr. Fane, that I have no intention of taking part in any obscene devil-worship," he began, when Guy interrupted with an involuntary burst of laughter that to his sensitive ears sounded almost hysterical.

"Devil-worship, sir? What the devil do you mean by that? Do you dare insinuate that I would have used an innocent girl in such vile practises? But you shall see for yourself!" And he laughed again as he moved down the long passages.

AT LAST he opened a door, pulled to one side the somber hangings that veiled it from within, and entered, with a backward gesture of his head for Luke to follow. The artist entered warily, to find himself in the body of the chapel upon which he had gazed once before. He looked about him, strange apprehensions creeping into his mind at sight of the monstrous decorations of the chapel, which made their subtle suggestions to his over-strained nerves, now at their highest tension.

"Look about you, Mr. Porter!" cried the high, mellow voice of the Master genially. "Is it not astonishing that the mind of human beings could have imagined and wrought such bizarre creations as these?"

"Guy, Guy, no more, I beg of you," pleaded Madam Fane, her voice deep with tense emotion. "I—I can not bear it if you say more!"

"My poor mother, you dislike to have it known that yours was the moving mind? Or is it just modesty?"

Madam Fane's lips emitted a groan. Her son laughed heartily.

"Sit you here, my mother, and when the time is ripe, throw on the incense," he commanded bruskly. "And no more interruptions, when I start to consecrate the holy blade of sacrifice," he added, sharply.

"I didn't understand before, my son," the dark woman murmured as she kneeled with bowed head near the tall censer that swung on its tripod at one side of the altar steps.

"Come up here, Mr. Porter, and see if the mechanism of this globe is not interesting," invited Guy Fane. "See how lightly it hangs on its network of fine platinum chains—oh, yes, they must be of platinum, for occult reasons—and then tell me, *if you can*, why it should start swinging of itself in response to the fragrance of burning incense and the chanting of strange incantations. Tell me, too, why those lapping tongues of flame should shoot from its vibrating surface. Why it should hum and sing its unearthly music."

Accepting the Master's invitation, Luke advanced up the steps of the altar, conscious all the time of an inward arming against some unexpected wile on the part of Guy Fane, whom the artist could not trust. He looked at the crystal globe gingerly; simple enough in appearance, without observable mechanism to produce the sound, the movement, the lifelike flames, it was an interesting thing in itself.

"Remain near it, if you choose, Mr. Porter, and watch it. See if you can detect chicanery in my simple methods of bringing it into startling life. But I would advise, my dear young man, that when you see it spring into glorious ruby life, you step back out of the reach of those tongues of flame. They are very real, I assure you, and I do not care to have you tell me that I did not warn you."

Once again, Luke Porter had the experience of watching the Master at his incantations. But this time it was close at hand, standing behind the very altar itself, close to the crystal ball, watching it closely. Madam Fane tossed great handfuls of incense upon the smoking tripod censer; volumes of faintly acrid haze began to rise and float in fitful currents of air through the gloomy chapel.

"Lucifer! Lord Lucifer! Grant a sign!" implored Guy Fane, bending low with imploring arms outstretched before him.

The still air began to crowd with murmurings, soft, whining sounds that vibrated through the air. The great globe in the shrine began to move, even as Luke watched it; to swing slowly at first, but with increasing rapidity, in a circle within the shrine. As it swung, the humming grew louder. Ruby flames leaped from the crystal's heart, seeming every moment to stretch farther, until the artist hastily stepped back and down the stairs to be out of their way.

From an undertone that merely stirred the atmosphere, vibrations grew in resonance until the entire chapel was vibrating with that rhythmic, sonorous cadence. The sibilant hum beat against the unwilling ears of the artist with an intolerable sweetness, as cloying as the sickening sweet odor of ether to the nostrils.

The dim red dusk only half cut the gloom, through the clouds and eddies of whirling, vaporous incense. The ruby glow at the heart of the sphere grew and grew, until it, too, seemed

intolerable with its strange crimson brilliancy. Luke went down one more step, but his dazzled gray eyes were on that swinging, humming, ruby thing, which shot out its sweeping, octopuslike feelers of living fire, that elongated and retracted in every direction. The humming sounded louder again, a dire suggestion of vague and intangible, but none the less potent, evil. The vibrations increased in force and volume. At the foot of the altar lay the Master, prostrate; only muttered exorcisms reached Luke's straining ears. The tongues of flame now shot forth fiercely, and the artist, with a muttered exclamation of alarm, went backward another step—came in contact with the great marble top of the altar—reeled slightly—and crumpled back upon it, weakly, horror on his agonized face.

Guy Fane sprang up the altar stairs with a cry of triumph and leaned over the recumbent young man.

"You are mine, now!" he cried wildly. "Your youth shall fill my veins anew with vitality! Your handsome features shall bring me pleasure where my gruesome mask of horror has brought me only loathing. Your fine limbs—ah, Lucifer! Lucifer! here lies the youth from whom I am tonight to recruit that for which I have so long yearned!"

STRUGGLING with the despair into which his impotent and unconquerable weakness had plunged him, Luke stirred ever so little. The flashing eyes of the Master were upon him through the folds of the chiffon veil. They threatened . . .

"Lie still, fool, else I lift my veil! He who looks upon my face can never be the same again!" cried the Master terribly. "Ah, that is better!"

The unhappy artist felt weakness creeping inexorably through his limbs—through his very veins, until it seemed that the beating of his heart was stilled. He could hear—see—all about him, but move he could not; it was as if he were chained to that cold marble slab. He strove to keep his senses, but was sick as he realized that he could not now spring to Sybil's aid, should the girl again fall into the hands of the evil mage.

The Master turned to his mother.

"Woman, the hour is close at hand. Fetch the maiden! Her presence is necessary for this last rite."

There was the sound of rustling garments. Luke realized that he and the Master were alone.

The swinging and humming of the ruby sphere had somewhat lessened, but there was a compelling sound to it now that sent a languid feeling of sensuous and delicious emotion through Luke's body. He could not fight this as he might have done a little since; perforce yielding to it, he felt no repugnance when the ungainly hand of the Master began to pass gloatingly up and down his arms, his legs, over his firm young chest, his youthful face. A glow of thrilling eagerness began to rise hotly throughout his being—eagerness for he knew not what.

The Master leaned closer. Through the veiling chiffon he kissed the smooth cheeks of the helpless man, kissed them in a sheer voluptuous passion of delight. Luke's body trembled sickly. . . .

"Ah! How can I wait, even minutes? To possess these fine limbs! Lucifer, mighty art Thou above all other angels! How can I thank Thee enough for this most splendid gift? I tingle with mad expectations! Already I feel the racing of *his* youthful blood through my veins!"

The black velvet curtain parted again, interrupting the Master's rhapsodies. Luke, straining eyes in his motionless head, soon saw the

source of the interruption. Advancing before Madam Fane, like a lamb before the slaughterer, came the trembling Sybil, widely awake at last to the horror of her situation . . .

CHAPTER 12

CAGLIOSTRO TO THE RESCUE

"SYBIL, the Master needs you!"

Alden whirled to confront the black-clad figure of Madam Fane, whose dark eyes rested with superb disdain upon the wrinkled face of the devoted nurse.

"Sybil—do not go!" whispered Alden tremulously, twitching at the girl's sleeve.

Madam Fane spoke again, imperiously.

"Sybil, your lover lies in the chapel across Lucifer's altar. Will you leave him there, alone?"

"Luke in Lucifer's chapel?" cried the dazed and horrified girl, her pansy purple eyes roving from one woman to the other.

"He lies on the altar, Sybil," repeated Madam Fane grimly. "Do you intend to leave him there?"

The veiled significance of her words pounded into Alden's whirling brain.

"My darling, my lamb, don't believe her! Don't go!" she implored.

Sybil drew her arm away from her nurse with dignity and decision. Her pale face grew whiter, but she stepped to Madam Fane's side.

"Alden, if he isn't there, tell him at once that I have gone to find him," she murmured. "If he is—oh, no! I won't believe that my cousin could be so vile, so wicked! — Aunt, I am coming."

Before the agonized Alden could detain her, the girl had swung down the corridor after the swiftly retreating figure of Madam Fane, and their footsteps died away into silence.

ALDEN would have run after them, but her thoughts went suddenly to the little occultist waiting outside the castle walls. If only she could devise a way to get him inside, perhaps he might be able to cope with Guy Fane; Alden knew that she alone would be helpless, for she stood in horror of what she might see if the Master were once to lift that protecting veil . . .

She ran to the wall and looked down. The headlights of Luke's car were on, and to judge by their position, the car stood near the drawbridge. Alden leaned over and called softly.

"Mr. Binney!"

At once she discerned the little man's squat figure as he ran in front of the car so that she could see him, and called back:

"Who is it?"

"Alden, Mr. Binney. Listen!" Her voice cut through the whispering dusk sharply. "Mr. Porter is lying on the altar in the chapel,"—a husky intake of breath from below apprized her that Cagliostro had heard—"and Miss Fane has been called there, too. I can do nothing alone . . ."

The little figure moved away from the car and close to the edge of the moat, the black waters of which were troubled by swirling things that passed across where it gleamed somberly in the car's illumination.

"Mrs. Alden, if you have anything to make a rope of, I can catch one end of it, and you can fasten the other securely up where you are. Then I can manage to swing across the moat."

"Oh, I can fix something with sheets," called back Alden eagerly.

"Get in I must," declared the occultist, ominous grimness in his voice. "There's devil's work going on in that chapel, and we must make haste. If I can get there in time, I may be able to help those poor young things,"

finished Cagliostro, his voice breaking.

"I'll be back in five minutes!"

Alden rushed down the corridor to the linen closets and secured a number of sheets. It seemed a century before she had torn and knotted them to make a rope of sufficient length to go, she hoped, across the moat. As Madam Fane unlocked supplies of linen only for each day, Alden was unable to get enough, to her dismay, for when she had fastened one end to the parapet and had flung the other out across the moat, the occultist could not reach it. There it hung, barely touching the surface of the murky water that seemed to mock at both would-be rescuers with a thousand twinkling evil eyes.

She hauled in the improvised rope, gathered it into a bunch, and tossed it out again. Cagliostro, springing to catch at it, just as it fell short of his grasp, slipped and almost fell into the moat.

"Oh, what shall we do?" lamented Alden, trembling with sick apprehension as the precious moments slipped by. "You—you wouldn't dare to risk—?"

Cagliostro grasped the thought that she had hardly dared put into words. He could drop into the moat and swim across to where that rope hung dabbling in the black water. His flesh crept shudderingly on his bones as he bent down to inspect the slimy surface of that repulsive viscid liquid. As he leaned over, something shining writhed out of the blackness and across the light from the car headlights; something that glistened with a nasty slipperiness that struck nausea to his stomach. He caught his breath with a quick gasp of repugnance; was there no other way?

His gaze swept the steep and slippery sides of the moat. If it should happen that he could not pull himself out of the water up to that knotted rope of sheets, or if the knots should give way, or if Alden had not fastened the other end securely, he would slip back—and a horrible death inevitably awaited. His body would fester in the deeps of that stagnant slime, and the things that flourished in it, as vile as its waters, would feed upon his shrinking flesh and pick at his bones . . .

"Have you decided?" pleaded Alden. "Oh, every minute is precious! Will you try—?"

"You don't happen to know which switch on the switchboard in the Master's study controls the workings of the draw, do you?" countered the shuddering Herbert Binney. "He explained some of them to me, but I am not sure now that I know which one to tell you—and if you touch the wrong one, you will open trap-doors all over the castle . . . and another one lights a five-minute fuse to a powder cache that would send Fanewold into the air in ruins!"

Alden moaned and wrung her wrinkled hands frantically.

"I've seen it, but I don't know which switch would be right. Oh, can't you—?"

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the little man piously. "Alden, I'm going to swim the moat."

"Don't make any more commotion than you can help," warned the woman, ominously. "The—the things—would surround you at once. I've seen doves, and once a lamb, floating, half devoured—."

HERBERT BINNEY dared not hear more. He took off his shoes and discarded his coat. Then he dropped quietly over the edge of the moat and slipped gently down into the black water. Ugh! How coldly, how hungrily, it closed about him! With an effort he managed to keep his face above the slimy surface. With shrinking strokes he struck out for the castle wall from which dangled the sheet-rope. The water about him

seemed alive with evil things, foul things, venomous things. He could feel the stirring of that evil life as he shot through the turbid waters. Once his hand touched something that slithered across it hastily, leaving him with a sickening nausea. Every moment he expected to feel the fangs of some unknown and hideous reptile fasten in throat or arm.

At last, the final stroke—. He caught quickly at the drabbled end of the rope, and for a moment his faint heart sank, for it gave easily in his grasp. Momentarily he thought the knots had given way. Then he realized with relief that the material was only stretching under his weight. He pulled himself up the wall, bracing himself against it, and in a few minutes felt the outstretched hands of Alden helping him over the parapet.

His gaze, turned downward to the water he had just quitted, showed what seemed myriads of tiny shining points. He realized with a shudder of disgust and loathing that those points were the eyes of the horrors that had waited for him to slip, to fall, that they might crowd in upon him, pull him beneath the slimy water, and tear the shrinking flesh from his bones.

"Dry clothes, first of all," the occultist exclaimed, as he felt himself safely on the parapet.

"But—"

"You must trust me, Alden. I know what I have to do. I can not go before Guy Fane a dripping scarecrow. Where would be my dignity, the lofty impression that must surround me like an aura, if I am to make the right impression upon him? I have another mantle and other clothes in my room; also, I can not go in my stocking feet," the little man declared decidedly.

Alden, who would have run at once to the chapel, was obliged to wait for Cagliostro. While she waited, she remembered the pistol Luke had given her. She put it in her apron pocket, a grim look about her mouth.

When the occultist emerged from his room, he looked the part of the serious magician he wished to appear, until he let the mantle drop from his face, when the absurd button nose and the squinting pale blue eyes somewhat dulled the new dignity that drew the lines of his cupid's bow mouth into something strange and hard.

"The Master's study," he said tersely, and led the way.

Behind the screen he showed Alden a switchboard with fifteen buttons.

"One of these operates the draw," the little man said. "I think it is the first one."

"If you don't know, why do you touch it?" cried out the alarmed Alden, catching at his hand.

He shook off her restraining touch imperiously. The next moment he had pressed the first button. She strained her ears to hear the creaking of the drawbridge, but there was no sound to break the night's silence. Cagliostro shook his head, his brow scowling at the switchboard. Then he deliberately put his hand over and pressed the second button. Alden's wrinkled face whitened. Then she uttered a soft exclamation.

"The draw! The second button was right! The way is open!"

"The chapel next," commanded Cagliostro bruskly. He strode on ahead of Alden, who could hear him muttering to himself. "Now, what could that *first* button have been?" the occultist kept asking himself aloud in perplexity. To Alden he addressed one more observation: "Keep close to the edges of the corridor," he said warningly.

She understood, shuddering. Perhaps the first button had opened yawning traps that would let them down into black gulfs when they stepped upon them . . . Perhaps—

perhaps that first button had meant that Fanewold would fly up into the air, carrying them all to sudden death . . .

As if this thought had gone home to him, also, the occultist now exclaimed:

"Let us run! If we can get there in time, perhaps we can—." He let the sentence go unfinished, as the two of them, careless of what that first button might have done in the way of opening trap-doors, began to run through the winding halls.

CHAPTER 13

LUCIFER TAKES TOLL

BETWEEN the heavy black curtains that shielded the entrance to the chapel, Alden stumbled like one suddenly dazed. The loud humming of the ruby globe dominated the atmosphere, and like one bereft of all will power, all strength, the woman sank down behind one of the evil statues near the doorway, helpless to aid in averting the tragedy that now seemed imminent.

The occultist, more wary because he, perhaps, knew what he would have to confront, stood just inside the curtains, out of sight of the Master but in a position to take in everything. On the marble slab lay the supine figure of Luke Porter, motionless. Before it, with hands outstretched against the nearer advance of the Master, stood Sybil, as if frozen stiff by horror and her impotence. Guy Fane, his arms lifted to the swinging, flame-tongued sphere, was wrapped in ecstasy, as he cried his invocations:

"Behold the spotless sacrifice! Today she was supremely happy, and tonight her abandonment to grief is just as keen. Lord Lucifer, is not this broken spirit meet for a sacrifice unto Thee?"

Madam Fane emptied a handful of incense upon the tripod censer. Her garments rustled like wind in the trees as she turned to her son.

"Guy!" trembled her voice imploringly. "Do not forget your promise to me!"

A hard, triumphant laugh issued from the chiffon swathings that hid the Master's face.

"Woman, what are promises to me, the favored one of Lucifer? I am a free man. Promises cannot bind *me!*"

"But you told me Sybil should live—"

"She shall live, to endure a living death," he pronounced oracularly. "Unless she stands in my way, when Lucifer tells me her lover's youth and beauty are ripe for my taking. Then—" and the voice was ominous with unspoken threats.

He swept aside his mother's entreating hands.

"Stand aside, woman!" he thundered. "This is no time for your silly chatter. This is *my* hour!"

Again he lifted both hands in invocation.

"Lucifer! Son of the Morning! I have obeyed Thee. I give Thee the soul of Sybil Fane, once a happy, light-hearted girl, now a sad and agonizing woman. Thou hast promised me in return these limbs—these features,"—and he gestured toward the quiet form on the altar.

"No—no—no!" screamed Sybil, finding voice at last. "I do not know what you intend to do, but you shall not harm Luke! Not while I live to prevent it!"

"Perhaps you will not—live to prevent it, Sybil," responded the magician, pausing in his invocation to address her. "But if you will stand out of my way, I will spare his life."

"Oh, I knew you couldn't be so cruel!" the girl gasped. "You won't hurt him, will you, then?"

Again a laugh issued with malevolent hardness from the veil.

"I shall take that shell of his, and give him mine in return, Sybil. If

you can love him still—why, perhaps you can be happy with the monster that he will be."

He turned once more to the globe.

The perfumed incense had created clouds of heavy fragrance redolent of the East and its esoteric mysteries. The Master was plainly on the verge of his diabolic experiment. The whimpering hum of the glowing sphere sounded continuously with a drowzy, numbing effect on the senses. The Master cried out.

"Lucifer! Lucifer!! Lucifer!!! I dedicate to Thee the broken heart of this spotless maid! I offer Thee the pulsing heart of this sturdy man whose youth and comeliness are to be mine!"

The humming of the ruby globe grew louder, heavier, sweeter, until it seemed as if the very atmosphere were charged with some foreign, supernatural potency to draw the vitality out of those who had braved the horrors of that eery chapel. The occultist heard a little sigh, and saw Alden crumpling into a tumbled heap at the foot of the sculptured horror; the automatic slipped from her pocket to the floor. Cagliostro salvaged the weapon; he would try material magic on the Master first . . .

MADAM FANE'S voice rang out loudly with sudden sharp reproach.

"No, Guy! You shall not, I tell you! Let her alone!" Her voice rose in a shrill treble of excitement, ending in a shriek that pierced the eardrums with poignancy. "No, Guy, no! Her blood must not be on your hands! She is your own half-sister!"

The Master had swung about, the keen blade of a flashing knife in one hand. With the other he held back the struggling form of his mother, who caught vainly at the deadly blade, her face convulsed with horror and dismay. Sybil, pressed backward across her lover's motionless form, had spread her hands behind her for his protection, and it was this thwarting of his intention that had infuriated Guy Fane, who was threatening her with the knife even while he held back his mother's struggling body.

That shrill scream had acted like a powerful tonic to the other mother, lying apparently unconscious at Cagliostro's feet. Alden was up, and had crossed with a bound the space separating her from the altar. The knife swept downward toward Sybil's breast as Guy flung his mother to one side. Alden met it full. As it clove its way into her unresisting flesh she laughed aloud, a terrible laugh that rang out through the atmosphere with ominous import. Then she slipped to the feet of the dazed Sybil, gasping as she fell five pregnant words:

"Fools! I am her mother!"

It was over in a moment. The actors in the tragedy stood as if paralyzed by this swift movement of events. Then Madam Fane broke into a weakly wailing cry.

"Her *mother?* Oh, now I understand much. Much! I knew Sybil was protected. Her *mother!*"

Burning eyes through his veil, the Master turned to look upon the dying woman.

"Her mother!" he echoed numbly. "Oh, I knew something, someone, was watching over her, to thwart me. But I shall not be cheated out of my bargain with Lucifer! The offering which purchases my freedom from this horrible and monstrous form shall yet be his. And it shall be a triple one tonight!"

He took the dead woman's shoulder and drew her to one side roughly. Cagliostro took a step forward from the protection of the statue, but Madam Fane had caught again at her son's arm, this time with a purpose and nervous strength that took him by surprize.

"Guy, you shall not! In that Name I dare not utter in this evil place, I swear that *I* shall perish before you stain your hand with more blood tonight. Another crime on your soul, my son? Let these poor helpless creatures go—"

"Are you mad?" he shouted, brutally pushed her aside, and reached for Sybil's shoulder.

The terrified girl shrank back, but not for an instant did she forget to shield her lover's body with her own, her purple eyes ablaze with fearless purpose.

Crying: "Give me the knife!" Madam Fane caught at Guy's hand and by sheer force of sudden surprize wrested the blade from his fingers. Then she moved away from him—backward—down the altar steps—holding that horridly dripping thing away from contact with her rustling garments as she backed off, step by step.

The horrified occultist had been paralyzed by the swift march of events, and unable to do even so little as lift the pistol into shooting position. Alden's astonishing and tragic death had happened so quickly that he knew he could not have saved the unhappy mother. He stood rooted to the spot now, watching this other mother who had snatched the deadly knife from the hands of that worshiper of Lucifer.

Madam Fane backed away, holding the weapon from her in mingled repulsion and dread. For a moment her son followed her with his eyes, and then realization that without the knife he could not go on with the sacrifice came to him. He took a step toward her.

"Give me the knife!" rang out the stern command.

She shook her head slowly from side to side, continuing her retreat toward the corridor door. Cagliostro lifted the pistol and waited for her to pass him. He intended then to cover Guy Fane, make him stand beside her. . . .

Down the altar steps sprang the Master toward his mother. And then that took place which Providence decreed. As Cagliostro peered cautiously around the statue, watching Madam Fane, he drew back involuntarily at her loud cry of consternation and dismay. He leaned out to stare incredulously. She had disappeared from view as if the earth had opened to swallow her.

THE Master stopped short. The paving of the chapel had yawned at his very feet, had swallowed up the sins and sorrows of his mother, and had closed relentlessly upon her. The Master turned his head from side to side uneasily; he knew that someone had tampered with the buttons of the private switchboard.

"And I cannot punish her," he murmured in a low voice. "She has gone beyond my reach, that other mother. It was Sybil's mother—oh, if I could bring her back to life, how I would punish those meddling fingers!"

He turned and retraced his footsteps to the altar, testing each stone on the way with his foot to be sure that it would bear his weight. Muttered words fell from his lips as he once more confronted Sybil.

"There are too many mothers here tonight! Too many mothers. . . . And my knife is gone—but it shall not matter. These hands shall tear his pulsing heart from his breast, Sybil, while you watch him change into my ugliness."

He came closer to her, while she leaned away from him, terrified, but without leaving the man she loved. His thoughts went at random then, and Sybil watched him, fascinated, as he sank upon his knees before the altar.

"Unhappy mother! And that other mother! How could I know that the

mothers would ruin everything? Lucifer, why didst Thou not warn me that the mothers would ruin all? Must I remain an eternal prisoner in this monstrous shape, because of the mothers?" His voice rose in plaintive melancholy. "And did not the oracle promise me that tonight I should step from this loathsome body into freedom? Oh, Lord and Master, give me a sign!"

Cagliostro had been creeping closer to the altar. As he went, he managed to make some gesture that caught Sybil's eye. As soon as she saw him, his finger at his lips imposed silence upon her. But he glowed at the look of relief that swept across her pallid face.

The heavy, incense-laden atmosphere vibrated. Flickering lights and shadows danced evilly on the pavement as the ruby tongues of flame darted from the swinging, humming globe of fiery crimson in the shrine. Cagliostro did not wish to wait longer. The moment had come for him to act.

"Lucifer! Grant a sign! The sacrificial knife has been wrested from my fingers. I have but these naked hands. Touch the altar with Thy fire, Lord Lucifer, that I may know it is acceptable!"

Into the radiance of that mystic ruby brilliance sprang the short, heavy figure of the little occultist.

"Hands up, Guy Fane! I have you covered!"

The veiled man rose, turning in a dazed manner that betrayed eloquently how far unaware the Master had been of other presences in the chapel. He came down the steps of the shrine with reluctant dignity but without lifting his hands as Herbert Binney had commanded.

"Put up your hands, Mr. Fane!"

With contemptuous gesture and scornful laugh, the Master folded his arms on his breast so that the hands rested on opposite shoulders.

"Do you really imagine, silly little mummer, that I—*I*—am to be constrained like any common man, to comply with your very rude demand? I, who can lift my veil again, and blast you where you stand? Has not one lesson been sufficient? Must I repeat it?"

The little man shivered. His pale blue eyes squinted from Guy to the eager, strained face of Sybil, and back again.

"Shoot, if it pleases you," observed the Master nonchalantly. "The experience may teach you another lesson. Your bullets cannot penetrate my charmed flesh. None but a silver bullet can harm me, and your bullets are of lead, foolish magician; lead. What, afraid? Am I not a broad target?" He sneered.

"You're unarmed, Mr. Fane," retorted the little man with as much calm as his jumping nervous system would allow him to demonstrate. "I can't shoot an unarmed man. But I want you to undo your spells on that young man, and then you can stand aside while both of those young people go out of this hellish place. I'm not afraid of you," stoutly. "I know now what to expect. You—you took me by surprize before."

The Master laughed soft and long.

"I am not an unarmed man, Mr. Binney. There are occult forces at my disposal, as you have witnessed, that would strip you of the power to press the trigger, but I scorn to use them against such a miserable and puny opponent."

The words stung. Cagliostro Moderno, stepping forward with the pistol pointed at the Master's stomach, said bruskly:

"Move to one side."

Instinctively the Master gave way. Cagliostro sprang past him and up to the altar. He drew Sybil gently to one side and leaned over the prostrate young man. He breathed against the

closed eyelids. He whispered into the ears. And then he took both hands and drew Luke Porter into a sitting position.

"All right?" he queried briefly.

Luke drew a long breath of relief.

"Knew what was going on, all the time!" he exclaimed. "But just couldn't speak or move. Give me that pistol, Binney."

The occultist shook his head.

"You take the young lady and run as fast as you can to the draw. It's open. Get out quick. Your car's in front. Never mind me. I can take care of myself. Go, while the draw is open!"

"How wise is our great Cagliostro Moderno!" drawled a mellow voice.

Luke and the occultist both turned like a flash. They had, for the time, forgotten Guy Fane, who had slipped quietly to the entry door and—carefully avoiding the pavement which had swallowed up his unfortunate mother—stood there, leaning against the lintel negligently.

"Do go, *while the draw is open!*" He laughed. "How long do you think it will take me to reach my study? I, who am acquainted with every passage, every stairway, here? Five minutes after I have reached my study, I shall have the pleasure of going on a long journey, and I think you three will go with me, in fire and flame from the altar of Lucifer! No, do not stir! You can not escape. I shall close the draw first—and the fuse will burn exactly five minutes."

"Stop him!" shouted Luke, reaching for the pistol.

"You have ruined my hope to be as other human beings are. Perhaps, if I had gained what I desired, I might have acquired a heart as well. Who knows? But now I am harder than the very nucleus of the crystal sphere. You shall not live to triumph over me. This castle will make a splendid funeral pyre, will it not?"

The little occultist stood stupidly while Guy Fane turned to go.

"Give me that pistol!" cried Luke again, snatching at it, and firing after the disappearing Master.

THE shot echoed and re-echoed along the chapel walls and out through the adjoining corridors. As it died away, they could hear Guy Fane's eery laughter ringing mockingly through the doorway, mingled with his rapidly retreating footfalls. The Master had gone, unharmed, to carry out his threat!

"The draw! Sybil, give me your hand! Binney, I can't forgive you for not giving me that pistol before. If I'd shot the monster, we would be safe now," snapped Luke, drawing Sybil after him along the pavement blocks that had appeared sound when the Master had retreated.

Cagliostro stared mournfully but did not follow them. A sudden white light of determination broke across his face. He spoke quickly:

"*I* can stop him—hold him—long enough for you to escape. . . . Run! I'll get at him in his study!"

"Don't be a fool!" shouted Luke, pulling Sybil along down the corridor that led to the courtyard giving upon the draw. "You'll be trapped!"

A strangely transfiguring smile rested on the little occultist's face, transforming it into something finer, bigger, than it had ever appeared before.

"Good-bye!" he said simply, and was gone.

There was no time to dissuade him. Luke swept the panting Sybil up into his arms. Twice she had stumbled in their mad flight. He covered the short remaining distance with his precious burden in record time, and as he emerged into the courtyard saw with

grateful heart that the draw was still open, lighted by the headlamps of the waiting car. His limbs braced themselves for the final effort. He staggered out upon the drawbridge, holding the girl closely to him.

"If we go, we go together," he told himself grimly.

At the middle of the draw, it began to tremble and jar. . . . *The draw was rising slowly!* Guy Fane must have reached his study and have closed it. The cables creaked and groaned. For a moment Luke's heart almost stopped beating, as he flung himself face down—Sybil beside him—on the rapidly perilous slope of the draw. They clung together. In another moment they would lose their hold and slip down, back, into the courtyard, to perish by the explosion.

The jarring recommenced. The draw—miracle of miracles!—began to lower again. Sybil got to her feet dazedly. Luke rose, caught at her hand and drew her along. In another minute they had reached the edge. Another, and they were across the moat and Luke was pulling the girl into the seat of the little car.

He slid in behind the wheel, started the engine. Then he turned and honked several times, watching to see the little occultist in the doorway. A fine column of smoke was rising from midway in the building. . . . A loud crackling . . . The waving hands of Herbert Binney from the window over the draw. . . . "Good-bye! Don't—forget—Cagliostro!" The little man was smiling wanly. . . .

Rumbling. A heavy, thunderous roar that rose in terrible crashing explosion, shaking the earth, rocking the car's occupants from side to side. Blinding light flashed from the castle on all sides. The landscape stood out distinct as in broad daylight.

It was sheer stupidity to linger in the open. Luke, sick at heart for the fate of the little occultist, who had so nobly risen to that great opportunity of his life, drove off down the steep roadway as rapidly as he dared, to get beyond the radius of falling stone and debris.

Guy Fane had been right. The oracle had spoken truly. The Master had left his monstrous body and stepped out into freedom at last.

[THE END]

WEIRD STORY REPRINTS

No. 5. The Young King

By **OSCAR WILDE**

IT WAS the night before the day fixed for his coronation, and the young king was sitting alone in his beautiful chamber. His courtiers had all taken their leave of him, bowing their heads to the ground, according to the ceremonious usage of the day, and had retired to the great hall of the palace, to receive a few last lessons from the professor of etiquette; there being some of them who had still quite natural manners, which in a courtier is, I need hardly say, a very grave offense.

The lad—for he was only a lad, being but sixteen years of age—was not sorry at their departure, and had flung himself back with a deep sigh of relief on the soft cushions of his embroidered couch, lying there, wild-eyed and open-mouthed, like a brown woodland faun, or some young animal of the forest newly snared by the hunters.

And, indeed, it was the hunters who had found him, coming upon him almost by chance as, bare-limbed and pipe in hand, he was following the flock of the poor goatherd who had brought him up, and whose son he had always fancied himself to be. The child of the old king's only daughter by a secret marriage with one much beneath her in station—a stranger, some said, who, by the wonderful magic of his lute-playing, had made the young princess love him; while others spoke of an artist from Rimini, to whom the princess had shown much, perhaps too much honor, and who had suddenly disappeared from the city, leaving his work in the cathedral unfinished—he had been, when but a week old, stolen away from his mother's side, as she slept, and given into the charge of a common peasant and his wife, who were without children of their own, and lived in a remote part of the forest, more than a day's ride from the town. Grief, or the plague, as the court physician stated, or, as some suggested, a swift Italian poison administered in a cup of spiced wine, slew, within an hour of her wakening, the white girl who had given him birth, and as the trusty messenger who bare the child across his saddle-bow stooped from his weary horse and knocked at the rude door of the goatherd's hut, the body of the princess was being lowered into an open grave that had been dug in a deserted churchyard, beyond the city gates, a grave where it was said that another body was also lying, that of a young man of marvelous and foreign beauty, whose hands were tied behind him with a knotted cord, and whose breast was stabbed with many red wounds.

Such, at least, was the story that men whispered to each other. Certain it was that the old king, when on his deathbed, whether moved by remorse for his great sin, or merely desiring that the kingdom should not pass away from his line, had had the lad sent for, and, in the presence of the council, had acknowledged him as his heir.

And it seems that from the very first moment of his recognition he had

shown signs of that strange passion for beauty that was destined to have so great an influence over his life. Those who accompanied him to the suite of rooms set apart for his service, often spoke of the cry of pleasure that broke from his lips when he saw the delicate raiment and rich jewels that had been prepared for him, and of the almost fierce joy with which he flung aside his rough leathern tunic and coarse sheepskin cloak. He missed, indeed, at times the fine freedom of his forest life, and was always apt to chafe at the tedious court ceremonies that occupied so much of each day, but the wonderful palace—*Joyeuse,* as they called it—of which he now found himself lord, seemed to him to be a new world fresh-fashioned for his delight; and as soon as he could escape from the council board or audience chamber, he would run down the great staircase, with its lions of gilt bronze and its steps of bright porphyry, and wander from room to room, and from corridor to corridor, like one who was seeking to find in beauty an anodyne from pain, a sort of restoration from sickness.

Upon these journeys of discovery, as he would call them—and, indeed, they were to him real voyages through a marvelous land, he would sometimes be accompanied by the slim, fair-haired court pages, with their floating mantles, and gay fluttering ribands; but more often he would be alone, feeling through a certain quick instinct, which was almost a divination, that the secrets of art are best learned in secret, and that Beauty, like Wisdom, loves the lonely worshiper.

MANY curious stories were related about him at this period. It was said that a stout burgomaster, who had come to deliver a florid oratorical address on behalf of the citizens of the town, had caught sight of him kneeling in real adoration before a great picture that had just been brought from Venice, and that seemed to herald the worship of some new gods. On another occasion he had been missed for several hours, and after a lengthened search had been discovered in a little chamber in one of the northern turrets of the palace gazing, as one in a trance, at a Greek gem carved with the figure of Adonis. He had been seen, so the tale ran, pressing his warm lips to the marble brow of an antique statue that had been discovered in the bed of the river on the occasion of the building of the stone bridge, and was inscribed with the name of the Bithynian slave of Hadrian. He had passed a whole night in noting the effect of the moonlight on a silver image of Endymion.

All rare and costly materials had certainly a great fascination for him, and in his eagerness to procure them he had sent away many merchants, some to traffic for amber with the rough fisher-folk of the north seas, some to Egypt to look for that curious green turquoise which is found only in the tombs of kings, and is said to possess magical properties, some to Persia for silken carpets and painted pottery, and others to India to buy gauze and stained ivory, moonstones and bracelets of jade, sandalwood and blue enamel and shawls of fine wool.

But what had occupied him most was the robe he was to wear at his coronation, the robe of tissued gold, and the ruby-studded crown, and the scepter with its rows and rings of pearls. Indeed, it was of this that he was thinking tonight, as he lay back on his luxurious couch, watching the great pine-wood log that was burning itself out on the open hearth. The designs, which were from the hands of the most famous artists of the time, had been submitted to him many months before, and he had given orders that the artificers were to toil night and day to carry them out, and that the whole world was to be

searched for jewels that would be worthy of their work. He saw himself in fancy standing at the high altar of the cathedral in the fair raiment of a king, and a smile played and lingered about his boyish lips, and lit up with a bright luster his dark woodland eyes.

After some time he rose from his seat, and leaning against the carved penthouse of the chimney, looked round at the dimly-lit room. The walls were hung with rich tapestries representing the Triumph of Beauty. A large press, inlaid with agate and lapis-lazuli, filled one corner, and facing the window stood a curiously wrought cabinet with lacquer panels of powdered and mosaicked gold, on which were placed some delicate goblets of Venetian glass, and a cup of dark-veined onyx. Pale poppies were broidered on the silk coverlet of the bed, as though they had fallen from the tired hands of sleep, and tall reeds of fluted ivory bare up the velvet canopy, from which great tufts of ostrich plumes sprang, like white foam, to the pallid silver of the fretted ceiling. A laughing Narcissus in green bronze held a polished mirror above its head. On the table stood a flat bowl of amethyst.

Outside he could see the huge dome of the cathedral, looming like a bubble over the shadowy houses, and the weary sentinels pacing up and down on the misty terrace by the river. Far away, in an orchard, a nightingale was singing. A faint perfume of jasmine came through the open window. He brushed his brown curls back from his forehead, and taking up a lute, let his fingers stray across the cords. His heavy eyelids drooped, and a strange languor came over him. Never before had he felt so keenly, or with such exquisite joy, the magic and the mystery of beautiful things.

When midnight sounded from the clock-tower he touched a bell, and his pages entered and disrobed him with much ceremony, pouring rose-water over his hands, and strewing flowers on his pillow. A few moments after that they had left the room, he fell asleep.

And as he slept he dreamed a dream, and this was his dream.

He thought that he was standing in a long, low attic, amidst the whir and clatter of many looms. The meager daylight peered in through the grated windows, and showed him the gaunt figures of the weavers bending over their cases. Pale, sickly-looking children were crouched on the huge cross-beams. As the shuttles dashed through the warp they lifted up the heavy battens, and when the shuttles stopped they let the battens fall and pressed the threads together. Their faces were pinched with famine, and their thin hands shook and trembled. Some haggard women were seated at a table sewing. A horrible odor filled the place. The air was foul and heavy, and the walls dripped and streamed with damp.

The young king went over to one of the weavers, and stood by him and watched him.

And the weaver looked at him angrily, and said: "Why art thou watching me? Art thou a spy set on us by our master?"

"Who is thy master?" asked the young king.

"Our master!" cried the weaver, bitterly. "He is a man like myself. Indeed, there is but this difference between us—that he wears fine clothes while I go in rags, and that while I am weak from hunger he suffers not a little from overfeeding."

"The land is free," said the young king, "and thou art no man's slave."

"In war," answered the weaver, "the strong make slaves of the weak, and in peace the rich make slaves of the poor. We must work to live, and they give us such mean wages that we

die. We toil for them all day long, and they heap up gold in their coffers, and our children fade away before their time, and the faces of those we love become hard and evil. We tread out the grapes, and another drinks the wine. We sow the corn, and our own board is empty. We have chains, though no eye beholds them; and are slaves, though men call us free."

"Is it so with all?" he asked.

"It is so with all," answered the weaver, "with the young as well as with the old, with the women as well as with the men, with the little children as well as with those who are stricken in years. The merchants grind us down, and we must needs do their bidding. The priest rides by and tells his beads, and no man has care of us. Through our sunless lanes creeps Poverty with her hungry eyes, and Sin with his sodden face follows close behind her. Misery wakes us in the morning, and Shame sits with us at night. But what are these things to thee? Thou art not one of us. Thy face is too happy." And he turned away scowling, and threw the shuttle across the loom, and the young king saw that it was threaded with a thread of gold.

And a great terror seized upon him, and he said to the weaver: "What robe is this that thou art weaving?"

"It is the robe for the coronation of the young king," he answered; "what is that to thee?"

And the young king gave a loud cry and woke, and lo! he was in his own chamber, and through the window he saw the great honey-colored moon hanging in the dusky air.

And he fell asleep again and dreamed, and this was his dream.

He thought that he was lying on the deck of a huge galley that was being rowed by a hundred slaves. On a carpet by his side the master of the galley was seated. He was black as ebony, and his turban was of crimson silk. Great ear-rings of silver dragged down the thick lobes of his ears, and in his hands he had a pair of ivory scales.

The slaves were naked, but for a ragged loin-cloth, and each man was chained to his neighbor. The hot sun beat brightly upon them, and the negroes ran up and down the gangway and lashed them with whips of hide. They stretched out their lean arms and pulled the heavy oars through the water. The salt spray flew from the blades.

At last they reached a little bay, and began to take soundings. A light wind blew from the shore, and covered the deck and the great lateen sail with a fine red dust. Three Arabs mounted on wild asses rode out and threw spears at them. The master of the galley took a painted bow in his hand and shot one of them in the throat. He fell heavily into the surf, and his companions galloped away. A woman wrapped in a yellow veil followed slowly on a camel, looking back now and then at the dead body.

As soon as they had cast anchor and hauled down the sail, the negroes went into the hold and brought up a long rope-ladder, heavily weighted with lead. The master of the galley threw it over the side, making the ends fast to two iron stanchions. Then the negroes seized the youngest of the slaves and knocked his gyves off, and filled his nostrils and his ears with wax, and tied a big stone round his waist. He crept wearily down the ladder, and disappeared into the sea. A few bubbles rose where he sank. Some of the other slaves peered curiously over the side. At the prow of the galley sat a shark-charmer, beating monotonously upon a drum.

After some time the diver rose up out of the water, and clung panting to the ladder with a pearl in his right hand. The negroes seized it from him, and thrust him back. The slaves fell asleep over their oars.

Again and again he came up, and each time that he did so he brought with him a beautiful pearl. The master of the galley weighed them, and put them into a little bag of green leather.

The young king tried to speak, but his tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth, and his lips refused to move. The negroes chattered to each other, and began to quarrel over a string of bright beads. Two cranes flew round and round the vessel.

Then the diver came up for the last time, and the pearl that he brought with him was fairer than all the pearls of Ormuz, for it was shaped like the full moon, and whiter than the morning star. But his face was strangely pale, and as he fell upon the deck the blood gushed from his ears and nostrils. He quivered for a little, and then he was still. The negroes shrugged their shoulders, and threw the body overboard.

And the master of the galley laughed, and, reaching out, he took the pearl, and when he saw it he pressed it to his forehead and bowed. "It shall be," he said, "for the scepter of the young king," and he made a sign to the negroes to draw up the anchor.

And when the young king heard this he gave a great cry, and woke, and through the window he saw the long gray fingers of the dawn clutching at the fading stars.

And he fell asleep again, and dreamed, and this was his dream.

He thought that he was wandering through a dim wood, hung with strange fruits and with beautiful poisonous flowers. The adders hissed at him as he went by, and the bright parrots flew screaming from branch to branch. Huge tortoises lay asleep upon the hot mud. The trees were full of apes and peacocks.

On and on he went, till he reached the outskirts of the wood, and there he saw an immense multitude of men toiling in the bed of a dried-up river. They swarmed up the crag like ants. They dug deep pits in the ground and went down into them. Some of them cleft the rocks with great axes; others grabbled in the sand. They tore up the cactus by its roots, and trampled on the scarlet blossoms. They hurried about, calling to each other, and no man was idle.

From the darkness of a cavern Death and Avarice watched them, and Death said: "I am weary; give me a third of them and let me go."

But Avarice shook her head. "They are my servants," she answered.

And Death said to her: "What hast thou in thy hand?"

"I have three grains of corn," she answered; "what is that to thee?"

"Give me one of them," cried Death, "to plant in my garden; only one of them, and I will go away."

"I will not give thee anything," said Avarice, and she hid her hand in the fold of her raiment.

And Death laughed, and took a cup, and dipped it into a pool of water, and out of the cup rose Ague. She passed through the great multitude, and a third of them lay dead. A cold mist followed her, and the water-snakes ran by her side.

And when Avarice saw that a third of the multitude was dead she beat her breast and wept. She beat her barren bosom, and cried aloud. "Thou hast slain a third of my servants," she cried, "get thee gone. There is war in the mountains of Tartary, and the kings of each side are calling to thee. The Afghans have slain the black ox, and are marching to battle. They have beaten upon their shields with their spears, and have put on their helmets of iron. What is my valley to thee, that thou shouldst tarry in it? Get thee gone, and come here no more."

"Nay," answered Death, "but till thou hast given me a grain of corn I will not go."

But Avarice shut her hand, and clenched her teeth. "I will not give thee anything," she muttered.

And Death laughed, and took up a black stone, and threw it into the forest, and out of a thicket of wild hemlock came Fever in a robe of flame. She passed through the multitude, and touched them, and each man that she touched died. The grass withered beneath her feet as she walked.

And Avarice shuddered, and put ashes on her head. "Thou art cruel," she cried; "thou art cruel. There is famine in the walled cities of India, and the cisterns of Samarkand have run dry. There is famine in the walled cities of Egypt, and the locusts have come up from the desert. The Nile has not overflowed its banks, and the priests have cursed Isis and Osiris. Get thee gone to those who need thee, and leave me my servants."

"Nay," answered Death, "but till thou hast given me a grain of corn I will not go."

"I will not give thee anything," said Avarice.

And Death laughed again, and he whistled through his fingers, and a woman came flying through the air. Plague was written upon her forehead, and a crowd of lean vultures wheeled round her. She covered the valley with her wings, and no man was left alive.

And Avarice fled shrieking through the forest, and Death leaped upon his red horse and galloped away, and his galloping was faster than the wind.

And out of the slime at the bottom of the valley crept dragons and horrible things with scales, and the jackals came trotting along the sand, sniffing up the air with their nostrils.

And the young king wept, and said: "Who were these men, and for what were they seeking?"

"For rubies for a king's crown," answered one who stood behind him.

And the young king started, and, turning round, he saw a man habited as a pilgrim and holding in his hand a mirror of silver.

And he grew pale, and said: "For what king?"

And the pilgrim answered: "Look in this mirror, and thou shalt see him."

And he looked in the mirror, and, seeing his own face, he gave a great cry and woke, and the bright sunlight was streaming into the room, and from the trees of the garden and pleasance the birds were singing.

And the chamberlain and the high officers of state came in and made obeisance to him, and the pages brought him the robe of tissued gold, and set the crown and the scepter before him.

And the young king looked at them, and they were beautiful. More beautiful were they than aught that he had ever seen. But he remembered his dreams, and he said to his lords: "Take these things away, for I will not wear them."

And the courtiers were amazed, and some of them laughed, for they thought that he was jesting.

But he spake sternly to them again, and said: "Take these things away, and hide them from me. Though it be the day of my coronation, I will not wear them. For on the loom of Sorrow, and by the white hands of Pain, has this my robe been woven. There is Blood in the heart of the ruby, and Death in the heart of the pearl." And he told them his three dreams.

And when the courtiers heard them they looked at each other and whispered, saying: "Surely he is mad; for what is a dream but a dream, and a vision but a vision? They are not real things that one should heed them. And what have we to do with

the lives of those who toil for us? Shall a man not eat bread till he has seen the sower, nor drink wine till he has talked with the vine-dresser?"

And the chamberlain spake to the young king, and said: "My lord, I pray thee set aside these black thoughts of thine, and put on this fair robe, and set this crown upon thy head. For how shall the people know that thou art a king, if thou hast not a king's raiment?"

And the young king looked at him. "Is it so, indeed?" he questioned. "Will they not know me for a king if I have not a king's raiment?"

"They will not know thee, my lord," cried the chamberlain.

"I had thought that there had been men who were kinglike," he answered, "but it may be as thou sayest. And yet I will not wear this robe, nor will I be crowned with this crown, but even as I came to the palace so will I go forth from it."

And he bade them all leave him, save one page whom he kept as his companion, a lad a year younger than himself. Him he kept for his service, and when he had bathed himself in clear water, he opened a great painted chest, and from it he took the leathern tunic and rough sheepskin cloak that he had worn when he had watched on the hillside the shaggy goats of the goatherd. These he put on, and in his hand he took his rude shepherd's staff.

And the little page opened his big blue eyes in wonder, and said smiling to him: "My lord, I see thy robe and thy scepter, but where is thy crown?"

And the young king plucked a spray of wild briar that was climbing over the balcony, and bent it, and made a circlet of it, and set it on his own head.

"This shall be my crown," he answered.

And thus attired he passed out of his chamber into the great hall, where the nobles were waiting for him.

And the nobles made merry, and some of them cried out to him: "My lord, the people wait for their king, and thou showest them a beggar;" and others were wroth and said: "He brings shame upon our state, and is unworthy to be our master." But he answered them not a word, but passed on, and went down the bright porphyry staircase, and out through the gates of bronze, and mounted upon his horse, and rode towards the cathedral, the little page running beside him.

And the people laughed and said: "It is the king's fool who is riding by," and they mocked him.

And he drew rein and said: "Nay, but I am the king." And he told them his three dreams.

And a man came out of the crowd and spake bitterly to him, and said: "Sir, knowest thou not that out of the luxury of the rich cometh the life of the poor? By your pomp we are nurtured, and your vices give us bread. To toil for a hard master is bitter, but to have no master to toil for is more bitter still. Thinkest thou that the ravens will feed us? And what cure hast thou for these things? Wilt thou say to the buyer: 'Thou shalt buy for so much,' and to the seller: 'Thou shalt sell at this price'? I trow not. Therefore go back to thy palace and put on thy purple and fine linen. What hast thou to do with us, and what we suffer?"

"Are not the rich and the poor brothers?" asked the young king.

"Ay," answered the man, "and the name of the rich brother is Cain."

And the young king's eyes filled with tears, and he rode on through the murmurs of the people, and the little page grew afraid and left him.

And when he reached the great portal of the cathedral, the soldiers

(Continued on page 716)

By Night He Plied His Revolting Quest, and by Day He Trafficked With Ghouls

The Fiend of the Seine

By DICK HEINE

Author of "The Jungle Presence"

ON THE banks of the Seine, not far from where a famous avenue crosses it on a famous bridge, there is a small stone house, gray and inconspicuous amid its surroundings. Here there lived, entirely alone, Jules Dérroil. He was about fifty years old and had a kind face covered with short, stubby beard. He wore rough, rivermen's clothes, a black cap, and smoked a straight, black pipe. His house, which faced the river, had a small boat tied up in front of it. By day, the boat was always there and Jules at home; by night, the boat was absent and Jules in it, paddling up and down the river, sometimes three miles from home. Before daybreak, he would return and tie up the boat; then he would carry into his house a big black sack, bulging with contents, the nature of which could not be told by looking at it. Only Jules Dérroil knew what was in the sack.

During the day, several fine automobiles with chauffeurs would stop in the street not far away, and men would come and enter Jules' house. After a few minutes they would emerge carrying something wrapped in old newspapers. The men were generally well dressed, and had sharp, neatly trimmed beards. Some wore eyeglasses and silk hats and looked distinguished.

The police had investigated these activities several times, but found nothing wrong about them. Once they had held up Jules with his sack; it had contained firewood and old shoes and stuff he had been gathering in the river. Again they had accosted the visiting gentlemen and examined their packages: the packages had held lily bulbs and small plants in pots. So they did not bother Jules and his visitors any more. Moreover, since the men were all prominent, perhaps they had influence with the prefect, and the gendarmes were given secret instructions not to be too inquisitive.

Jules' strange doings went on for years before their tragic ending, and even the sharp-eyed neighbors had no clue to the mystery of the black sack.

ONE afternoon an automobile arrived, and a man got out. He was tall, handsome, and elegant. He entered Dérroil's house.

The room in which he was received was simply furnished. It was lighted by two windows which looked upon the river, the waters being just below outside. There was a fireplace and a bright wood fire. A small kettle hung near the fireplace. Some heavy sticks were piled near by for fuel. On the wall near the fire was placed a long, heavy knife such as is used for chopping up firewood. A shelf at one end of the room was lined with packages of something wrapped in newspapers. The bulging black sack stood in one corner. A table sat in the middle of the floor.

Jules Dérroil was smoking by the fire, and two empty chairs were close by.

"How do you do, Dr. Maune?" he said, as the man entered. "Sit down."

"Good afternoon, Monsieur Dérroil. I see I am earlier than our friend, Dr. Le Glé."

"He won't be long in coming. In fact, I think I hear his car now."

A minute later another man entered. He was shorter than Dr. Maune and less handsome, but looked distinguished.

"Good afternoon," he said, as he sat down before the fire.

"I suppose we three are alone, are we, Monsieur Dérroil?" observed Dr. Maune.

"Quite; we may discuss our business or whatever we like."

"I must say we are a bloody lot after all, we doctors," laughed Dr. Maune. "I can hardly say which is the most ungodly, our calling or that of Jules Dérroil."

Dr. Le Glé laughed, and Dérroil smiled and said nothing.

"There is another ungodly thing about you, Le Glé," continued Dr. Maune. "I hear you have disowned your daughter. Is it true?"

"True, indeed. I regret it deeply, but it was unavoidable. She was in love with a spendthrift. Her surreptitious conduct defied convention, and she would not even disclose the man's name. But I hear a similar tale on you. Is that true also?"

"It is," said Dr. Maune. "I have disinherited my son for spending his time and my money on a girl whom the family has never seen. He refused to introduce any of us and has never revealed her name."

"Very sad. We should both be ashamed of ourselves," said Dr. Le Glé. "And Jules Dérroil here should be ashamed of himself, too. Look at him. He makes his living by paddling the Seine at night and gathering up the bodies of the suicides of Paris who die by drowning. He cuts off their heads, or cuts out their hearts or whatever we doctors want. He puts them into a sack and brings them home. We come and buy them to dissect and experiment with for the ultimate benefit of humanity."

"Bloody business for all concerned," remarked Dérroil.

"What did you find last night?" asked Dr. Le Glé.

"Four adult bodies and three castaway babies."

"A good night's work. Did you bring them back?"

"I brought the four big heads and the three little bodies."

"Give us two heads apiece. We shall call tomorrow for the babies."

Dérroil arose and went to the sack in the corner. He stooped and took something from the sack.

"Let us see the heads before you wrap them," said Le Glé, rising.

Jules Dérroil handed him a woman's head, holding it out to him by the long, brown hair. Dr. Le Glé took it carelessly.

Almost at the same moment, as Dr. Maune rose, Dérroil handed him a man's head. Maune reached unconcernedly for it. Suddenly his face turned pale, his breath came in gasps, and he staggered against the wall by the fireplace, trembling in every limb. The rush of blood to his eyes was so great that for a moment he could not see. But when his vision cleared, he looked at Le Glé.

Dr. Le Glé stood in the middle of the floor with the head dangling in his hands. His eyes were closed, and he was breathing hard and swaying back and forth on his feet. He let fall the head and dashed his palms over his face. That instant Jules Dérroil knew what he had done. He had handed Le Glé his daughter's head

and Maune that of his son. The unhappy couple had committed suicide together. He looked from one doctor to the other.

The doctors felt almost the same reaction. They saw the utter horror of their whole lives, the far pit into which their minds had hurled them. The brutality of Jules Dérroil also flashed home to them. They were seized with a simultaneous desire—to kill him.

DERROIL was strong and his muscles hard from the daily paddling, but he was no match for the half-crazed and infuriated doctors. They banged him about the room, overturning the furniture and making considerable noise. One doctor held him by the throat. The other plucked a flaming stick from the fire and thrust it into his face. Dérroil screamed a horrible scream. The heavy knife by the fire was next in Le Glé's hands, and the head of the fiend soon fell to the floor. The body sagged and tumbled in a heap.

Scarcely had the murder been committed when the door of the house burst open and the gendarmes rushed into the room. They had been sent for by the nearest neighbors, who had heard the screams and sounds.

Dr. Le Glé and Dr. Maune were never tried for the murder of Jules Dérroil. The grievous nature of the affair worked in their favor; the public was satisfied that the mystery of the numerous headless bodies found in the river was cleared up; and some newspapers even congratulated the physicians for ridding Paris of the fiend of the Seine.

Whispers of Heavenly Death

By WALT WHITMAN

(Reprint)

Whispers of heavenly death murmured I hear,
Labial gossip of night, sibilant chorals,
Footsteps gently ascending, mystical breezes wafted soft and low,
Ripple of unseen rivers, tides of a current flowing, forever flowing
(Or is it the plashing of tears? the measureless waters of human tears?)

I see, just skyward, great cloud-masses,
Mournfully, slowly they roll, silently swelling and mixing,
With at times a half-dimmed saddened far-off star
Appearing and disappearing.

(Some parturition rather, some solemn immortal birth;
On the frontiers to eyes impenetrable.
Some soul is passing over.)

GREYE LA SPINA'S serial of devil-worship, *The Gargoyle,* which ends in the present issue, promises to outdo in popularity even her gripping werewolf serial, *Invaders From the Dark,* if one may judge from the comments of the readers on the first installment, which appeared in WEIRD TALES for September. We will quote just one of the letters which it called forth, for all the letters received about *The Gargoyle,* up to the time of going to press, express the same vigorous enthusiasm.

This letter is from Lieutenant Arthur J. Burks, who is known to you for his powerful tales of Santo Domingo: "I have just finished the latest W. T., and I have a big fat crow to pick with you! What in thunder do you mean by breaking a story like *The Gargoyle* off right in the middle? So many good things have been said about Greye La Spina (I never believed I would like stories written by a woman) that I started the story with a great deal of skepticism, my lips pursed like the usual egotist who has to be convinced, read a few pages, straightened my lips, wrinkled my massive brow, leaned closer to the page, hung my heels over the chandelier, let my fried-chicken dinner get cold, became deaf to the commands of the 'wiff' to 'come and get it', read on and on—and then almost bumped my brains out on the three cussedest words ever invented by soulless editors: TO BE CONTINUED!

"I am convinced! I am humbled in the very dirt! I am no longer an egotist! I never knew nothing and always will! There are five votes (can minors vote?) in my family, and Greye La Spina gets 'em all or I am no longer the head of the household! When a chap who, less than six feet tall, only twenty-seven years of age and weighs 214 pounds misses his dinner over a story, I don't think there's anything more to be said! That's all I have to say about the lady in question and her story, and if you don't pass it on I'll—I'll—

"I don't know just exactly what I'll do; but in any case I'll postpone definite action until I have the rest of *The Gargoyle* safe in my hands. Let's have a La Spina story in each issue hereafter."

Well, that's a sample of the enthusiastic comment on *The Gargoyle.* We won't count this letter for five votes, as the genial lieutenant wants us to do, nor do we intend to print a La Spina story in each issue; but we hope to give you several of them in the course of a year. Those of you who have read *Invaders From the Dark* and *The Gargoyle* will be gratified to know

that a fascinating weird novelette by Greye La Spina, *A Suitor From the Shades,* will be printed complete in one of our forthcoming issues.

Writes Carl Wharton, of Wyncote, Pa.: "Mr. Long's verse in the August issue is rather fine. I wonder if he is Celtic. Somehow its subtle beauty suggests the mystic and romantic imagery of some of the Irish contemporaries."

Lilla Price Savino, of Portsmouth, Va., writes: "In suggesting reprints, I request Poe's *The Black Cat.* I have heard so much about it, and my brother told me not to read it as it scared him into a spasm when he was a youngster."

Mrs. Harry A. Wenz writes from Cincinnati: "I wish you would print more of such stories as *Four Wooden Stakes, The Statement of Randolph Carter,* etc., and the more necrophilic tales, the better."

Errol McCallum writes from Toronto: "My selection of stories are those which deal with inventions of the future, voyages to other planets, etc. Stories such as *When the Green Star Waned* and *The Moon Terror* were splendid. Will you not arrange to have one of these included every month?"

A letter from Casper, Wyoming, by Mrs. V. F. B., says: "I, too, like Miss E. F., like the stories about quicksand pits, swamps and their denizens, snakes, spiders, queer plants, poisons, apes, and doctors' experiments. Let us have more of them in WEIRD TALES."

Vivien McAllister, of Portland, Oregon, writes: "I read everything I can lay my hands upon but nothing sets my nerves a-tingling and my imagination rioting so much as a copy of WEIRD TALES. I can not lay them down, once I have started, until every story has been read. I revel in the gruesome adventures and uncanny happenings of these brain children. Each story in the September issue is a masterpiece, but I believe I shall cast my vote as follows: 1. *The Furnished Room,* because of the beautiful sentiment in it and its dash of the supernatural; 2. *The Sultan's Jest,* for its fiendish cruelty; 3. *The Flying Halfback,* for its spicy impossibility."

Writes A. V. Pershing, of Odon, Indiana: "In my opinion your magazine is one of the most mind-broadening, intellect-awakening, and instructive magazines on the market. I especially like the weird tales that involve pure science or imaginative science."

There was hardly a story in the September issue that did not receive several votes as favorite story. However, the leaders in popular favor are *The Sultan's Jest,* by E. Hoffmann Price, and *The Terrific Experiment,* by Hurley von Ruck. If you have any favorites in the present issue, write and let us know. Address your letter to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 408 Holliday Building, Indianapolis, Indiana.

We have received a story called *Pity Me!* from one of our younger readers, a story that is altogether so delightful and interesting that we feel we must let you see it. The young lady who wrote it has not yet attained the literary polish and maturity of style that come only after years of writing, but she has imagination and enthusiasm, and achieves a gruesome effect that reminds us of the old English ballad of *The Gay Lady Who Went to Church,* with its doleful lines:

"On looking up, on looking down,
She saw a dead man on the ground;
And from his nose unto his chin,
The worms crawled out, the worms crawled in."

The authoress is young—very young;—but we give her story here in its entirety.

PITY ME!

By Bertha Russell (age 15)

How I loved to handle corpses, cold, stiff, bodies! That was why I had been an undertaker. Came the day though that resulted in my loathing and hating them. The reason for this, let me, a wretched, broken-down, white-haired old man explain to you, reader.

It was a cold, wet, dripping, clouded day when the body which was to make me what I am today arrived to be embalmed. The body was of a dark, beautiful, Spanish woman of wealthy people. I learned that she had died but three hours ago from some ailment or other. The boss, who was the head undertaker of the place, ordered me to embalm the body and to be ready inside of an hour. I nodded my head happily, for was I not going to handle a cold corpse?

Having secured the necessary tools and articles, I entered the gray, musty, tomblike, embalming room. It was a narrow room with large man-size shelves running on each side. At the end was a slight enlargement of space which made accommodating room for a long, narrow, black table. This section was lit more brighter. On the table a body covered entirely by a sheet was lying as stiff as a stick. I knew this to be *my* corpse.

With one sweep of my hand I snatched the sheet off with delightful eagerness. A sort of dismayed sound escaped my lips as I viewed the body of the woman. Ah, she was too lovely, too divine-looking for me to caress and pet. No, no, I would not let my passion work on her, no.

So, having prepared my thin, silver knife, I began to cut the artery that was customary to being severed in embalming. I know that I hadn't reached the artery as yet, (I don't know why for it was usually done in one minute) when my eyes were strangely attracted to the lips. Surely my eyes must be deceiving me, for did they not begin to twitch from one side to the other as if they had tasted bitter salt? The eyelids began to flicker; then the hands began stiffly to open and shut, open and shut. My knife clattered to the floor; still I stood there, powerless to run. The features began to twitch also, as if in some agonizing pain. To my horrified eyes, the eyelids flickered once more and then opened as quick as a bolt of lightning. Those haunting dark brown eyes just stared at me with a look that I don't want never, never, to see. "You—what—have—you—done!" the tortured living thing shrieked in a high pitch tone of voice between gasps while rising, with still those glassy eyes fixed on me.

I know I screamed, I know I yelled, I know that I fell with something fleshy hurling itself upon me. I knew no more.

The boss privately afterward told me while convalescening from a nervous break-down, six months afterwards to be exact, that when they heard my terrific fear-laden screams they had rushed in to find me on the damp floor with the dead body of the Spanish woman lying across me. Awful—awful!

He good-naturedly refused to believe me when I told him the entire frightful story, saying it was my nerves & strenuous work and to please forget it. But how can I forget it when he himself remarked that he finished cutting the artery?

Pity me, reader, pity me!

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The Conqueror Worm

By EDGAR ALLAN POE

(Reprint)

Lo! 'tis a gala night
  Within the lonesome latter years!
An angel throng, bewinged, bedight
  In veils, and drowned in tears,
Sit in a theater, to see
  A play of hopes and fears,
While the orchestra breathes fitfully
  The music of the spheres.

Mimes, in the form of God on high,
  Mutter and mumble low,
And hither and thither fly—
  Mere puppets they, who come and go
At bidding of vast formless things
  That shift the scenery to and fro,
Flapping from out their Condor wings
  Invisible Wo!

That motley drama—oh, be sure
  It shall not be forgot!
With its Phantom chased for evermore
  By a crowd that seize it not,
Through a circle that ever returneth in
  To the selfsame spot,
And much of Madness, and more of Sin,
  And Horror the soul of the plot.

But see, amid the mimic rout
  A crawling shape intrude!
A blood-red thing that writhes from out
  The scenic solitude!
It writhes!—it writhes!—with mortal pangs
  The mimes become its food,
And the angels sob at vermin fangs
  In human gore imbued.

Out—out are the lights—out all!
  And, over each quivering form,
The curtain, a funeral pall,
  Comes down with the rush of a storm,
And the angels, all pallid and wan,
  Uprising, unveiling, affirm
That the play is the tragedy, "Man,"
  And its hero the Conqueror Worm.

The Stolen Body

(Continued from page 588)

And at that instant it came to Mr. Bessel that evil had happened to his body, and behold! a great wind blew through all that world of shadows and tore him away. So strong was this persuasion that he thought no more of Mr. Vincey, but turned about forthwith, and all the countless faces drove back with him like leaves before a gale. But he returned too late. In an instant he saw the body that he had left inert and collapsed—lying, indeed, like the body of a man just dead—had arisen, had arisen by virtue of some strength and will beyond his own. It stood with staring eyes, stretching its limbs in dubious fashion.

For a moment he watched it in wild dismay, and then he stooped towards it. But the pane of glass had closed against him again, and he was foiled. He beat himself passionately against this, and all about him the spirits of evil grinned and pointed and mocked. He gave way to furious anger. He compares himself to a bird that has fluttered heedlessly into a room and is beating at the windowpane that holds it back from freedom.

And behold! the little body that had once been his was now dancing with delight. He saw it shouting, though he could not hear its shouts; he saw the violence of its movements grow. He watched it fling his cherished furniture about him in the mad delight of existence, rend his books apart, smash bottles, drink heedlessly from the jagged fragments, leap and smite in a passionate acceptance of living. He watched these actions in paralyzed astonishment. Then once more he hurled himself against the impassable barrier, and then with all that crew of mocking ghosts about him, hurried back in dire confusion to Vincey to tell him of the outrage that had come upon him.

But the brain of Vincey was now closed against apparitions, and the disembodied Mr. Bessel pursued him in vain as he hurried out into Holborn to call a cab. Foiled and terror-stricken, Mr. Bessel swept back again, to find his desecrated body whooping in a glorious frenzy down the Burlington Arcade. . . .

And now the attentive reader begins to understand Mr. Bessel's interpretation of the first part of this strange story. The being whose frantic rush through London had inflicted so much injury and disaster had indeed Mr. Bessel's body, but it was not Mr. Bessel. It was an evil spirit out of that strange world beyond existence, into which Mr. Bessel had so rashly ventured. For twenty hours it held possession of him, and for all those twenty hours the dispossessed spirit-body of Mr. Bessel was going to and fro in that unheard-of middle world of shadows seeking help in vain. He spent many hours beating at the minds of Mr. Vincey and of his friend Mr. Hart. Each, as we know, he roused by his efforts. But the language that might convey his situation to these helpers across the gulf he did not know; his feeble fingers groped vainly and powerlessly in their brains. Once, indeed, as we have already told, he was able to turn Mr. Vincey aside from his path so that he encountered the stolen body in its career, but he could not make him understand the thing that had happened; he was unable to draw any help from that encounter. . . .

All through those hours the persuasion was overwhelming in Mr. Bessel's mind that presently his body

NEXT MONTH

The

Tenants of Broussac

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

By SEABURY QUINN

Before the ancient tumbledown altar, her white body glistening in the dark, stood Adrienne Bixby. Parted in a smile such as Circe, the enchantress, might have worn when she lured men to their ruin, the red lips of the entranced girl were drawn back from her gleaming teeth, while she crooned a slow sensuous melody. About her slender body, ascending in a spiral from hips to shoulders, was the spotted body of a gigantic snake. The monster's horrid, wedge-shaped head swung and swayed a scant half-inch before her face, and its darting, lambent tongue licked lightly at her parted lips. But it was no ordinary serpent which held her a laughing prisoner in its coils. . . .

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would be killed by its furious tenant, and he would have to remain in this shadowland for evermore. So that those long hours were a growing agony of fear. And ever as he hurried to and fro in his ineffectual excitement, innumerable spirits of that world about him mobbed him and confused his mind. And ever an envious applauding multitude poured after their successful fellow as he went upon his glorious career.

For that, it would seem, must be the life of these bodiless things of this world that is the shadow of our world. Ever they watch, coveting a way into a mortal body, in order that they may descend, as furies and frenzies, as violent lusts and mad, strange impulses, rejoicing in the body they have won. For Mr. Bessel was not the only human soul in that place. Witness the fact that he met first one, and afterwards several shadows of men, men like himself, it seemed, who had lost their bodies even it may be as he had lost his and wandered, despairingly, in that lost world that is neither life nor death. They could not speak because that world is silent, yet he knew them for men because of their dim human bodies, and because of the sadness of their faces.

But how they had come into that world he could not tell, nor where the bodies they had lost might be, whether they still roved about the earth, or whether they were closed forever in death against return. That they were the spirits of the dead neither he nor I believe. But Dr. Wilson Paget thinks they are the rational souls of men who are lost in madness on the earth.

AT LAST Mr. Bessel chanced upon a place where a little crowd of such disembodied silent creatures was gathered, and thrusting through them he saw below a brightly-lit room, and four or five quiet gentlemen and a woman, a stoutish woman

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dressed in black bombazine and sitting awkwardly in a chair with her head thrown back. He knew her from her portraits to be Mrs. Bullock, the medium. And he perceived that tracts and structures in her brain glowed and stirred as he had seen the pineal eye in the brain of Mr. Vincey glow. The light was very fitful; sometimes it was a broad illumination, and sometimes merely a faint twilight spot, and it shifted slowly about her brain. She kept on talking and writing with one hand. And Mr. Bessel saw that the crowding shadows of men about him, and a great multitude of the shadow spirits of that shadowland, were all striving and thrusting to touch the lighted regions of her brain. As one gained her brain or another was thrust away, her voice and the writing of her hand changed. So that what she said was disorderly and confused for the most part; now a fragment of one soul's message, and now a fragment of another's, and now she babbled the insane fancies of the spirits of vain desire. Then Mr. Bessel understood that she spoke for the spirit that had touch of her, and he began to struggle furiously towards her. But he was on the outside of the crowd and he could not reach her, and at last he went away to find what had happened meanwhile to his body.

For a long time he went to and fro seeking it in vain and fearing that it must have been killed, and then he found it at the bottom of the shaft in Baker Street, writhing furiously and cursing with pain. Its leg and an arm and two ribs had been broken by its fall. Moreover, the evil spirit was angry because his time had been so short and because of the pain —making violent movements and casting his body about.

And at that Mr. Bessel returned with redoubled earnestness to the room where the séance was going on, and so soon as he had thrust himself

within sight of the place he saw one of the men who stood about the medium looking at his watch as if he meant that the séance should presently end. At that a great number of shadows who had been striving turned away with gestures of despair. But the thought that the séance was almost over only made Mr. Bessel the more earnest, and he struggled so stoutly with his will against the others that presently he gained the woman's brain. It chanced that just at that moment it glowed very brightly, and in that instant she wrote the message that Dr. Wilson Paget preserved. And then the other shadows and the cloud of evil spirits thrust Mr. Bessel away from her, and for the rest of the séance he could regain her no more.

So HE went back and watched through the long hours at the bottom of the shaft where the evil spirit lay in the stolen body it had maimed, writhing and cursing, and weeping and groaning, and learning the lesson of pain. And towards dawn the thing he had waited for happened, the brain glowed brightly and the evil spirit came out, and Mr. Bessel entered the body he had feared he should never enter again. As he did so, the silence—the brooding silence—ended; he heard the tumult of traffic and the voices of people overhead, and that strange world that is the shadow of our world—the dark and silent shadows of ineffectual desire and the shadows of lost men—vanished clean away.

He lay there for the space of about three hours before he was found. And in spite of the pain and suffering of his wounds, and of the dim, damp place in which he lay; in spite of the tears—wrung from him by his physical distress—his heart was full of gladness to know that he was, nevertheless, back once more in the kindly world of men.

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THE

LAST MAN

By Douglas Oliver

In the December

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Lukundoo

(Continued from page 606)

"Van Rieten!" he exclaimed. "My work passes on to a better man. Luck go with you, Van Rieten."

Van Rieten went nearer to him.

"Just hold still a moment, old man," he said soothingly. "It will be only one twinge."

"I've held still for many such twinges," Stone answered quite distinctly. "Let me be. Let me die my own way. The hydra was nothing to this. You can cut off ten, a hundred, a thousand heads, but the curse you can not cut off, or take off. What's soaked into the bone won't come out of the flesh, any more than what's bred there. Don't hack me any more. Promise!"

His voice had all the old commanding tone of his boyhood and it swayed Van Rieten as it always had swayed everybody.

"I promise," said Van Rieten.

Almost as he said the word Stone's eyes filmed again.

Then we three sat about Stone and watched that hideous, gibbering prodigy grow up out of Stone's flesh, till two horrid, spindling little black arms disengaged themselves. The infinitesimal nails were perfect to the barely perceptible moon at the quick, the pink spot on the palm was horridly natural. These arms gesticulated and the right plucked toward Stone's blond beard.

"I can't stand this," Van Rieten exclaimed and took up the razor again.

Instantly Stone's eyes opened, hard and glittering.

"Van Rieten break his word?" he enunciated slowly. "Never!"

"But we must help you," Van Rieten gasped.

"I am past all help and all hurting," said Stone. "This is my hour.

This curse is not put on me; it grew out of me, like this horror here. Even now I go."

His eyes closed and we stood helpless, the adherent figure spouting shrill sentences.

In a moment Stone spoke again.

"You speak all tongues?" he asked thickly.

And the emergent manikin replied in sudden English:

"Yea, verily, all that you speak," putting out its microscopic tongue, writhing its lips and wagging its head from side to side. We could see the thready ribs on its exiguous flanks heave as if the thing breathed.

"Has she forgiven me?" Stone asked in a muffled strangle.

"Not while the moss hangs from the cypresses," the head squeaked. "Not while the stars shine on Lake Pontchartrain will she forgive."

And then Stone, all with one motion, wrenched himself over on his side. The next instant he was dead.

. . . . . .

WHEN Singleton's voice ceased the room was hushed for a space. We could hear each other breathing. Twombly, the tactless, broke the silence.

"I presume," he said, "you cut off the little manikin and brought it home in alcohol."

Singleton turned on him a stern countenance.

"We buried Stone," he said, "unmutilated as he died."

"But," said the unconscionable Twombly, "the whole thing is incredible."

Singleton stiffened.

"I did not expect you to believe it," he said; "I began by saying that although I heard and saw it, when I look back on it I can not credit it myself."

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The Return of the Undead

(Continued from page 598)

terrifying to behold, soul-withering in its awful suggestion! A new life, a new mission had been given to this innocent child, returned from the grave. No longer a living mortal, yet undead, Martha had returned, to begin the horrible, dual existence of which Dracula, the vampire, was only another unwilling propagandist. For therein lay the horror of the situation: the dread work of propagation in this terrible society of the undead was an act at which, even while they carried it on, their undying souls revolted; death, true, lasting death, was the one thing for which each and every one of them longed; yet forever and forever they must live on, in the undead state, carrying out their awful work, adding to their dread clan, helpless and—*deathless!*

A cloud passed across the face of the moon. At the same moment, the creature advanced to the bedside, and bent its horrible, loathsome face over mine. A sickening sensation entered my soul; the breath of it was detestable, nauseating! The body reeked of the charnel-house; but the breath *was of blood!*

A bony hand reached out and, grasping my chin, tilted my head back upon the pillow. Closer came the horrid mouth; the fetid breath overpowered me like an anesthetic. The skeletonlike hands held me pinned down, helpless. The teeth touched my throat. Again, everything went black.

4

I OPENED my eyes. It was morning. The position of the sun in the heavens told me that it must be about noon. Viola, with tear-stained eyes,

sat on the chair beside my bed, watching me as a physician might watch the expected signs of life in one who had been apparently drowned.

I turned my head slowly and tried to speak.

"Not now," she said, quietly, "just rest, and be quiet. I'll get you some strong coffee now. When Dr. Spalding comes—he'll be here any minute—you must tell him the truth. He'll know what to do. I've taken away your little bottle, and the tablets that remained. I don't want your promise never to do it again, for you never will. After the doctor has fixed you up, you'll be broken off the morphine as quickly as possible. Holloway has been discharged from the hospital. I heard enough of your wild mutterings to show me what kind of a night you must have had. I'll keep my promise to you, dear, because I know what you've been through, and because I understand what the craving is. But you're through with that devil's drug—a wonderful aid to healing only when rightly used—from now on, or as quickly as you can be relieved from actually needing it. Now, I'll go for the coffee."

Bending to kiss me again, as I turned to look out upon the bright world of living things, she slipped out of the room and softly closed the door.

I lay there, my nerves still tingling from the reaction of the morphine and the unforgettable memory of the frightful experience through which I had passed. Through with that devil's drug—indeed I was! Nothing on earth, not even the most exquisite physical agony, could ever make me willingly take another quarter-grain of it into my system. Could the imps of hell itself have devised a more soul-shattering torture than that which I had brought upon myself only a few hours earlier?

And poor little Martha! To have her, in that terrible fantasy of dark-

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ness and death, brought back to earth, to a world where, toward the end, her frail body had been so racked with pain, her poor little brain so distraught by the dread of the hypodermic needle which I had learned to look upon as a nepenthic solace for which one might almost willingly die. And to be brought back in that appalling form! Thank God! She was now as good as in her resting grave; today she *would* be laid in it; and her sorrowing parents would pray for the repose of the soul of the little one whose death—though they probably would never realize it—was at least partly traceable to their own misguided but well-meant efforts to "be good to her."

VOICES outside my door. I turned over on my back and, with considerable effort, raised my head from the pillow, the better to catch the words. Not the children in the ward talking together—it was Viola's voice, and then, in vehement response, that of Jennings, the porter. Every word they uttered seemed to be burning into my very brain!

"But, I tell you, it's impossible. There isn't a child in the whole ward who has strength enough to stand alone at present, let alone walk about. Not one of them could leave her bed without assistance. And you surely don't think that Miss Murray goes about her night work in her bare feet, I hope?"

"I don't think anything so silly," I heard the porter respond, "and I tell you again they was *small* footprints—a little one's tracks. Mebbe one o' the little boys could 'a' come upstairs. Mebbe one o' your little girls walked down in her sleep, spite o' what you say. Whoever 't was, the tracks went both ways, and showed up plain on my clean steps. I shined 'em up pretty, with the oil-mop, 'bout 1 o'clock this morning, same as I always do. Miss Murray's

felt slippers don't track up my clean floors.

"Well, I wiped the stairs off again, while you was down in the kitchen a while ago. If you didn't have so many rugs scattered around this floor, I betcha you could tell which cot the tracks led to. An' I betcha 't was the little Ryan girl; Miss Richards told me she's always wantin' to get up an' go downstairs to talk to her big brother. This typhoid's the craziest disease I ever heard of. It gets 'em all, old and young, and makes 'em all silly in the head. I betcha 't was the little Ryan girl."

Their voices died out as they walked across the ward. I dropped my head back on the pillow. A thought that was almost unthinkable was creeping into my brain, chilling my heart, withering my soul.

For I was certain that if Jennings really had seen the prints of a child's feet on the stairs, I knew only too well whose tracks they were! And they were not those of the little Ryan girl—though perhaps they might, some morning, be traced to her bed!

Slowly my right hand crept up to feel at my throat. With my left, I reached out for the electric push-button. I wanted to ask Viola . . . to bring me a mirror.

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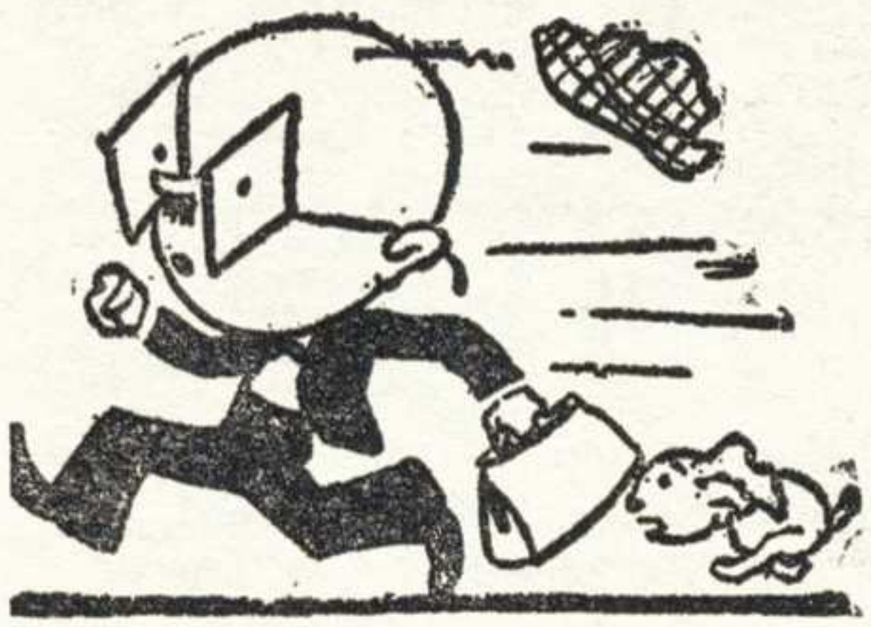

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The Young King

(Continued from page 696)

thrust their halberts out and said: "What dost thou seek here? None enters by this door but the king."

And his face flushed with anger, and he said to them: "I am the king," and waved their halberts aside and passed in.

And when the old bishop saw him coming in his goatherd's dress, he rose up in wonder from his throne, and went to meet him, and said to him: "My son, is this a king's apparel? And with what crown shall I crown thee, and what scepter shall I place in thy hand? Surely this should be to thee a day of joy, and not a day of abasement."

"Shall Joy wear what Grief has fashioned?" said the young king. And he told him his three dreams.

And when the bishop had heard them he knit his brows, and said: "My son, I am an old man, and in the winter of my days, and I know that many evil things are done in the wide world. The fierce robbers come down from the mountains, and carry off the little children, and sell them to the Moors. The lions lie in wait for the caravans, and leap upon the camels. The wild boar roots up the corn in the valley, and the foxes gnaw the vines upon the hill. The pirates lay waste the sea-coast and burn the ships of the fishermen, and take their nets from them. In the salt-marshes live the lepers; they have houses of wattled reeds, and none may come nigh them. The beggars wander through the cities, and eat their food with the dogs. Canst thou make these things not to be? Wilt thou take the leper for thy bedfellow, and set the beggar at thy board? Shall the lion do thy bidding, and the wild boar obey thee? Is not He who made misery wiser than thou art? Wherefore I praise thee not for this that

thou hast done, but I bid thee ride back to the palace and make thy face glad, and put on the raiment that beseemeth a king, and with the crown of gold I will crown thee, and the scepter of pearl will I place in thy hand. And as for thy dreams, think no more of them. The burden of this world is too great for one man to bear, and the world's sorrow too heavy for one heart to suffer."

"Sayest thou that in this house?" said the young king, and he strode past the bishop, and climbed up the steps of the altar, and stood before the image of Christ.

He stood before the image of Christ, and on his right hand and on his left were the marvelous vessels of gold, the chalice with the yellow wine, and the vial with the holy oil. He knelt before the image of Christ, and the great candles burned brightly by the jeweled shrine, and the smoke of the incense curled in thin blue wreaths through the dome. He bowed his head in prayer, and the priests in their stiff copes crept away from the altar.

And suddenly a wild tumult came from the street outside, and in en-

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And the young king bowed his head again, and prayed, and when he had finished his prayer he rose up, and turning round looked at them sadly.

And lo! through the painted windows came the sunlight streaming upon him, and the sunbeams wove round him a tissued robe that was fairer than the robe that had been fashioned for his pleasure. The dead staff blossomed, and bare lilies that were whiter than pearls. The dry thorn blossomed, and bare roses that were redder than rubies. Whiter than fine pearls were the lilies, and their stems were of bright silver. Redder than rubies were the roses, and their leaves were of beaten gold.

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And the people fell upon their knees in awe, and the nobles sheathed their swords and did homage, and the bishop's face grew pale, and his hands trembled. "A greater than I hath crowned thee," he cried, and he knelt before him.

And the young king came down from the high altar, and passed home through the midst of the people. But no man dared look upon his face, for it was like the face of an angel.

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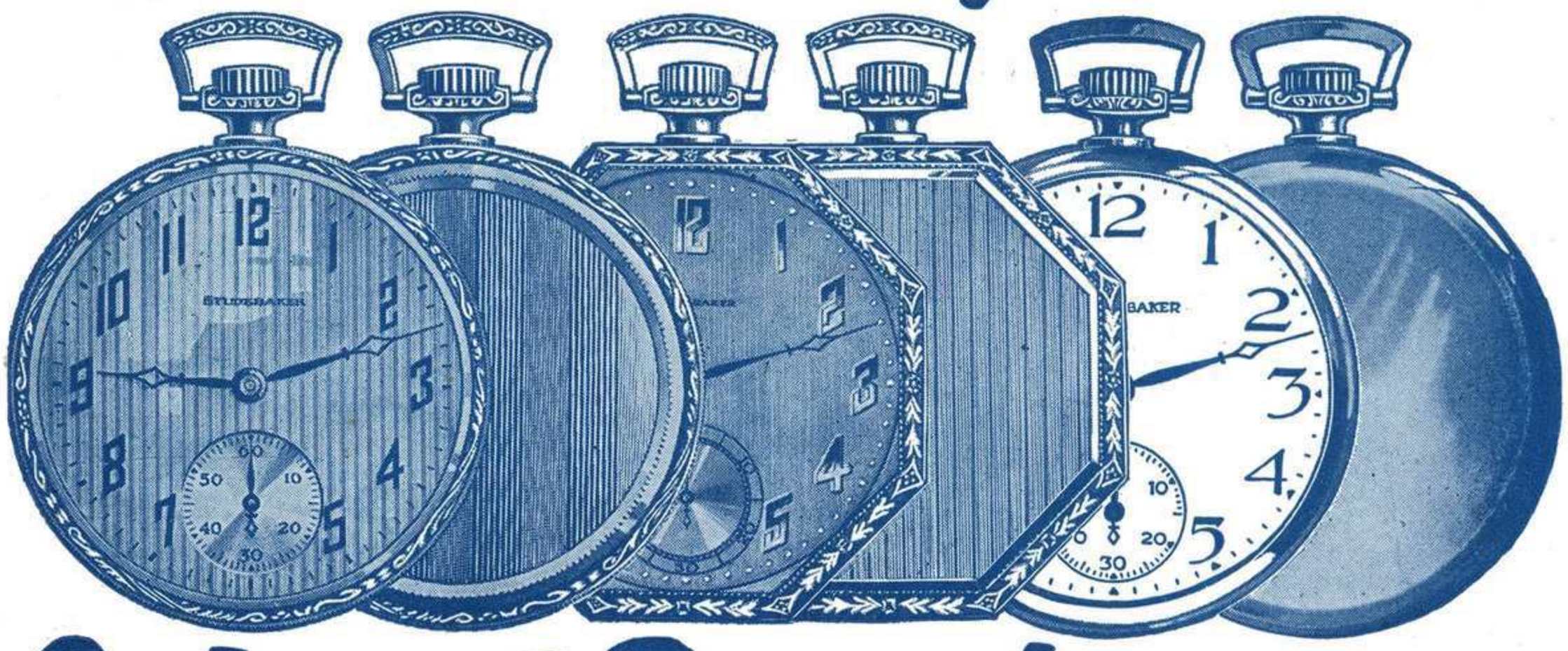

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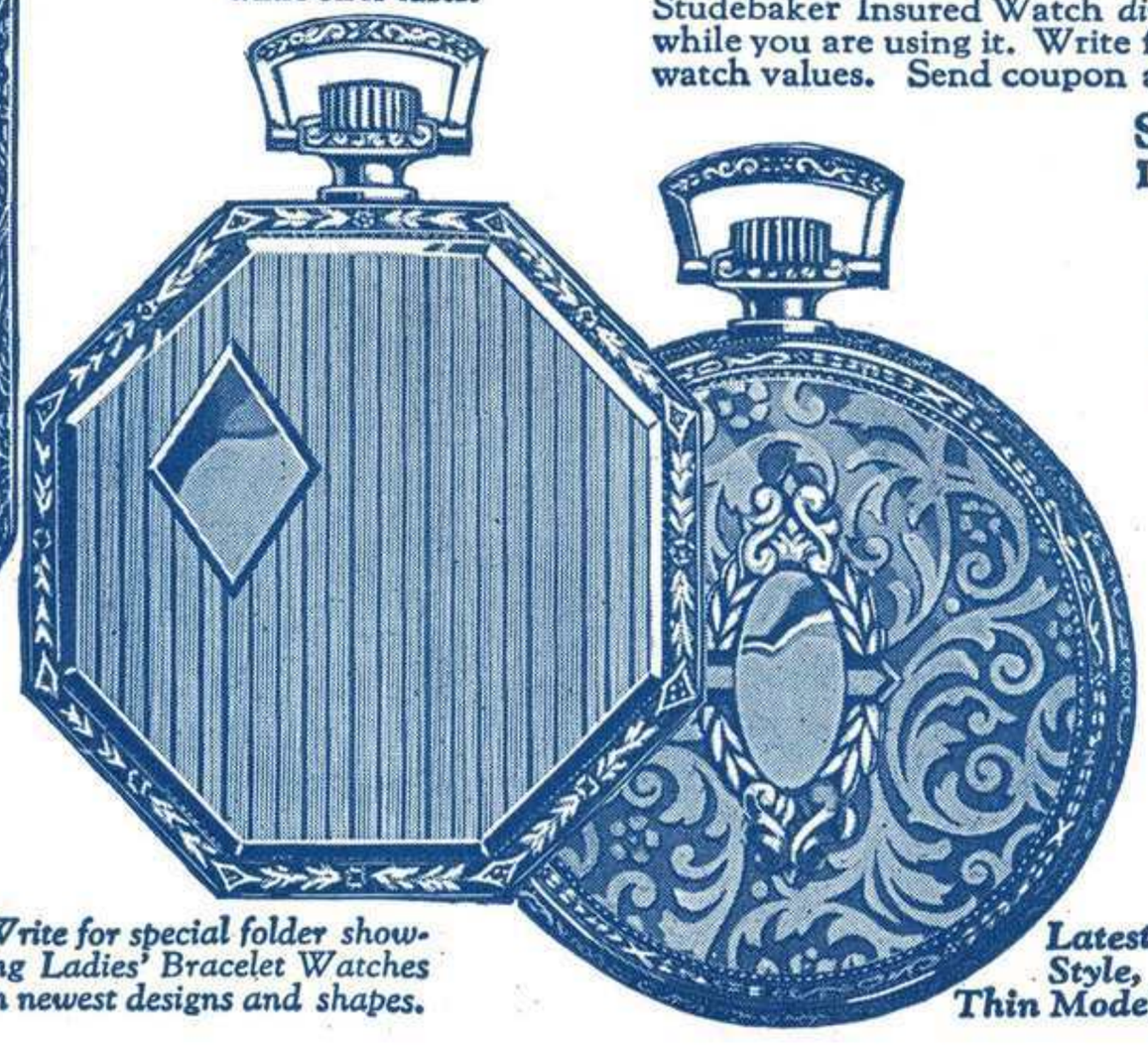

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