Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

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LOCHINVAR LODGE

By Clyde Burt Clason

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March 1926

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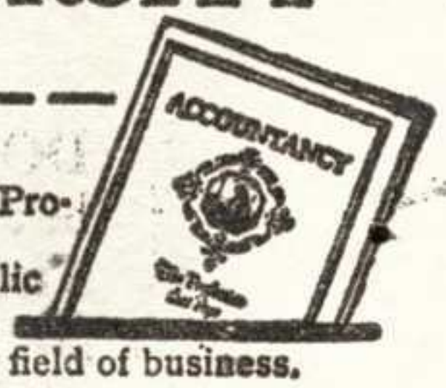
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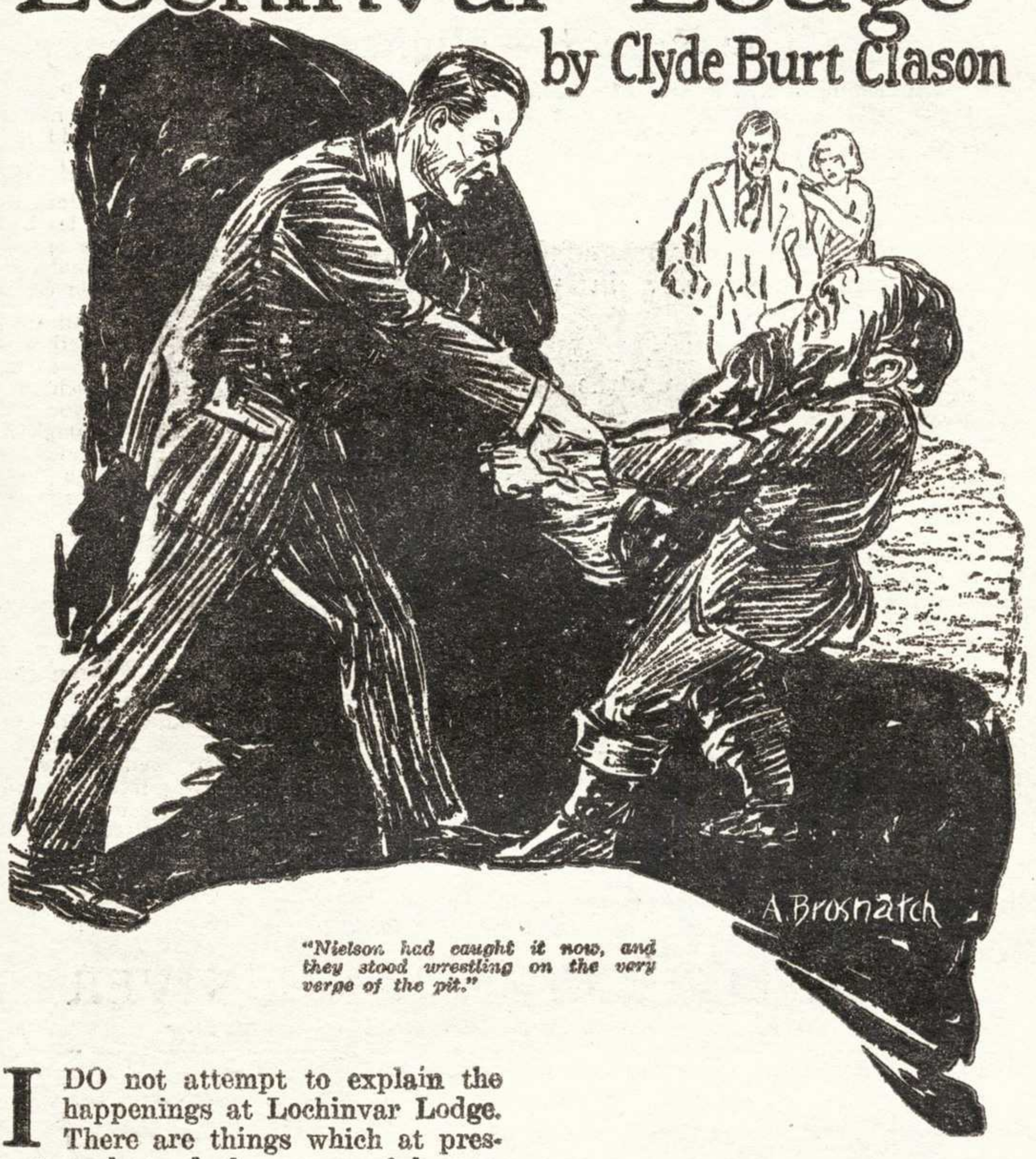
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Lochinvar Lodge

by Clyde Burt Clason



"Nielson had caught it now, and they stood wrestling on the very verge of the pit."

I DO not attempt to explain the happenings at Lochinvar Lodge. There are things which at present go beyond the range of human science to explain. You read some mighty legend of the past and smile, perhaps, at the strange monsters depicted. "Those old warriors had wonderful powers of imagination," you remark, half in jest. But wait, wait yet one more minute—are you sure it was all imagination?

I was going to take Doris to the Motor Club dance that night. Was it only last night, or was it years ago? I remember I had just finished dressing when the telephone rang. With a presentiment that things were not as they should be, I answered it.

"This is Doris, Perry," said the voice I would have recognized anywhere in the world. "I've got some bad news for you, old dear."

"All right, let's have it," I answered, preparing myself for the worst.

"A friend of mine just got in from Chicago. Now it would hardly be polite to run off to a dance and let him hunt a movie, would it?"

I was rather of the opinion that such conduct would come well within the realm of the best etiquette. But it would never do to tell Doris so. I must devise a way out of the dilemma.

"Bring him along," I vouchsafed; "there's room for three in the coupé."

"You're an old darling, Perry," she called as she hung up the receiver.

I was far from feeling an old darling or anything else other than a growling, disgruntled bear. I had counted on having Doris alone that night. Of course one in my financial circumstances couldn't marry, but there was always such a thing as becoming engaged.

I liked Harvey Nielson from the minute his hand met mine in that warm hearty grip of his. He was a fine type of a young Danish-American: big, blond and virile. Here is a man you can depend on in a pinch, I thought, and almost forgot my annoyance at being dispossessed of Doris.

I do not remember much about the dance that night. I have a confused recollection of Japanese lanterns strung symmetrically over the hall, a jazzy orchestra, a smoothly waxed floor, and a multitude of pretty gowns, a few of them perhaps enclosing a pretty girl. It seems that I danced with Doris a great deal, and with other girls a little, and whispered pretty nothings to all as was the custom among our set. But as I look back it seems more like the hazy mysteries of a dream, than any bit of life in which I had a distinct part. Only what followed is forever engraved upon that function of human intellect which psychologists call the memory.

THERE was a full moon and a cloudless sky, as well as just the faintest whisper of a breeze. I proposed to Doris that we drive up the canyon, returning by way of Mount Lookout in order to show Nielson a little bit of the splendor of Colorado mountains. Unfortunately she assented.

I had never known my Ford coupé to run more smoothly. We glided dreamily along that smooth white marvel of a road, Doris seated snugly between Nielson and me.

"What," asked Nielson, "is that picturesque old castle doing over there? It is distinctly out of place in these settings. It is an atavism, a throwback to old feudal England."

"It is all of that," I agreed. "That is Lochinvar Lodge. And it has a history."

"An old feudal castle in the heart of Colorado mountains with a history? Impossible! It is only a hallucination, something we both think we see."

"No, it is there, all right," I went on. "It was built by some millionaire mining man long before the auto was ever thought of, when this road was nothing more than a wagon road into the mining camps. He was an eccentric old fellow, what you'd call a misanthrope. They used to call him the Baron, for he certainly acted like a very fierce member of that species. So when he struck it rich he swore he would have a castle, like the Robber Barons of old time. It must have cost him a pretty penny, too, when you think of hauling all that stone up by wagon. At last the Baron's castle was finished, and he retired there to spend the rest of life away from mankind, surrounded by only a few faithful servants, as they say in fiction. He had lived there only about a year, when——"

"Well," put in Nielson impatiently, "what happened?"

"He disappeared," I announced with an impressive pause, "disap-

peared completely from the face of the world. He said good-night to the servants and was gone the next morning."

"Spirited away?" suggested Nielson, almost flippantly.

"Well, perhaps," I admitted.

"And then," Doris took up the thread of the story, "his brother took possession of the place. That was nearly twenty years ago. His brother, whom I shall call James, as I don't like to keep saying 'his brother' all the time, moved in.

"James was the Baron's exact opposite. You know the kind—poor but jolly and gregarious; in fact he was quite a bit of a profligate. He would have been the last person in the world the Baron would have left his fortune to, for he hated James like poison. But there was no will, so James, being next of kin, took the whole thing, the castle and any loose millions the Baron happened to leave handy. He did a lot of remodeling and redecorating before he moved in. Then he inaugurated the first night with a house-warming. It must have been quite a party, you know, 'Bright the lamps shone o'er fair women,' and the rest of it. You must remember, Harvey, it was long before prohibition was ever dreamed of. 'Fill the flowing bowl' was the cry of all. It must have been about 2 o'clock and they were still dancing in the ballroom, when James and a friend went to the basement (I believe 'donjon' would be the technically correct term for a castle, wouldn't it?) to get some more 'bottled in bond.' The friend's name must remain anonymous for the simple reason that I don't know it. Ten minutes later he came back (no, Harvey, I mean the friend, not James) a raving maniac, a gibbering idiot, or whatever you choose to call him. He kept repeating something about 'the bearded dwarf, the bearded dwarf.' James seemed utterly to have disappeared.

"Well, none of the party could make out what the poor fellow was trying to say. It was well known that the Baron was a short-bearded fellow, and some thought it was his spirit that the friend had seen. They averred it was the judgment of heaven come to punish James for his wickedness; but they agreed to have a searching party before leaving the house forever. So they all went down to the basement."

"And what did they find?" asked Nielson with dawning eagerness.

"Nothing," I put in. "That is the funny part about it. They searched the whole castle from top to bottom, too. If it hadn't been for the fact that James never showed up again, I'd say the whole thing was a fabrication caused by the premature delight of the 'bottled in bond.' And so they all packed their tents like the Arabs, and if not as silently, at least as efficaciously stole away."

"And from that day to this," Doris added in sepulchral voice, "no one has ever entered the gates of Lochinvar Lodge again."

"I wonder if the charm still works," remarked Nielson.

"Oh, I know what let's do," broke in Doris, the light of adventure gleaming in her limpid blue eyes. "Let's explore Lochinvar Lodge!"

"My child," I said with the paternal air which was so provoking to her, "you know not what you ask. If the demon took at one gulp the tough and indigestible James, and his still more tough and indigestible brother, how long do you suppose a tender morsel like you would last?"

She laughed. She had an adorable little laugh.

"Oh, of course, if you are afraid."

There was an enchanting archness about her that was irresistible.

"It would be rather fun to look the place over," Nielson unexpectedly supported her. "Quite an experience

visiting a haunted castle, don't you think?"

"Oh, well," I yielded reluctantly. "We may as well be doing it as standing here talking about it."

I took the electric torch from the tool-box, and we started toward the castle.

LOCHINVAR LODGE stands on the opposite side of Bear Creek. There is a little rustic bridge, however, over which one can cross. It is quite a climb to the old stone wall which encircles the place, I should say about one or two hundred yards to the top of the hill on which Lochinvar Lodge is precariously perched. As we scrambled up the rocky side, Doris suddenly caught my arm.

"Oooh!" she gasped in a transport of delight. "Isn't it beautiful!"

It was indeed a wonderful sight, the moonlight gleaming over the four towers of that huge old gray structure, with the ragged edge of the bordered roof forming a silhouette in strong contrast to the white light bathing the whole. But beautiful as it was, it seemed to me an infernal, malignant beauty, a sinister suggestion of Pluto's castle in the Elysian Fields. A stone dislodged under my feet went tinkling down into the river as if glad of an excuse to remove itself from the castle's proximity. I laughed, but somehow there was not much mirth in my laugh tonight.

"Why, we are at the wall already!" It was Doris speaking. "Do you suppose we can go inside?"

"I am sure of it," I answered reassuringly, "almost too sure."

If she heard the last words she paid no attention to them.

"The gate is locked, all right," proclaimed Nielson, who was a little ahead of us, "and shaking won't budge it. Looks as if we'd have to climb over the fence."

Fortunately, or unfortunately, the wall was only about five feet high. By dint of much boosting and giggling we managed to get Doris over. It was about a hundred feet to the front door of the castle.

There must have been a well-kept and beautiful garden here once, but now the more hardy mountain shrubs have completely overrun the place, and form such an inextricably tangled mass that all evidences of cultivation are lost. The grass is long and rank, and shows an alarming propensity to trip a person walking over it. In fact, Doris did stumble once, and would have fallen had not Nielson caught her in time. Such a tenderly grateful look as she gave him! Without the slightest warning, a fierce unreasoning jealousy seized me. That he loved her I had only to look into his face to see. And what would be my chances compared to his? I did my best not to think of it. A man of thirty-five with a taste for literature, and a taste for science, and no money to support either taste, and what is worse, no means of making it.

We were now so close to the castle that we could see it only as a huge shapeless bulk looming in front of us. I turned on the flashlight as we made our way toward the glass-enclosed porch which took the place of a drawbridge at the front entrance. The door was effectually barred.

At the rear of the castle was what might be termed a porte-cochère, through which vehicles could drive into the inner court of the castle. I shuddered at the idea of any car coming the way we had climbed until I remembered there was a road winding around the other side of the hill.

It was a broad, deep, moldy tunnel through which we passed. And it was extremely black, black as if it were totally devoid of light. I amused myself by turning the flashlight over the surroundings.

"Hello!" Nielson suddenly ejaculated; "what's that?"

I had brought the flashlight to rest upon what appeared to be a white panel inserted in the gray walls.

"Nothing like finding out," I responded as I drew my fingers lightly over the surface. "It seems to be a sort of door or something. I wonder if it will open? Ah——" My monologue was interrupted by the flying back of the board, disclosing a little cavity in the wall.

"There seems to be some sort of lever here," said Nielson as he reached his hand into the hole. "I wonder what it would do if I pulled it."

"I wouldn't advise you to try and see," I remarked dryly, but for once I spoke too late. There was a deafening crash from the rear, a loud ringing sound as of metal dropping on stone. Like frightened rabbits we scurried back to the beginning of the passage. It was firmly barred by a massive gate of rusty iron.

"The portcullis," put in Doris, calmly enough. "It dropped when you pulled that lever, Harvey."

The united efforts of the three of us failed to move that old gate. It was as firmly imbedded as if set in solid concrete. We looked at each other with just the faintest tinge of apprehension on our faces. For the present, at least, we were prisoners in Lochinvar Lodge.

"Since the way we came is barred to us," remarked Doris bravely, "there's nothing to do but go on. And if we can't open the front door from the inside, there are still a lot of windows left."

SILENTLY we retraced our steps to the unfortunate panel. Nielson suggested that perhaps moving the lever the other way would raise the portcullis. But, as surmised, nothing happened. Whatever the machinery that lifted the gate, it was in another part of the castle.

"It is getting lighter ahead," announced Doris.

Indeed, the blackness was getting much less dense. And then, almost before we realized it, we had come to the end of the passage. But before going farther, it is absolutely necessary that you should have a clear picture of the interior of the castle.

The porte-cochère through which we had just passed opens into an inner courtyard or *patio*, as the Spanish call it. The floor of the *patio* is paved with flagstones and there is a pretty little Grecian fountain in the center. Surrounding the courtyard at a height of about four feet from the level of the floor is a balcony. Three doors open from this, one on each side of the courtyard, excepting the one through which the porte-cochère passes. As we stood in the entrance to that passageway we noticed a stairway on each side of us to the balcony. Directly opposite is a third stairway descending to the basement. It is the only entrance there, as I was afterward to learn.

To climb to the balcony naturally seemed the first thing for us to do. The courtyard gleamed white in the moonlight, but on the balcony all was a sinister black, a black suggestive of an impenetrable barrier to the light outside. I felt Doris shudder a little.

"Whoooo, but it's woozy in here! Let's have a little light on the subject, Perry."

Obediently I turned the flashlight toward the nearest door, my hand, I confess it, shaking a little. Nielson began to laugh.

"Well, for the love of Mike!" I exploded; "I can't say I think much of your sense of humor. Let us in on the joke, will you?"

"There's not much joke to it," admitted Nielson, "only I was just thinking what a queer thing superstition is. Out in the car when you two were telling me that story, you two would have been the last pair in the

world to admit there was any truth to it, but now doesn't the whole thing seem different?"

"Well," I admitted, "perhaps it does. Doesn't it to you, too?"

"Not the slightest. What is there here but a picturesque old castle high above Bear Creek Canyon? I'll admit it's dark, and lonely, and we may be locked in, but what difference should that make? We know there must be another way out. And not two hours ago we were dancing in that center of Denver's Four Hundred, the Motor Club. And yet superstition enters in and transforms the whole thing to a terrifying abode of horrific monsters. I guess it is because I am unimaginative that I can't see it."

"Well, you don't need to be so superior about it," Doris complained. "I bet it looks the same to you as any of us, only you don't want to admit it—why, what's that?"

The flashlight had come to rest upon some black body directly in front of us.

"It looks like a table," I answered as we drew closer. "This must be the dining room. Nielson, I know you are right about what you just said. All these supernatural phenomena have some natural explanation if you can only find it. And so long as we keep the intellect busy, it is impossible to yield to that paralyzing demon, Fear. I——"

"Listen!" commanded Doris, and clutched my arm.

As if floating through infinite space, a weird cry came to us, hideously clear, hideously terrifying.

Yahoooo! Yahoooo! Yahoooo!

Three times we heard it, each time clutching at the brain like the cries of a lost soul vainly seeking refuge. And then—silence, an intense, deathly silence. For about a minute no one dared to break it.

"The wind is surely whistling tonight," I remarked, and my words seemed weak indeed.

"I didn't notice any wind," commented Nielson. I turned on him in rage.

"Well, what if you didn't? Is that any reason for trying to frighten this poor girl to death?"

"Oh, I am not frightened a bit," said Doris bravely, but the tremulous grasp on my arm belied her words. "It was the wind, of course, but it did come rather suddenly."

I changed the subject.

"The remains of the Baron's old furniture are still here. I wonder why they did not take it away. Didn't James have any heirs?"

"Rumor says no," laughed Doris. "The entire estate went to the government, or wherever such estates do go. And there was so much of it, anyway, I guess they never thought the stuff up here was worth bothering about. Why, where are we now?"

"As near as I can make out, we are in the saloon of the castle. It is hard to tell anything with only one flashlight, and every room black as Erebus. (That's very black, isn't it?) And according to my reckoning the front door should be about here."

It was not. Nor was there a door of any kind visible. The room was immense. Indeed, from where we stood at one wall, the trembling rays of the flashlight could barely penetrate the Stygian darkness to the opposite side. I wondered how the castle had been lighted, for it had been built long before electric lights were in general use. Could it have been gas or candle light, or perhaps petroleum lamps? I could detect no evidence of either. But on closer examination I could see that this room was not nearly so well furnished as I had expected it to be. There was only an old oaken table, a few musty chairs, and a huge carpet of the softest material possible. All was a moldy

damp: a disagreeable damp that comes from long seclusion away from the sun. It was cold: strangely cold, considering that it was a warm summer night. Further observations were cut short by an exclamation from Nielson.

"Well, here is another door of some kind. It doesn't look like the front door to this mansion, though."

I turned the flashlight in the direction he indicated. There was a door: a heavy massive door, tightly closed. I gave a slight pull on the doorknob. It would not budge. I pulled slightly harder. It resisted (and why should that suggestion come to me?) almost as if someone were holding it. Then, bracing both feet firmly on the floor, I prepared for one more assault on the door. As both hands were necessary in this attempt, I handed the flashlight to Nielson.

"It doesn't feel as if it were locked," I remarked, "only the dampness has caused the wood to swell, and the thing is tightly stuck! Damn!"

The door had suddenly yielded at a moment when I had least expected it, consequently precipitating me flat upon my back. Shouts of laughter came from both Doris and Nielson.

"Perry, Perry, if you only knew how funny you looked!" choked Doris. "I don't blame you in the least for saying it."

"Well, I beg your pardon," I apologized, climbing once more to my feet. "But anyway, the door is open."

"No, it isn't," informed Nielson; "it blew shut while you were lying there. Let me brush you off. You've got something all over your back."

"Just dust," I answered, "about twenty years of it. I fell like a ball player sliding for home on a dry July day. That was peculiar about the door, though. The wind would have had to come from this side, and I didn't notice the faintest sign of a breeze in here before."

"Now who is trying to frighten Doris?" he taunted. "Of course it was the wind. See how easily the door opens now?"

"What's that?" gasped Doris.

"What's what? I didn't hear anything."

"That noise. It sounds like footsteps scurrying down the hall."

Sure enough, from the distance came a faint thumping as of rapidly receding footsteps.

"Well, you two are the limit," broke in Nielson, somewhat testily. "You're going to have yourselves scared to death in a minute, and all over nothing at all. We are virtually out now. I believe this hallway leads to the front door."

Indeed, that entrance was plainly visible as he directed the flashlight down the corridor.

"This door is barred as if they expected to stand a siege. But she'll open all right. See there," he added, in triumph.

WE MADE our way out to the mammoth, glass-enclosed porch before mentioned. Now only the flimsiest kind of screen stood between us and the outside. And yet somehow we all hesitated to move that screen. It seemed too much like confessing our cowardice.

"Oh, let's go back," Doris cried. "Are we going to abandon our glorious adventure just because the wind whistled, and a door blew shut, and Perry and I thought we heard footsteps? Surely we are not such cowards as that."

To my surprize it was Nielson who hesitated.

"Don't you think, Doris," he said slowly, and I could see the effort it was costing him to say it, "that maybe it would be tempting fate too far to go back again? If there is some unknown danger lurking within, I don't want you to risk meeting it."

It was a glorious sacrifice, coming as it did from this fearless man willing even to risk having his own courage disparaged rather than to expose to danger the woman he loved. And fool that I was, I opposed him.

"You know, Nielson, I'd be the last one in the world to see Doris go in again if there were any danger. But we know there is none. Everything we've met can be attributed to perfectly natural causes. It is only the unusualness of their appearance that paralyzes the intellect and enables Fear to steer the car. We owe it to ourselves to conquer this impulse and go back to prove to ourselves upon what harmless trivialities our fears have rested."

I felt very, very wise indeed as I uttered this. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

"Perry's right," said Doris, softly. "I appreciate your thinking of me, Harvey, maybe more than you can tell, but we owe it to ourselves to conquer this weakness and go back."

Once again that tender, grateful look passed between them. And once again that vague, transient, unreasoning jealousy possessed me. With an effort I shook it off.

"All right," Nielson yielded. "If we know there is no danger, it would indeed be the worst kind of cowardice to pretend there is."

He handed the flashlight to me as we went inside. The corridor extended back a long way beyond the door that had proved so disastrous to me. It turned sharply to the right, and then after a little way abruptly to the left again. At last it ended in a broad flight of marble stairs. And here was light, for the moon rays filtering through the tall window at the landing plainly illuminated everything. Enchanted metamorphosis from a past age! One would expect to see a golden-haired princess with a coronet of seed pearls come sweeping proudly down, accompanied perhaps by a knight in clanking mail. Or indeed almost anything rather than three ultramodern explorers stealing stealthily up, flashlight in hand, looking for all the world like three guilty burglars.

YAHOOOOO! Yahooooo! Yahooooo! Once again that uncanny cry. Louder perhaps than before, as if the thing that uttered it was closer, was creeping up to protest at the desecration of its castle. This time we were all better pretenders.

"That wind is surely making a dickens of a noise," Nielson remarked. "There are such big rooms here, and the castle is far from airtight, I suppose, so when it does get in, it howls like the mischief."

"It would be rather disconcerting, wouldn't it," laughed Doris, "if we weren't sure it was the wind?"

"Well, rather," I cogitated. "But what difference would that make so long as we know it can be nothing else?"

"None at all," she admitted, and yet, somehow, neither of us was sure of anything.

"There is another balcony on the second floor," remarked Nielson placidly as we came to the top of the stairs.

"Oh, isn't this lovely!" exclaimed Doris, leaning over the edge of the stone railing.

It was, indeed: the fretted stonework of the parapet, and the arched doorways behind. But she herself was the loveliest of all, as she looked dreamily down into the courtyard below. Those wonderful pellucid eyes of hers, and that glorious mass of golden bronze hair. Yes, it was lovely, indescribably so.

"I wonder where this door leads to?" she called out as she danced away from us like some airy sprite too ethereal to be exposed to the gaze of mere mortals. "Oh, Perry, Har-

vey, come here! Did you ever see anything like this before?"

The ballroom! What pictures that one word calls up! Of fair women and brave men. Of laughter and love and glorious youth. Of the dreamy movements of an old-time waltz. And more than all, of Doris herself as she called for us: face flushed with excitement; laughing, joyous eyes. Futile pictures that can now exist only in the mind!

Inside was only a long room, barren of all furniture, and with a glistening floor smooth still in spite of twenty years accumulation of dust. At one end was a raised platform on which the musicians must have sat, and there (a strange sight indeed!) was an old-fashioned grand piano.

"Oh, Perry," called Doris, the irrepressible, "play something; let's dance."

Obediently I went to the piano. It was, of course, hopelessly out of tune, but still I could get some sort of melody out of it.

"What do you want?" I asked. "*Stumbling?*" Automatically my fingers played the opening chords, and then I involuntarily stopped. *Stumbling* seemed as sacrilegious as if played during church service. Without conscious volition my fingers ran over another tune, a melody of long ago, ever old and yet ever young, the immortal *Blue Danube Waltz*. And as I played it, the twenty years slipped away like a shadow.

The room is brilliantly lighted, and the floor packed. Beautiful women with quaint coiffures and quaintlier cut gowns glide dreamily down the floor in the arms of gallant youths. A huge old punch bowl stands over there in that corner dispensing merriment and good cheer to all. Suddenly there is a commotion at the door. A man rushes up frothing madly at the mouth.

"The bearded dwarf! The bearded dwarf!" he gasps, and then collapses. The man makes one more attempt to speak. His lips move slowly. "James——"

Almost immediately the merry-making ceases. The guests disappear. *Boom!* An overworked bass string snapped like a pistol shot. And I turned to face the present once more.

"Some dance, Perry!" said Doris. "We certainly enjoyed your playing. And I wouldn't have let you play anything else but the *Blue Danube* here. We couldn't have been so sacrilegious."

But for once I did not pay any attention to Doris. Would the man of my vision have said more if the piano string had not banished him forever?

I turned again to the piano. At any rate, let us go on with the dance. I wish I could picture it to you as vividly as I saw it then: a broad beam of light from the flashlight playing hide and seek with the semi-darkness of the room; the cacophonous discords emanating from that old piano; the black shadows lurking in every corner; and like two immortals from Olympus dancing — Doris and Nielson.

Whenever they glided into the rays of the flashlight which I had placed on the piano, it surrounded them with golden splendor, bathed them as the limelight caresses the dancers of the stage. Two gods from Olympus. I repeated: he with his splendid strength and virile manhood, and she with her laughing youth and joyous beauty. The musician at the piano faded into insignificance by contrast. What had I to offer her to compare with him? No, it was better thus, it was better thus. A scream from Doris broke the spell which surrounded them.

"Harvey!" and I could not help noting that it was he to whom she turned. "Look! There's something in the doorway."

We both rushed in the direction she indicated. The ballroom has two doors: the one from the balcony through which we had come, and another one leading out into a corridor. Only impenetrable darkness greeted us as I turned the flashlight down there. If Doris had indeed seen anything it had vanished.

"Wasn't that silly of me to call out like that?" she greeted as we returned. "It was nothing but imagination, I suppose, but I seemed to feel the presence of something at that door. And when I looked there was a black shadow there. And it moved——" She stopped suddenly. Of course I had to put a natural interpretation upon the phenomenon. If I only hadn't been so anxious to explain everything, and had let my feelings guide me more!

"The strange unreality of the place has unstrung your nerves, Doris; has keyed them up to an unusually high pitch of excitement. That is why the imagination responds so readily to the slightest stimuli or sometimes to no stimuli at all. This in turn leads to the nameless terror which we have all observed since the portcullis first fell. But should we leave now, Doris? I see no use to subject your nerves to any further strain."

She smiled bravely.

"If you think I am going to leave just because my imagination responds to any old stimuli that come along, you're mistaken. Both you and Harvey say positively there's nothing in here which can not be explained by natural causes, so if there is no danger, why should we go?"

"You are right, Doris, as you always are," confirmed Nielson. "If we know there's nothing here let's see the thing out."

I acquiesced readily. I had no desire to abandon our exploration so soon. We went out into the corridor, which I had a presentiment led to another flight of stairs. I stumbled. "What the deuce!" I began and then stopped. My foot had struck something hard. As I turned the flashlight upon it, I gave a cry of astonishment.

"What do you think of this, Doris?"

It was a rusty iron bar about three feet long and an inch in diameter. But the unique thing about it was its irregularity: it looked as if it had been cast by people knowing only the rudiments of iron work. A round knob on the end showed that it would make an unpleasant weapon in the hands of anyone who was not afraid to strike hard.

"Ugh, what a terribly nasty-looking thing!" she exclaimed. "Where did you find that? What is it, anyway? What are you going to do with it?"

"As to the first," I replied with assumed levity, "I found it lying back there. As to the second, it looks like an iron rod, but I am ignorant of any specific purpose it may serve. And as to the third, I think I'll just tote it along. It may come in handy to chase the spooks off."

YAHOOOOO! Yahooooo! Yahooooo! An angry note in it this time, as if the thing uttering it (and why should that simile come to me?) had been robbed of something. And yet a plaintive whining, too, as if it were not immune to fear. So suddenly had it come that for a minute no one spoke, none daring to break the spell. Then Nielson laughed, a harsh mocking laugh.

"I see our friend the Yahoo Bird is on the job again. Well, let him howl his fool head off if he wants to, and see if we care."

"Yes, let him," echoed Doris. "Harvey, you're good. Calling that thing the Yahoo Bird! A funny name for a funny animal."

"Isn't it?" he agreed. "But what else would you call it?"

"Harvey," she asked him, "just what kind of animal is this Yahoo Bird?"

"Oh, it lives in old castles," he told her lightly, "and it tries to scare pilgrims away by screaming 'Yahoooo! Yahoooo!' at them. (As if that meant anything!) And it flaps its wings down musty corridors, and it pulls on doors they try to open, and altogether it is a very terrifying sort of creature. And it may have a beard and leave iron rods around for all I know," he added for my special benefit.

"Good heavens!" laughed Doris. "What an awful creature, Harvey! What else does it do?"

"Well, it carries people away to some deep, damp hole whenever it feels like it. And it usually gets credit for their disappearance even when it doesn't. And in general it does whatever people are too lazy to think out the true cause of. And then when it drives anyone away from its abode it shrieks and hoots and flaps its wings in a very jubilant manner to think what fools these mortals be."

"The Yahoo Bird," Doris repeated dreamily, "the Yahoo Bird that lives in deserted castles!"

"Are you going to write a book about the habits of that very eccentric and interesting character?" I inquired ironically. She laughed, a delicious, gurgling little laugh.

"Well, not just yet, anyway. But it is easy, isn't it, for people to attribute things they can't understand to some creature like the Yahoo Bird?"

"It is the easiest thing in the world," I assured her, "and that very tendency is what has retarded the progress of the human race so long. Some unusual happening occurs, and immediately, without the slightest attempt to ascertain its true cause, man ascribes it to something quite as absurd as Harvey's Yahoo Bird. And from that propensity arose all the mythology of primitive peoples: their gods and goddesses and strange monsters, all terrible beings to be appeased. But, thank heaven, we are overcoming that now. And——"

"Well, here are the stairs on up," interrupted Nielson. "There are three stories in this place, aren't there?"

"Four, counting the towers," replied Doris. "They rise an extra story above the rest of the castle, you know. What were you going to say, Perry?"

"As I was going to say," I continued calmly, "in the olden days the people would have said this castle was haunted by a wizard or a witch, or what's that old Scandinavian monster's name, Harvey? You know the thing that was supposed to dwell in caves or old houses and deal death and destruction to all who saw it."

"Troll," he suggested.

"That's it, a troll. But now we can get at the true cause of things. Every miracle under the sun has a natural explanation if you will only look hard enough for it."

Yahoooo! Yahoooo! Yahoooo!

A fierce, angry ring to it this time, like the war whoops of aborigines preparing for an assault.

"Now, fifty or even twenty years ago," I continued quite as if nothing had occurred, "such a wailing as that could mean only one thing, the cries of a disembodied spirit. Now we are able to turn the white glare of analytical reasoning upon it and watch superstition vanish like a mephitic mist. There are probably certain acoustic properties to this castle which intensify and amplify sound to a great extent. That accounts for a slight breeze of wind being able to produce such a volume of sound as we have heard."

"Do you honestly believe that is what causes it?" asked Nielson curiously.

"Why, of course," I replied angrily. "Don't you?"

"I don't know," he said slowly. "But whatever it is, I believe you're right about there being some natural cause. Maybe."

"Well, even if the cause should be unusual," I questioned, "something previously unknown to modern science, is that any reason why it couldn't be natural?"

"Here you two go talking a blue streak about nothing at all," broke in Doris gayly. "Harvey looks solemn and says 'maybe' in a mysterious tone, and Perry goes clear back to primitive man and brings in all the wiles of modern science to prove there's no maybe about it. As a scientist, Perry, you are a scream. I believe if you'd been in the Garden of Eden you wouldn't have noticed the apple when Eve held it out to you. You would have been too busy counting the scales on the snake."

"Not if you were Eve," I retorted, which was rather brilliant repartee for me.

She blushed adorably, and for all I could see quite without cause.

"Well, if I am to be Eve I refuse to tempt you away from the Tree of Knowledge. You can keep your musty old science and let it give purely natural explanations to all the phenomena it wants to."

As I look back upon it, nothing seems more ironically inept than this half superior, half jesting attitude that we displayed toward all the manifestations about us. To make a joke of *that!* And yet in one way it seemed wonderful, too: the amazing power of man's sense of humor, that glowing spark of kinship with the divine which has done so much to prevent man's falling a helpless victim to the nameless terrors engulfing him. But to continue the story.

WE ASCENDED the rest of the stairs in utter silence. Nor was this silence broken upon reaching the third floor. Here the moldy dampness and the gloomy darkness which had been so prominent on the first floor were intensified. Automatically our own attitude changed to correspond. There was none of that forced gayety which had been so apparent a floor below. No; subconsciously we yielded to that profound despondency which enveloped us, a despondency so real that it seemed almost a tangible thing, something one could touch or even see.

On this floor were nothing but bedrooms, vast, empty, desolate bedchambers barren of all furniture. Impelled by a grim determination to see everything, we went gloomily through all the rooms. The first one opened out upon a balcony exactly similar to the one below, and here Nielson, who had yielded less to the influence of the place than either Doris or I, made a feeble attempt at a joke. But it fell flat on unheeding ears. Every power of reason I possessed could not dispel the effect of a sinister, malefic presence, grimly watching our every move. And waiting, waiting for what? With an effort I shook off this feeling, as we made our way into another bedroom. My flashlight illuminated the threatening walls and desolate ceilings in a peculiarly horrible manner.

"Look, Perry!" cried Doris clasping my arm. "There seems to be some sort of paper on the floor." I turned the flashlight in the direction she had indicated. All three of us bent over for a closer scrutiny. And then in spite of ourselves we laughed in the sudden relief at the tension. For we plainly read: "Peerless Milk Chocolate. Supreme in Quality, Delicious in Taste." So the malfeasances of the inveterate tourist extended even here! We were not treading upon haunted ground for the first time, then. We could not be violating a sanctuary which had already been violated by other hands so prosaic as to leave milk chocolate wrappers behind them. But grossly inept as the

thing was, it was strangely comforting, and I stooped to pick it up. And then suddenly I drew back with a little gasp of horror. For I had beheld an indisputable confirmation of all my previous shapeless fears. There, implanted deep in the twenty-year-old dust of that deserted bedchamber was a naked footprint. And it was not a *human* footprint!

To say I was astonished would be putting it mildly indeed. I was amazed, astounded, plunged in the depths of total consternation. I examined it more closely, anxious to see if I had not made a mistake in that initial observation. No, there it was just the same: amazingly long, something well over twelve inches, but twisted and distorted in a peculiarly horrible manner; a shapeless, formless, hideous, awful thing.

Doris and Nielson had walked toward the other end of the room, but were now coming back when they saw I had not followed them. At all events I must never let Doris see it. With a quick motion of my foot I erased it completely with the dust. A certain desperate courage came over me with this action. If the footprint could be so easily eradicated, why not the thing making it?

"Why, Perry, what on earth are you doing?" called Doris as they drew near. "Have you found something else?"

"Nothing at all," I lied glibly. "I am just kicking up a little dust."

"I'll say you are," affirmed Doris, "and you are a sight, too. Just like one of those Arabs caught in a dust storm. But let the storm die down and come along. There are the towers yet to explore, and the roof, too, if we can get out there."

Obediently I followed. There are four towers on Lochinvar Lodge, one at each corner. The roof between is flat. Entrance to the towers is reached by a tortuous, spiral stairway, a separate one for each tower. We made no effort to choose which tower we would explore first, but took the first stairway that offered itself. By chance we found ourselves in the north tower, the one overlooking Bear Creek. What it could have been used for I have no idea. It was devoid of furniture, and the glass windows encircling it were set high, about ten feet above the floor. The floor of the tower is on the same level as the roof of the rest of the castle. And there is a door leading to that roof.

To this door we directed our footsteps. Doris took the lead, I followed closely and Nielson was about two feet behind me. That door opened readily and Doris sprang forward with a little cry of delight. Disregarding for a moment all rules of etiquette which would have made me hold the door open for Nielson I ran toward her, anxious to see that which had attracted her so. Almost immediately I turned back, for I had distinctly heard a sound as of a heavy body falling. The door when I reached it was locked tight. And Harvey Nielson was still inside!

"Why, Perry," Doris called gayly, "what on earth is the matter with you? You look as if you'd seen a ghost or something. Doesn't he, Harvey?" Then for the first time she became aware that I was alone. "Why, where's Harvey?"

No matter what had happened, I must avoid frightening Doris.

"I think he's playing a joke on us," I said with a forced attempt at a laugh. "You see there's a spring lock on the inside of this door—which is really the most absurd place to put it—and the beastly thing won't open. Harvey's hiding in the tower trying to convince us, I guess, that we are locked out, and he's disappeared, but if we don't let on that we miss him he'll come out soon enough."

"All right," laughed Doris, and I noticed with a feeling of relief that she was always ready to accept the

most logical explanation. "We'll fool him, then. Did you ever see anything so weirdly beautiful as this in all your born days, Perry?"

I freely confessed that I never had. In contrast to the gloom and terror of the castle this seemed an atmosphere of heavenly peace, a veritable paradise. The entire roof was bathed in a brilliant white light from the broad rays of the full moon. I can remember gazing at the stars and breathing a sigh of relief at seeing the old familiar constellations. No matter how much the world of known science might fail, at least the heavens were constant. What words can describe the rest of the scene: the high battlement surrounding us; the black shadows cast by each of the four towers! Far below gleamed the river, a little silver thread glistening in the moonlight. The pure crisp mountain air went to my head like strong wine, a nectar for the gods, indeed.

"Nabopallassar's palace," I whispered softly.

"Who was he?" questioned Doris. "At any rate he has an awful-sounding name."

"Silence, young lady," I said sternly; "don't you know by your frivolity you are committing an act of lese-majesty?"

"Goodness!" she laughed; "as bad as all that?"

"Yes, quite," I agreed. "Nabopallassar was an old Babylonian king. He delivered his people from the yoke of the Assyrians, as the history goes (although I suppose the yoke was only figurative) and performed a good many other deeds of like valor. Then, too, he was a mighty builder, building three walls around Babylon. And he had a palace that was a perfect marvel in those times for size and beauty."

She caught my meaning instantly with that ever-ready sympathy of hers.

"Oh, Perry, it is like that. And if I ever seem foolish or flippant you will know I don't mean it. For I do respect your mighty wisdom, although I can't help laughing at it sometimes. But you will forgive me, won't you?"

"The queen," I said solemnly, "can do no wrong."

She drew my arm a little closer.

"You're a dear, Perry, just a dear—why, what's that?"

A faint, scarcely audible moaning had come from the direction of the castle, a sound as if someone, or some *thing*, were in pain. But I made an attempt to pretend I had heard nothing.

"Just an overstrung imagination," I assured her. "There's nothing that I can hear."

"Wasn't it silly of me?" she smiled bravely. "But I don't like this place. Somehow it scares me as if there were something here I couldn't understand. And then you whisper some big-sounding words and I am not afraid any more, Perry. I know everything's going along just as right as it should be."

"Oh, my dear, my dear," I cried hoarsely, and could say no more.

I WONDER if I dare to try to picture that scene to you! Just the two of us locked on the roof of a deserted castle. And Babylonian splendor outside, and a nameless terror lurking within, and the third member of our party already a victim. Not the faintest chance of escaping from the roof, and perhaps worse than death awaiting us should we attempt it. And all the while trying with every ounce of will power I possessed to keep her cheerful, and loving her—God knows I never loved another woman one-half so sincerely or so intensely before. And the moonlight surrounding all with a sort of diabolic radiance. There is magic in moonlight—magic and madness.

(Continued on page 424)



"It was a monstrous red ant, and I had no time to escape. It started racing for me."

The Jungle Monsters

by Paul S. Powers

YES, I'll take the medicine, if you'll put it in a glass of whisky, Doc — no, fill up the glass! Never mind the medicine, fill up the glass. It'll burn the fever out of me. Thanks!

Now give me a shot of your cocain. Don't look so shocked, Doc. The natives learned me to chew coca leaves—I'd never made it to the coast without them. You're a doctor, and you understand. Nuga, the devil-devil doctor, understood, and he understood other things — many other things. But give me the cocain, Doc, and I'll tell you the story.

Ah! That sinks deep! I can see you better now, and can talk better, too. Tell me, Doc, is this the way a man's supposed to feel when he's dying? But never mind, I promised to tell you the story. . . . . I'll tell you while you're tying up that stump of a leg. Say, Doc, bury that foot, won't you? I don't like to think about it. I can still feel the saw buzzing, or maybe it's in my head. Burned, wasn't it? That foot, I mean. Burned all over, ain't I, Doc? Well, acid did that—an ant sprayed it on me. The ant was about fifty feet away, too, and I was running, or I'd never even made it back to Nuga's hut. Didn't you know that ants sprayed acid? Just a tiny drop of formic acid, eh? Well, maybe you're right. But I'll tell you.

Did you ever read *Alice in Wonderland?* The part where Alice bit into a mushroom and became so little she wasn't more than an inch high? Sure, I thought you had. Well, I found that mushroom, or rather the devil-devil doctor found it. So I guess really I wasn't more than three or four inches from the ant when he sprayed me. But the ant wasn't the worst part. There were little things in the mud, and bigger things — butterflies and moths bigger than airplanes, and all covered with feathers. Then there were centipedes and spiders and hairy jungle things all bigger than houses.

No, I'm not out of my head, Doc. I'm just trying to tell you. Nuga told me, and I laughed, just as you are laughing, and if you still want to laugh when I am done, you can go into the jungle and eat of Nuga's stinking powder. He makes the powder by carefully drying the small purple toadstool that grows at the root of the banyan tree. . . . But you will want the story at the beginning.

WHO am I, and how do I happen to be in the Solomons? I have told you that. I was the second mate of the blackbirder *Jeletta*, wrecked on the beach at Ringmanu, crawled into the swamps and fought my way through the bush. I had a pistol, and by putting a bullet through the brain of Sagana was adopted by Nuga, the high devil-devil who hated Sagana. Oh, Nuga knew white men, and had a taste for gin, but with the natives I was a kind of god. I still had my pistol, you know.

I lived with Nuga in his thatch hut, which was taboo to the rest of the natives. The devil-devil took a fancy to me because, as I said, I had killed the rival devil-doctor, and because I was white and knew many things that he did not know. I lived on breadfruit, raw eels from the swamps, dried corn and other good things. My taboo was dead pig—I could not eat that.

Nuga showed me many strange things, for he was very wise and very old. He told me how heads were cured, and what herbs to gather for the smoke. And he told me of many medicines. Among other things he told me of a drug that he could prepare, a drug that would bring a sleep, and then shrink a man, bones and body, to the size of the little finger of a child.

I laughed, and said that Nuga was one of two things, a madman or a fool. A native will only smile when you mock his gods, but when you hint that he is a liar he will study a way to kill you—if he is a liar. Nuga wasn't a liar. He would prove it, he said, and then I could laugh.

"Ever heard of Gulliver, Nuga?"

Nuga had not heard of Gulliver, and when I told him the tale of his voyage to some place or other where he found himself no match for a mouse, he nodded sagely.

"It is the truth," he said. "Gulliver fella ate of the powder of the little devil plant, which I will show you."

"And have you tried it yourself?" I asked him.

"Why should I try? I, who know of it, have seen it tried upon my father's father as a torture for breaking a taboo. He became as small as the hoof of a pig, and died squealing as a pig when he was eaten by a snake no longer than that." And Nuga placed his dark hands six inches apart.

"That's black magic," I smiled. "White man knows better than black magic—he believes only what he has seen for himself."

"And would you care to see, O Foolish White Man From the Stars?" grinned Nuga.

I told him that I would taste his stuff, if only to show him what I thought of his magic. The toadstool

he showed me did not look to be a poisonous kind, and I knew something of tropical fungi. I told him that he might grind his powder. I would try it, and if it was poisonous, and sickened me, I would show him some white man's magic with my pistol.

So the next morning Nuga gathered some of the evil-smelling things, and after drying them in the sun, he ground them to a powder, added a small quantity of another herb, and let the mixture dry again. Finally, he told me that the powder was ready for me.

"But you must not eat it here," he grinned. "There are things that the black children must not see—things that only devil-doctors should know—and white men who laugh at black men's magic."

He walked into the jungle and halted near the banks of the swamps that bordered the river. Nuga picked a spot nearly bare of grass, and we seated ourselves under a breadfruit tree.

"There is another herb, Unbeliever," he said, unfolding a skin filled with a greenish pulp, "that undoes the work of the little-devil plant. And when you are through laughing——" He laid the skin upon the ground, and rose.

"But I must go to the devil-house," he added, "and finish the head I am curing in the smoke. Perhaps, O Child Who Does Not Believe, we shall meet again."

With these words he disappeared in the direction of the village, and I sang out a mocking good-bye. Of course, I really did not intend to try the filthy stuff he had prepared. It stank of the swamps, and was not pleasant to think about. But he had been so serious—he had believed in it so much! I wondered if it might not contain some curious drug, and I have a weakness for finding things out for myself. I'd tried coca, as I told you, and wondered if Nuga was not showing me something like that—you know, Doc. I had the thirst for dope in my veins.

Well, I tried it. Just a taste, at first, and then, because the stuff wasn't so terrible after all, I took quite a dose of it. It was stingy—like coca leaves, only it didn't freeze my tongue like that always does. You know Bronsen, the first mate of the *Jeletta*—well, I guess you don't, Doc, but anyway he told of eating hashish in Indo-China, and I figured that maybe this was it, for after walking about for a few minutes, waiting to see what would happen, I began to get sleepy. Not just ordinary sleepy, Doc, but dope-sleepy—I got so I couldn't hold my eyes open, and my legs got heavier and heavier and finally they sagged under me and I went under, feeling half sick and swearing at Nuga as I felt myself slipping. In five minutes I was completely gone. Everything went black.

WHEN I came to myself—and I woke up just as I would from a natural sleep—I couldn't seem to grasp where I was. Things seemed changed, and instead of being under the breadfruit tree, I was under a great green stalk that shielded me from the sun. I didn't see the breadfruit tree at all, and I didn't remember, for a long time, what happened. I felt queer all over, and looked down to see if there was any change in me. I didn't see any. Nuga was crazy, after all, for if his witchcraft had worked I'd have shrunk clear out of my clothes, don't you see? Drugs don't work on clothes, and my boots were tight as ever. So Nuga had lied, you see, and had played me for the fool. I got to my feet, and looked around. Things looked funny, Doc, but then I felt funny, too—I felt about like I did a while ago when I was coming out of that chloroform you gave me. My head was light and I was so dizzy I could hardly stand.

Well, as I said, things looked mighty queer when I stood up and looked around. I thought Nuga had played a trick on me and had me carried away somewhere, for I'd never seen such scenery. The ground was covered with pebbles as big as your hat, and there were great plants and flowers growing everywhere—higher than trees. As I looked—listen, Doc—I heard a roar. It sounded like an airplane, and when I saw the thing, I ducked. Doc, it was a butterfly, a red and yellow one, and had a wing-spread of fifteen feet.

It won't do to call me a liar, Doc, because you remember I called Nuga a liar. It was real, and I wasn't dreaming. Its wings were beating through the leaves of one of those fearful plants, and the thing perched for a minute and then was gone with a roar. I began to shake all over, and as soon as I could find control of my feet, I began running as best I could through the fifty-foot grass. I didn't know yet what had happened. All I knew was that I had seen something impossible, and I was nearly screaming when I saw another horror, Doc, something worse than the butterfly.

I fell over it. It was a caterpillar, a great hairy one, and bloated up bigger around than my waist. It must have been ten feet long, maybe more. It writhed away from me on its hideous-looking feet, and I ran—I knew I was screaming then, Doc. I was fear-crazy, and ran blindly, falling down over rocks and bumping into those huge plants. After a while, when I had run myself out, I came to a rocky ledge, and rested, cursing Nuga and the stuff that had crazed me. I hadn't been there but a little while, when I heard a soft scraping noise behind me. It sounded like something crawling across silk and I turned and saw it.

It was a spider. A spider with a body twice as big as mine, and with legs like the biggest devil-fish you ever saw, Doc, only worse. And the legs were bent ready for a spring. I could see the spider watching me with eyes like great polished black beads. Did you ever see a spider's eyes, Doc? Well, I did then, and it was all I could do to move. I was scared so stiff you couldn't have pried me off that rock if I hadn't seen the spider's legs bend still lower. He was ready to jump, and that brought me to my senses. I jumped instead, but I made up my mind to die when I saw that the thing had me cornered. Another jump or two and it could have got me, for the rock was a natural trap and the only way I could have got off was by the way I came, and the spider held that. Below me was a drop of eighty or a hundred feet.

But the spider forgot all about me. I guess he wasn't sure how I'd taste anyway, and would rather eat something more familiar. Anyway, when a fly flew down and perched between us on the rock, the spider backed up and crouched low. I said a "fly," and I guess it was a fly that saved my life. It was a jungle fly and bigger than an eagle, and sat there watching me and polishing his head with his front feet. It didn't see the spider, but I could see the awful thing moving along a few feet at a time, then waiting, waiting until I could have screamed. I was afraid I *would* scream and frighten away the fly, and I knew it was my life or the fly's. I held my breath and watched. The spider crept up closer, stopped, crept closer, stopped, and still the fly perched and polished and rubbed his legs against his wings. Then there was a leap, and as the spider jumped into the air I could see the sickening yellowish color of his belly. Got the fly, too, and there was a buzzing that nearly deafened me. The spider had him tight about the body with his front pair of legs, or arms, and had the hooks into him. The spider was patient and didn't rush things. The

fly just struggled and buzzed his wings and the spider held on. Finally the spider seemed to have played long enough and sank his fangs with a rasping noise into the fly's middle. The buzzing grew louder and then stopped, and I crawled within a few inches of the horrible meal and made my way with safety back over the rock into the jungle. I went slower this time, which didn't mean that I wasn't almost mad with fear, but I was afraid of running into something else—and worse.

I can't tell you all the things I saw. You wouldn't believe me if I did, but at times I couldn't go ahead for the bugs. Yes, bugs, some of them small, and others — well, some were bigger than I was. I saw bugs with hard, shiny shells like turtles, only larger than turtles. All colors there were, and gnats, too, some striped and some grayish. One flew into my chest and nearly bowled me over. The scenery was different now, the big pebbles had given way to mud and moss trees, and plant-things twenty feet above my head. At times I had to fight my way through a greenish slime that covered the mud nearly as high as my knees. By this time I was beginning to think, or at least I tried to think. The grass *wasn't* fifty feet high, those gnats *weren't* as big as pigeons. It was me that had changed, and I was not more than an inch high! Oh, go ahead and laugh, Doc! I swear that it's the truth. It was magic—Nuga's magic —Nuga, the very old and very wise devil-doctor. So don't laugh, Doc. Remember that I laughed—once.

It all seems hazy now when I think about it. Oh, yes, there was the lizard. I saw him on the edge of a stone, snapping flies like a toad. He was so long I couldn't see the end of his tail, and was brown and green and yellow, covered with scales. His feet gripped the rock like the hands of a monkey — and he snapped flies and blinked. I don't remember what happened then. I believe I ran the other way, for I don't remember of seeing the lizard any more.

I COULD see that I was getting near to a river, or some pool of water, so I turned in the way I had come, remembering what I had forgotten—the antidote that Nuga had tossed on the ground, that little skin of herbs. Oh. I believed in black man's magic now, Doc. That was my only hope—to find that packet of Nuga's medicine, so I stopped and tried to get my bearings. All looked different, of course, but I could see the grove of breadfruit trees by climbing upon a rise in the ground. They seemed to tower as high as the sky itself and looked so far away that I almost gave up hope. But I managed to reach the rock where I had such a narrow squeak from the spider. He was still there, gorging himself on the fly, and I detoured a quarter of a mile around him —really only a yard or so, of course, Doc—and lost my way again. Deep in a thicket of giant plants, I could see nothing, not even the sun.

I heard a rustling through the grass, and ran without waiting to see the cause, for I was nearly mad already with what I had seen. I beat my way out into the sunlight and thought I had outdistanced it, whatever it was, but as I rested for a moment I heard it again, and then saw it. It was a centipede and running at me like a blue racer. I didn't have a chance to outrun the thing and I knew it. I jumped upward and caught the overhanging branch of the plant that was over me, praying to all of Nuga's gods that it would bear my weight. It did, or I wouldn't be here now, Doc, and the centipede flashed under me and back again. It was a fearful thing. Yes, I know you've seen these tropical centipedes and you remember how little I was. So you see, it was nearly a hundred feet long, and stood on its legs about two feet

from the ground. Brownish yellow it was, Doc, with whitish joints and a pair of legs to the joint, legs bigger around than mine. I could feel the leaf, for that's all I had hold of, sagging under my weight, and I could see the centipede chasing his tail around in big circles, looking for me. But he didn't find me, and I suppose he thought I was some kind of a winged insect, for he gave up pretty soon and darted back into the forest of grass. I could see the tops of the plants move as he passed, and waited until he was out of sight before I got ready to drop off.

Now fill up that whisky glass, Doc. Here comes a part that's hard to believe, but it's true. I swear that it's true. Thanks, Doc.

Well, when I was ready to drop to the ground again, I found that I couldn't drop. And when I saw what it was that had me, I screamed, for this struck more terror into me than any of the other things. You've seen the Venus Fly Trap plant, haven't you, and the other plants of that family? They're common enough in the tropics, and I'd seen all kinds and never thought anything about them. That's what had me. The leaf, or whatever it was, had folded around my arm and held me like so much steel. At the same time I felt the bottom of the leaf curl toward my face, and I knew that I was going to be rolled up in the plant, smothered, and then digested like an insect.

The leaf moved slowly, but the accursed thing had my arm up to the shoulder. With my free hand I tried to keep my face from being covered with the awful thing, and then one leg was caught and I was carried bodily to the cavity where the leaf joins the stem. Here I fought desperately, and felt my arm becoming numb and dead with the terrible pressure. Head first, I was going into the heart of the plant — then those awful green leaves would curl around me, tight, tight—I fought, but the thing was like leather, I couldn't tear myself loose. The cavity in the stem opened like two monstrous lips, and inside I could see the half-digested remains of a giant fly. Slowly, a few inches at a time, I was pushed forward until I could smell the sickening stench of the thing. I gave up, then, for I was paralyzed with fear and relaxed my muscles. What a horrible, hideous way for a man to die!

That was what saved my life. When I relaxed and went limp, the tightening leaf of the plant relaxed, too. That's part of nature's work. When the fly is smothered, it ceases to fight against it, and the plant eases its grip and digests it at its leisure. When I felt the leaf loosen its hold of me I tore loose with a tremendous effort, and dropped to the ground.

For a minute or two I lay there sick, and little wonder. Then I crawled away from the ghastly plant that hovered over me, and managed to get out into the open again.

THE thing for me to do now, I reasoned, was to find an elevation and try to find where I was, for I could not hope to escape many more horrors. To find Nuga's herbs now, that was all I could do to save myself. Ahead of me, and not so far away, I saw what seemed to be a hill. It was free from vegetation, and as I neared it I could see that its surface was baked hard. I decided to climb it and take the chance of finding a familiar landmark.

It was a hard climb to the top of the hill, and when I did reach it I found what seemed to be a crater. It looked like a dead volcano, for a hole some ten feet across formed the very peak of it. To the right I saw what appeared to be a slimy, stagnant lake, and on the left I was overjoyed to see familiar things. I could see the towering breadfruit tree, underneath

(Continued on page 429)

A Message From Space

by J. Schlossel



"Then he drew animals, such as I had never seen; and some of them I hope never to see."

"AND so you see in his last attempt, a forlorn, hundred-to-one chance, he won out, won out notwithstanding the fact that his own fate was already sealed. The final coup that he had planned when he realized what was in store for him, and which had been carried out by some of those who still remained true to him and what he stood for, came a little too late to save him. Still he was satisfied. If he could relive his life he would have done it all over again, willingly. And though sent into exile, he did not go alone."

With that I ended my story.

Swiftly I glanced from face to face, but on each I saw only one expression —unbelief. I felt my cheeks growing red as I saw that they did not believe me. For a moment or two I was nonplussed. I did not know what to think. My eyes, sweeping the room, paused inquiringly at Bill Tait, a chum that I thought would be the first to believe it and stand loyally by me, but he was finding the floral decorations on the wallpaper very interesting and was giving them his undivided attention.

"Proof! Where is your proof?" came from those nearest to me in almost one voice. "Have you any witnesses to substantiate your claims?"

I had neither proof nor witnesses, so could only shake my head as they began winking slyly at each other. Even Bill left off staring at the wallpaper on the other side of the room

long enough to demand in an aggrieved tone:

"Say, Tom, why do you persist in sticking so stubbornly to your story? Can't you see that such a thing is impossible?"

"What's impossible?" I shot back, getting angry.

"Why, about that world, of course, and the two suns. That a world can circle two suns in the manner you say it does—why, such a thing is beyond the realms of possibility. And the greatest impossibility of them all is for you to receive anything on your radio television set."

"Sure, that's right, Bill," came from most of the others in a chorus.

I was boiling. I could not reply. After a bit I calmed down. I sat there thinking. Beginning with the man nearest to me, I began looking them over one at a time. If one knew them as I did, it was not so very hard to see that they were all radio fiends, the real dyed-in-the-wool variety. It was just as easy to see that I did not belong among them.

A year or so ago they had all got together and formed themselves into a club, which they called "The Eureka Radio Organization"—a high-sounding title. The club was limited to twenty-four. Two months ago one of the members had moved to the other side of the continent, and Bill had somehow managed to get me in. I had been wild to join. It looked as if here was an opportunity for me to learn all about one of the most interesting hobbies in the world —radio—from first hand.

Now I was wondering what was the use of my associating with a bunch like that. They would not believe me. Perhaps they still looked upon me as an outsider. They greeted with snickers everything I told them that in any way related to my new radio television set. It did not take me long to find out that they were the most unbelieving bunch in the world, Bill included. And I had a good mind to tell them first just what I thought of them and then quit them for good.

Intent upon doing that very thing, I looked up and caught Bill staring at me speculatively. Realizing that I was watching him, his eyes darted away. I waited. I knew that his eyes would come back, and they did. Something in my gaze must have told him that I was absolutely in earnest; for he came over and placed his hand upon my shoulder and said half smilingly: "Come on, Tom, own up that you had fallen asleep and dreamt it all."

"It is absolutely true," I said, roughly shaking off his hand from my shoulder. "Even though I have no proof nor witnesses, I have sworn up and down that it is true, yet still you will not believe. Why? Give me a reason why you will not take my unsupported word for it. In the fields of radio I know that I am an amateur—yes, a rank amateur, maybe; but I am not the rankest amateur in the room at the present moment, and many of you know it deep down in your hearts."

I left the whole bunch in a huff. It was pretty early yet, about a quarter to 10. And I did not feel like going home for a while, at least, not till I had cooled off a bit.

I WAS still burning with indignation. The nerve of Bill! He had tried to tell me that it was only a dream. How foolish! If it had taken place in a minute, an hour, or even a day, I might have been convinced in spite of myself that it was only a dream, but it had taken a whole week. And after I had explained nearly everything to them, Bill had tried to tell me that I had fallen asleep and dreamt it. As if I could possibly sleep for a whole week!

The opposite was far nearer the truth. During the most of that week

my eyes had been glued to the tiny screen of my home-made radio television set, which I had copied with a few slight modifications from the plans in a radio magazine.

A radio television set, as you probably well know, transmits pictures instead of sounds. Years ago, when the radio telephony of today was still in its earliest infancy, radio television had moved along close behind it from out of the ranks of mere theories into the ranks of accredited possibilities. The advancement in the science of radio telephony was well-nigh magical. And so, following close upon the heels of radio telephony, radio television steps from out of the ranks of accredited possibilities into the ranks that are practical, and have already been accomplished by many radio enthusiasts.

There had been no one near the house or instrument but me. The folks had all gone on a vacation, and I alone remained in the house. Of course there was Boy, but Boy doesn't count. Boy is only a dog and knows nothing of the unlimited possibilities of radio.

And Boy, it now seemed, was the only one from whom I could expect any show of patience as I recounted what I had seen on the tiny screen of my television set. None of that bunch had given me a real chance to explain everything thoroughly. I had a wild notion of getting Bill into the house and sitting on him until I had told him my whole story, the events leading up to it and all. I was desperate to get someone who would listen to me. I was sure that if anyone heard me out, from the very beginning to the end, he would believe me.

If I had thought that it would have been at all necessary to get witnesses before they would have believed me, I would have called them all over and let them see for themselves. They knew enough about my radio television set to know that if it worked at all it would not lie. And they would have had to believe the evidence of their eyes just as I did, no matter how strange it seemed. I only wished that I had known then just what a bunch of incredulous fools they were.

Each of us had started to build a set at the same time, and I, even though the latest novice to join their ranks, had, by working night and day, managed to complete mine before any of the others had more than half finished. Hearing that my set was finished, they had, each and every one, predicted that it would not work. They hadn't seen the set, nor did they give me any reason why they thought that it would not work. I had followed the directions to the letter, and so believed otherwise. I wished that I could try out my set at once and see if it really worked, yet I could not do so until the sending apparatus that Ted Payne was making, the club's absolute authority on all things that concerned radio, was completed. If Ted Payne had been the one who told this story, there is no doubt that the members of the club would have believed him implicitly.

The first rule of the club was that each member should make a complete set that would work and use it on every occasion, not resort to a complete bought set.

The radio television set that I made worked in connection with my set only. It was operated by the sound waves that issued from the headphones. The receiving part of the television set was a sound-proof box with hundreds of vibrating wires inside. Each wire was of a different pitch. There were two openings that admitted the sound vibrations, one on each side of the box, and the phones were clamped over those holes.

The radio set was then tuned in precisely the same manner as for music, the sounds coming through the phones as before; but, instead of the ears interpreting it, the vibrating

wires on the inside of the box picked out their own note and electrically opened an individual tiny shutter behind the ground glass screen on which the pictures were to appear.

It was just a week ago last night that I had completed my radio television set. I had nothing special to do or make, so I thought that I would see what I could hear with my radio set. Clamping the phones to my ears, I idly turned the knobs. My mind was not on what I was doing. I was thinking of the set I had just completed and wondering when Ted Payne would have his sending apparatus ready.

I did not mind the scratches and squeals, the variegated roars, or sundry other noises that could not be classified. I continued to move the knobs one way and then another. Suddenly a shrill, terribly high-pitched note sounded in my ears. My hand dropped away from the knobs. The note seemed to have shaken me all up inside, it had come so unexpectedly. I tore the phones from my ears. I was thinking of leaving the set for the night when an inspiration struck me. I would see what that high-pitched sound would do to my television set.

After getting everything ready, I clamped the phones to the sound-proof box. Nothing happened for a few minutes except a patch of hazy light that brightened and faded on the screen as the sound rose and fell. Just as I was going to touch the knobs, two bright spots, one far brighter than the other, and an unearthly-looking hand with only three fingers, flashed upon the screen for a fleeting instant and then was gone.

For more than an hour I waited in breathless suspense, not daring to touch the set nor leave it. Again and again two soft hazy spots glowed brightly and then faded slowly from the screen. Misty forms seemed to take strange shapes for an instant and then dissolve away into nothingness. I was ardently wishing that Ted Payne were here with me, for he would know just what to do. I waited. The screen was becoming less hazy and the two bright spots came creeping back. This time they remained. With each passing second the focus of my instrument grew correspondingly clearer.

I rubbed my eyes in amazement as the true significance came to me. Those two bright spots that I was watching on the screen were balls of living fire—suns! One of them was far brighter than the other. And though the bright one appeared to be many times the size of the other, the dull one seemed to have a more solid look about it, and probably had the mass that equaled the other. And from behind the dull one there came another spot, very tiny compared to the others, and it shone as if by the reflected light from the other two.

What I saw was really a world in the depths of space circling around two suns; its orbit was not in the form of a circle like the Earth's orbit around the sun, but resembled the figure 8! Two huge suns whirling swiftly around each other and a small dark body weaving in and out continually.

The balls of fire faded from the screen and the inside of a chamber took its place. It was not a very large chamber. It was long and narrow. The furnishings looked as if they were constructed out of metal, a gray metal without luster. It reminded me of a ship's cabin. It seemed as if it could stand, and had already stood, many a terrific shock. There was an unexplainable fixity about it. Everything seemed as if it were fastened securely in place and could not be shaken loose.

The figure of a creature that resembled an Earth-born man, and yet was not, stepped into view. He seemed to glide through a door at the

far end of the narrow chamber; he did not seem to walk or fly, but swam through the chamber as if he had no weight at all, and his motions were extremely languid.

The instrument reproduced him and the things about him perfectly. I studied him carefully. He had on garments of woven cloth. His outer garment looked like a toga of ancient Rome. It swept the floor of the chamber.

His eyes were small, mere pinpoints. Either he did not have much use for his eyes, or else his world was provided with an over-abundance of light. He had no forehead; the head sloped right back just above the eyes, but the back of his head seemed to make up for it, for it was large and round. There was no hair on the top of his head or on his face. And the nose and mouth were both small. His hands, as I had seen one for a fleeting instant at first on the screen of my television set, had only three fingers, or two fingers and a thumb, to be exact. The fingers were nearly two and a half times the length of the palm of his hand, and had four joints. His arms reached almost to the floor.

Slowly it dawned upon me that this strange creature that I saw upon the screen in front of me was a being who had never seen me nor even guessed of my existence, nor of the existence of the whole human race! And that he, if not long dead, untold ages, perhaps, was separated from this Earth of ours by at least a hundred trillion miles of space devoid of all matter, a stark, untenantable void.

This was a conservative guess of mine. One hundred trillion miles is only about twenty light years distant. And twenty light years is a mere trifle in the way of stellar distances. Stars are known to be as far distant as three hundred thousand light years away from us, and some hazy patches of barely discernible nebulæ at least a million light years distant.

And so strong had been his influence upon me in those few brief days that I know I shall always think of him as a friend whom I had known more intimately than any friend on Earth. Even time seemed to pause an instant for him. Time, anyway, is necessary only to things that live.

This being pointed to himself, and his lips seemed to form the name "Tog Blaata," over and over again. There was no mistaking the meaning. He was making sure that those who were intelligent enough to intercept the wireless television waves that he was sending out should know his name.

After going through this pantomime ten or twenty times, Tog Blaata turned and walked (glided rather) through the doorway at the far end of the narrow room. He reappeared in another moment carrying a blackboard and easel. He put it down so that I seemed to face it at an angle that gave me a clear view of it even while he stood in front of it.

He picked up a chalk and began to draw. First he drew a few preliminary sketches that he rubbed out before they were wholly finished. He drew some trees (I think they were trees, though I had never seen their like on Earth). Then he drew animals, such as I had never seen, and some of them I hope never to see. He also drew pictures of his own kind sitting on the backs of beasts of burden of his own world.

He left the room suddenly and returned with a stack of papers in his hand. He showed them one at a time. They were pictures (photographs, I think) of buildings, which were built of various substances, stone, and metal, and wood. Metal seemed to predominate—a dull, gray, lusterless metal. Some of the buildings were plain boxlike structures, but there were some that were really wonderful works of art.

He showed about half of the stack of photographs, then put the rest down and began drawing again. He drew pictures of men and women of his race in every kind of dress that they wore since the dawn of their civilization. The evolution of dress on his world was probably the same as on Earth; for the first of his kind that he drew were naked, the next wore the skins of beasts draped about their bodies. On and on, through the various changes, their modes of dress moved, from simple to complex and back again. At the time that he was sending out the message he was wearing a beautiful toga, the like of which the ancient Romans of high estate wore.

He was a wonderful artist. His pictures served him as well as his tongue would have done had I understood his language and stood beside him. It was almost impossible to believe that he was so far away from me both in space and time. He was living, real, and likable. If he had used sound waves, that is, if he had tried to communicate without the use of pictures to illustrate his thoughts, it would have been only so much noise going through the ether. The pictures were the only means by which he could send his ideas sweeping across the unlimited space with any degree of intelligence.

Each time that he finished drawing anything he turned and gave it a name, moving his lips as would a man in a boiler factory or in any other place where the noise is too great to make oneself heard.

He began sketching again, but these were not pictures of any more kinds of creatures or things, they were vital scenes from life. He drew of his hopes and fears, his loves and his hates. He was baring his soul to whoever could see. And it was with a feeling of incredulity that I watched his almost unbelievable story unfold itself upon that tiny screen of my television set.

Pictures, I now realized, were the only means by which beings from one world can hope to communicate with those on another world with any kind of understanding. To try to communicate by any other means is the sheerest nonsense and waste of both time and energy. Besides, who knows but that other beings have tried to gain communication with the inhabitants of Earth in precisely the same manner for many ages? In fact, that might be the universal method of approved form of communication that one world has with another.

Still, I wondered what his feelings were as he enacted some of the more difficult parts of the story that he was sending out. He was like an actor on a stage. But what an audience he had! Stretching from one end of the Milky Way to the other! Boundless both in space and in time! The wireless waves that he had sent out would go on forever, on and on, through the awful immensity of space.

It was slow work to send out his message by sketches. His movements were very slow, and he was trying to be sure that each sketch was intelligible and capable of being understood by various creatures who did not have his viewpoint nor his knowledge of life on his world. There were many hundreds of drawings that he rubbed out before they were finished. Seven whole days and a part of the eighth passed before he had finished and the pictures faded from the screen. Many parts I did not receive, since I had to sleep and eat sometime. And there were also huge gaps, hours long, here and there in his story, as if it had been cut out or off.

He did not sleep. His movements were like those of slow-motion pictures that we see now and then in the cinemas. The length of day on his world might have been far longer than our day of twenty-four hours.

Perhaps he did not require sleep. Sleep, for all we know, might only be a habit that the creatures of our Earth have acquired. In the forgotten past of long ago the night times on Earth were the most dangerous out of the whole twenty-four hours. A reign of pure terror began at the end of each day as darkness fell. All creatures, with the exception of those who went forth to prey, crept back to the farthest corners of their lairs and there waited, trembling. As the darkness became more intense, their fear-taut nerves relaxed and merciful unconsciousness — sleep — enveloped them.

Most of the pictures that he drew had no real bearing on the main part of the story, bits of personal opinions on everything in general, so I omitted those. The rest I pieced together like the parts of a jig-saw puzzle.

The world that circled those two suns was known by the name of Nateer. And Nateer was ruled by two princes, one hereditary, the title descending from father to the eldest son, and the other for the duration of life. When the Hereditary Prince becomes legally of age the title and power of his station automatically become his, no matter though his father, the reigning prince, still lives. For on the day when the Hereditary Prince becomes of age, both of the elder princes retire to some monastery and there spend their declining years free from all worry.

When a ruling prince-to-be is born, another prince is chosen from out of the ranks of the humblest folk by a special body of holy men, the highest in the land. The second prince must be born on the same day and hour, if possible, but that is left to the discretion of the holy men who know by certain signs who should be chosen. And the two do not meet until the day when the Hereditary Prince places upon the brow of the Chosen Prince the diadem.

The person of the Chosen Prince is held to be sacred by all of his own kind. He is at once the supreme head of all religions on Nateer and one of the two ruling princes. No harm dare come to him through the hands of his own kind. He is outside the pale of all their laws, and is answerable only to that body of holy men who chose him on the day of his birth. All the laws and customs that surround the Chosen Prince date back to their prehistoric days.

And it was Tog Blaata who had been chosen to be jöint prince with the present Hereditary Prince, Prince Zeneth, the only surviving male member of Nateer's ruling family.

Prince Zeneth hated Tog Blaata, for he could not reconcile himself to the idea of sharing his power with anyone else. He did not seem to realize that the second prince was chosen with the idea of keeping in check the ambitions of one who would otherwise have unlimited power. Nor did he realize that he ruled only by the sufferance of the masses, whom he held in scorn. He saw in Tog Blaata only an interfering creature who had the power to check his ambitions and plans.

If Tog Blaata, the Chosen Prince, should die, then Prince Zeneth would be undisputed ruler of the whole of Nateer until another prince was chosen, an infant born on the day when the last prince had died, and had grown to manhood.

Not once since the dawn of their history had the person of the Chosen Prince been placed in jeopardy. The greatest crime that could possibly be imagined was to harm the Chosen Prince. Superstitious customs were too deeply ingrained.

But Prince Zeneth despised the ancient customs of his people and collected about him a chosen few who would do his bidding in everything.

They, too, had no reverence for the customs of their own kind. They followed the example of their prince and held in contempt everything that was regarded as sacred. And Prince Zeneth planned to use them in removing the Chosen Prince.

On that far distant world there was no year. It took their world just fourteen of our days to circle their two suns in the form of a figure 8. And that world did not turn on its axis. Out of the fourteen days each half of the world had many hours of darkness. The temperature on their world was of a tropical nature until it started to circle behind the dull sun, then came a period of intense cold, during which all living things on their world settled down into a state of apathy.

The average life of men on that world was in the neighborhood of twenty-two thousand days. A man had to be six thousand days old before he was legally considered to be of age.

Prince Tog Blaata had never expected to reach the six thousandth day of his life. His last thousand days had been filled with many an unaccountable accident. From some of them he escaped only by a hair's breadth, and he did not come out unscathed from all of them.

Though Prince Tog Blaata had his suspicions, he did not realize until the day of his coronation who the author of those seeming accidents could be. He knew that some of them were not natural, but he never thought that it could be the one whom he had never seen until that day. Then he saw the flare of hate leap from the eyes of Prince Zeneth as that person placed the diadem of supreme power upon his (Tog Blaata's) brow and held out to him the split scepter of his office.

Prince Zeneth had been secretly gathering a large force of adventurous youths together. His agents, under the guise of starting a world-wide athletic association, brought the youths together and tested them as to their sentiments regarding the two princes. Those who responded and those who through a little more coaxing could be won over were kept, the others were let go with some reason or other. Why Prince Zeneth ordered this procedure is hardly possible to say. Perhaps his mind was in some way deranged. Thousands of youths, to gain favor in his eyes, renounced all of the ancient customs and held them up as subjects of ridicule.

From the day of his coronation Prince Tog Blaata was officially known as the Prince of the Northern Hemisphere, and Prince Zeneth, of the Southern.

SEEING all about him the misery and terrible hardships that the people of his world were undergoing every time their world circled behind the dying sun, Prince Tog Blaata had thought out a scheme by which the awful coldness that they experienced on circling their dying sun could be counterbalanced. The scheme was so simple that it was a wonder no one had ever thought of it before.

Prince Tog Blaata submitted his plans to a body of engineers, who declared that they were not only feasible, but could be put into practise at once. The plans were nothing more than to build walls of the aluminumlike metal that was so very plentiful around all the cities of Nateer, and to cover the top with a transparent roof. Sufficient heat could be stored up inside of the enclosed city to hold over until once more Nateer would come under the influence of their bright sun.

The people, knowing well the rigors that were experienced on the dying sun's side, made a public holiday to celebrate the occasion. Large demonstrations were held in every city.

A small city, Nu Tala, was chosen as the one on which experimental cov-

ering was to be tried. It took three hundred days before the walls were finished and the transparent roof laid on. The experiment proved to be a great success. The inhabitants of Nu Tala were able to remain active and not submit to the frozen stupor that the people in all the other cities were undergoing.

Prince Zeneth had been very busy during the days when the experiment was undertaken on the city of Nu Tala. He viewed all those preparations with derision. Hundreds of electrical experts were to be seen daily around his palace. The whole east wing of his palace had been set aside as an experimental laboratory. And on the day when the experiment on Nu Tala had been proven a huge success, he had given out to the people through the press that he had a much better scheme, one that did not entail so much labor. His way would give Nateer an equable temperature the whole day through without the need of building walls or such.

"Why encircle the dead sun at all?" Prince Zeneth asked derisively. "It is possible," so he declared, "to slacken the speed of Nateer at the right moment so that the dead sun will have no more hold upon our world."

Prince Tog Blaata pointed out the grave risks in such a project. If there were any mishap in the calculations, their whole world would be drawn into one of the suns. To tamper with the orbit of Nateer might throw both of the suns out of the perfect balance that they now enjoyed. His plan of roofing the cities, however, entailed no risks whatever.

Prince Zeneth came back with the statement that the present generation could not enjoy any of the benefits of Prince Tog Blaata's scheme, that it would take more than one generation, possibly many generations, before each city could be enclosed. He, as Prince of the Southern Hemisphere, would not attempt to saddle those under him with so much useless work when a better way was available.

So Prince Zeneth ordered all factories in the Southern Hemisphere capable of producing electrical apparatus, to start making certain electrical machinery that he would need in the attempt to slacken the speed of Nateer as it hurtled around the bright sun.

In times of grave crisis the Chosen Prince is the supreme head of all Nateer; even the Hereditary Prince must bow his head and obey, for that was the ancient law of Nateer.

Prince Tog Blaata ordered the factories that were beginning to prepare to make the electrical apparatus Prince Zeneth needed, to cease immediately; that all who were in any way connected with that wild scheme of slackening the speed of Nateer should give themselves up to police in their respective districts; that Prince Zeneth consider himself under arrest until further orders. Such was the wireless order that was sent out again and again from Prince Tog Blaata's private broadcasting station.

Prince Zeneth laughed those orders to scorn. He called upon the adventurous youths who had joined his athletic association to stand by him as they had secretly promised in case of trouble. The youths in the Southern Hemisphere flocked to him, ripe for excitement of any kind. Some of the youths he armed and placed over the workers in the electrical factories that were to produce the electrical machinery he would need for his experiment of slackening Nateer.

As the head of the religious order on Nateer, Prince Tog Blaata ordered the men to come to his assistance in quelling Prince Zeneth's crazy scheme. The men of the Northern Hemisphere remained loyal to the Chosen Prince, the men of the Southern Hemisphere went over to Prince

Zeneth, official Prince of the Southern Hemisphere.

Thoughtful men on both hemispheres realized that Prince Zeneth was in a fair way to destroy all Nateer. Civil war was impending, the first since the dawn of their histories.

To all it was plainly evident that Prince Zeneth had been fully prepared for just such an emergency. He had planned everything in advance. Even before the peaceful relations of both hemispheres had been officially severed by Prince Zeneth's taunting reply and declaration of war, factories were running full blast in the Southern Hemisphere producing ammunition, guns, and everything else necessary to carry on war.

No wonder Prince Zeneth could send a taunting reply to the Chosen Prince. Hadn't he tens of thousands of highly excited youths who ached for adventure? Those thousands of youths had been fully trained in the athletic association that Prince Zeneth had organized through his agents. They were at once sent to the equator and thrown as a cordon around the northern border of the Southern Hemisphere.

Those thousands of youths could not hold the border if an organized attack was made against them at any one place; and knowing that, Prince Zeneth had secretly been constructing thousands of huge metal balls that had their own motive power inside and also room for two men to operate each one. The balls each weighed more than a hundred tons, and were composed of two parts, an outer and an inner shell. Each ball had a powerful engine and a gyroscope to keep the inside from turning with the outside.

From many separate points, long lines of those balls rolled to the equator to reinforce the youths who held the border there. Reaching the border at various points, the balls made no effort to pass, but patrolled the region that circled the equator.

Prince Zeneth next sent out an army of mechanics with endless lines of vehicles carrying the electrical machinery. The mechanics went to work at once and began to install high metal towers at regular spaces. These were of lattice metal work, very strong and light. All of the way around the equator they were being put up very swiftly. There were six rows of towers running around the equator, and each row was spaced five miles away from the next, and from the top of each tower was suspended a heavy metal wire. That coil of six wires that ran around the equator of their world was tapped every three or four hundred miles by hastily erected buildings which housed the electrical apparatus that was supposed to slacken the speed of Nateer at the throw of a switch.

Prince Tog Blaata mobilized his own forces and sent them to his side of the border. His forces tried to pass the balls that rolled up and down, but couldn't. They threw wooden obstructions in the path of those rolling spheres, but the huge metal balls could not be stopped; they crushed whatever was in their path and went on. Tog Blaata's leaders tried in every way to stop the balls, and not until tremendous charges of high explosives were placed in their paths and the charge exploded at the right moment could those balls be stopped, but for each ball that was destroyed, two others were constructed by the roaring factories of Prince Zeneth.

Word came to those of the Northern Hemisphere that the electrical equipment for slackening the speed of Nateer was almost ready. The Chosen Prince was desperate. He knew that he must either have Prince Zeneth destroyed or stop him from carrying out his plans, otherwise Nateer was doomed.

Unable to pass the huge balls that circled the equator and had kept his forces out for days without number, he launched a mighty fleet of aircraft. These were only pleasure ships and heavy, cumbersome commercial ships that he had conscripted in a desperate effort to save Nateer from the destructive hand of a madman. Each ship was loaded to its limit with explosives. The orders were that all the apparatus Prince Zeneth had erected was to be destroyed.

But Prince Zeneth had been warned by spies of the coming of the great air armada that had been launched against him. He had long ago prepared himself for every emergency, and so ordered out a fleet of swift-moving armored air warships to meet them. The two fleets met and fought before the Chosen Prince's fleet reached the equator. And though those under the banner of the Chosen Prince fought desperately, their fragile pleasure airships and heavy, slow-moving commercial ships could not meet on equal terms the efficient warships that Prince Zeneth sent to stop them. They were defeated easily.

The Chosen Prince then realized that he could not cope with the better equipped forces of his enemy. He could not break through, and soon it would be too late. He appealed to Prince Zeneth to have pity on the women and children, to stop his mad attempt before it was too late.

The hate that Prince Zeneth felt toward the Chosen Prince now made itself manifest. He answered that he would forego the attempt to slacken the speed of Nateer if Prince Tog Blaata would give himself up to him.

The people of the Northern Hemisphere answered for their Prince and said that they would go down to death sooner. But he whom the message vitally concerned considered it in a more favorable light and decided to give himself up to his enemy. If it became known to the people of the Northern Hemisphere that he contemplated giving himself up, they would surely try to prevent him from going; so, leaving a note telling where he was going and why, he ordered out his individual flyer and started in the general direction of the Southern Hemisphere toward his enemy.

When the people of the Northern Hemisphere learnt what their Prince had done, they sent a warning to Prince Zeneth and swore that they would not rest until they had utterly destroyed him and all who were connected with him if their prince was harmed in the slightest. Prince Zeneth, fearing to cause such relentless enmity toward himself, reluctantly promised that he would not harm the person of their prince.

Prince Zeneth, unknown to all but those who built it, had prepared an inter-stellar ship on which he had planned to escape from Nateer in the event that the slackening of the planet proved disastrous. He no longer needed it, since he had promised to forego the attempt, so he thought that here was a means of ridding Nateer of the one he hated most, while still keeping his promise not to harm him.

He gave orders that all the controls be stripped from the inter-stellar ship and that it be provisioned with enough to last one man a whole lifetime. No luxuries of any sort were to be put amongst the provisions, only the barest necessities to sustain life.

He then let Prince Tog Blaata know of the fate that he had planned for him and all the care that he had taken to insure his comfort on the long journey from Nateer into the fathomless infinite. He took a great delight in telling him what would happen if the inter-stellar ship which had been stripped of all controls should come under the powerful attraction of one of their two suns.

That inter-stellar ship was the only one of its kind on all Nateer. The

principles of inter-stellar travel had been accidentally discovered by Prince Zeneth when that individual had been experimenting with the project of slackening the speed of their world. No one else knew the secret of how that ship could roam the airless seas that separated Nateer from all other worlds.

As soon as Nateer whirled around the bright sun the inter-stellar ship would be hurled from off their world. All preparations had been finished. Only the Chosen Prince's own personal effects, the large trunks in which he carried his extensive wardrobe, were yet to be placed aboard. He had only twenty-eight more of our hours to remain on his own world.

No one knew of Prince Zeneth's plan to dispose of his enemy except a chosen few. He feared that if it became known how their Chosen Prince was being sent out into space, they would make a desperate attempt to save him.

Realizing that when he was gone, Prince Zeneth might again attempt to slacken the speed of Nateer, Tog Blaata conceived a plan that was nothing more than poetic justice if it could only be carried out.

Unknown to his enemy he had in Prince Zeneth's household some men who were still loyal to him and to the ancient customs that he represented. To those he managed to get word and tell them of his plan.

At last the hour arrived for the inter-stellar ship to be sent into space. The Chosen Prince was escorted aboard.

A cordon of youths armed to the teeth ringed the inter-stellar ship. There was no chance taken of a surprize attack. Prince Zeneth was nowhere in evidence. One would think that he would personally take charge of sending the ship up into the airless space. But, as he was not there, it was supposed that he did not care to see the Chosen Prince shot up into exile from which there could be no return, the ship being stripped of all controls and operated from the ground.

All of Prince Tog Blaata's personal effects were being brought aboard. At the last moment, almost too late, a long wooden case, a little longer than the length of an average man on Nateer, was put aboard. Those who bought it, but who were not allowed to carry it aboard, were from Prince Zeneth's own household. They said it was a parting gift from their master to the other prince.

The door to the inter-stellar ship was shut—from outside—and a switch that controlled the starting was thrown. The inter-stellar ship shot up into the heavens.

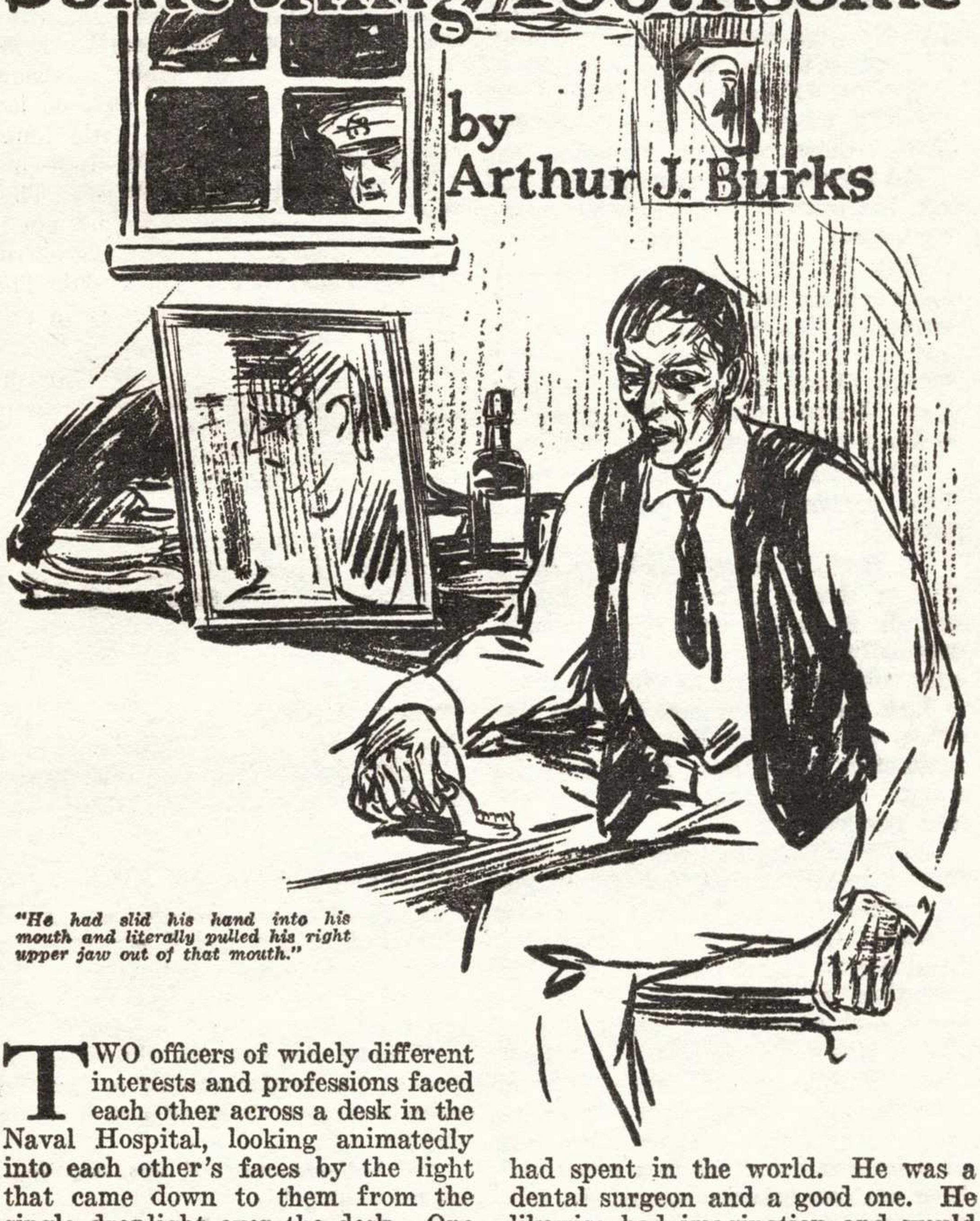
SITTING beside a table in one of the cabins of the ship, Tog Blaata stared fixedly at the box that had been the last to be brought aboard. Once or twice he made a move as if to get up and go to it. He drummed upon the top of the table impatiently. Had his last plan gone wrong? He wondered. There was a noise at the doorway, and he half rose to his feet as if he thought that someone was entering. No one came; they had only shut the door from the outside. Inside of the ship it was now deathly still.

A shock hurled him to the floor unconscious. He lay there for more than an hour as the inter-stellar ship plunged up and up. Like one dead he lay pressed to the floor of the chamber. His eyes fluttered open for a moment, then closed. Ten or twenty minutes passed before he opened them again. He got up on one elbow and stared at the box that the servants in the household of Prince Zeneth had brought. He pulled himself to his feet by gripping the leg of the table and drawing himself erect. He walked, or rather lurched,

(Continued on page 431)

Something Toothsome

by Arthur J. Burks



"He had slid his hand into his mouth and literally pulled his right upper jaw out of that mouth."

TWO officers of widely different interests and professions faced each other across a desk in the Naval Hospital, looking animatedly into each other's faces by the light that came down to them from the single droplight over the desk. One of the men was young, of Nordic type, with most of his life yet before him. He had too much imagination. He thought he could write and was forever looking for plot material. The other man had spent as much time in the service as the younger had spent in the world. He was a dental surgeon and a good one. He likewise had imagination and would have been a writer had he been less indolent. He never missed an opportunity of discussing stories and story builders.

Two-and-a-half-striper Danvers, dental surgeon extraordinary, and Wade Alexander, lieutenant of

marines, had found something in common and never missed a chance for discussion. When it happened that Danvers was Medical Officer of the Day on the same date when Alexander was Officer of the Day at the barracks, there was invariably an after-sundown meeting in the offices of the former. This was such a meeting, and both parties to it were waxing warm.

"But where in the devil do you find anything about which to write?" demanded Danvers. "I am a dentist, and all I can think of is teeth! Stories about teeth will never pay your dental work! Not that I couldn't write reams about 'em."

"Then why don't you write about them, turning your experiences into fiction?"

"It can't be done. Merely the mention of dental offices or dentists is enough to scare out most people, especially if they have had experience with either one or the other."

Just then a corpsman entered the office, calling Dr. Danvers to the main-office telephone, several doors away. The surgeon excused himself and hurried out.

While he was away the young lieutenant looked casually down at the top of the desk against which he was leaning. On a paper just under his hand lay an object that attracted his attention at once. It was rather small, and Alexander thought at first that it was a plaster cast of a baby's foot. He lifted it and turned it over. Then he noticed that it was a white plaster model of the upper right jaw of a human being, as if a piece had been cut out between where the wisdom tooth comes in and where a line drawn straight down from the bridge of the nose would cross the mouth. Teeth and gums were perfectly reproduced, except as to color.

As the surgeon's stay in the other office was prolonged by the wordiness of the person who had rung him up, Alexander's face began slowly to take on that look of interest which is the heritage of the person who is forever on the trail of good story material. He turned the little model slowly in his hand.

WHEN the dental surgeon finally returned, Alexander was smiling.

"Look here, Commander," he said: "here is a story right under your eyes and you haven't seen it. Look at this model which I hold in my hand."

"I see it," replied Danvers dryly; "fact is, I made the blamed thing. It is a model of Mrs. Parrish's right upper jaw. Models are common in dental offices."

"Yes, but there is a story here, too, I think. First, let me ask you a question. Has dentistry reached that stage of development in which a good dental surgeon could tell the difference between the toothmarks of a human being and those of, say, an ape?"

"Certainly. The veriest novice could tell the difference at a glance—by the spacing of the teeth, shape of the imprint, and so on. Take a handful of human teeth, for example, and mix them up helter-skelter. Hold them out to me and I can tell you where each tooth belongs in the human jaw as fast as you can point out the teeth you wish named."

"Could you tell the difference between the toothmarks of a Cro-Magnon man and those of a man of today?"

"I believe—nay, I am certain—that I could."

"All right, then, here is the germ of your story: say that a man who had an enemy, whom he wished to put out of the way, was possessed of a model of the upper right jaw of a Cro-Magnon man. Suppose that this fellow killed his man with some kind of poison that leaves scarcely a trace

—prussic acid, for example. Even if a good medical man could find a trace of poison in the stomach of the dead man, do you suppose he would even look for it if he saw the deep black and blue marks of human teeth on the dead person's throat? No, indeed! He would look for a human fiend who made his kill with his fangs, like an ape. But he, knowing that teeth could be identified, would soon learn that the marks were not those of an ape, but of a human being. But, after classifying the marks, he finds that the marks are of teeth such as are not found in the world today. He is up against a puzzle. Suppose one adds to the puzzle by having the marks be those of the upper right jaw only, and only a blur, a bluish bruise, where the rest of the teeth should have sunk home in the throat of the victim. What then? Has the killer held something in his mouth which took up the prints of the teeth without reducing the pressure on the murdered person's throat? Or has he made his kill in some other way, and marked the throat of his victim with a model such as this one—by way of a blind? Pressing the model home with his foot or the flat of his hand? Ah, there is where the story builder makes his living, by working out the puzzle. I have given you the germ. Can you complete the story?"

The dental surgeon looked at his brother officer in horror—and no small amount of admiration.

"We-e-ll," he replied slowly, "perhaps I might be able to do so, given time to mull it over. Supposing that someone knew that the killer had a model of a Cro-Magnon upper jaw?"

"That's out—not permitted!"

"Then I suppose I should be compelled to find my man."

"Exactly! And when you found him you would have a story to tell to your grandchildren!"

Both officers looked up as a chorus of sighs came from the open doorway of the office. Watching them were four or five corpsmen, who had listened to every word that had been spoken and were just expressing their relief that their superiors had not been discussing an actual case. Even they had been gripped by the possibility of the plot-germ.

Danvers waved them away and arose from his chair. Alexander accepted the move as a dismissal. He walked from the office and stood in the outer doorway for a second, looking out into the night. Something at the edge of the pathway of light caught his attention and held it. Then he sprang back inside and gripped Danvers by the arm. Alexander was trembling like a leaf.

"My God, Danvers!" he exclaimed, forgetting in the excitement of the moment, the courtesy due his superior. "Did you see that? Right out there, just within the glow of light from the doorway, I saw the most hideous face I have ever seen on a human being! The whole side of its face was gone! Whoever it was, he was standing in the darkness. But he was leaning forward so that his face was full in the light as he peered directly toward the two of us. I know it was a man, all right, and I would know that face again in a thousand! Who was he?"

"Why don't you go out and see? You imaginative fellows see too many things that aren't really there!"

Stung by the sarcasm, Alexander plunged out of the doorway. Ten minutes later he was back in the dental office to tell Danvers what he had learned. Which was nothing at all. He had seen but one person, the senior corpsman, and hadn't heard a single unusual sound. He had greeted the corpsman casually in passing. There was nothing wrong with the corpsman's face.

"But I am sure that I saw it," he insisted to Danvers.

Alexander was still a bit shaken.

"Go back to your office and sleep on the matter," said his superior kindly. "Tomorrow you will be satisfied that your imagination has been running away from you. I know every man in the post and there isn't anything hideous about one of them—and outsiders can't pass the sentries after nightfall."

ALEXANDER took his departure. But he couldn't get that apparition out of his mind. When he finally fell asleep it was to dream of a bodiless head and a weird face—a face from which the whole right jaw was missing.

He awoke with a start two or three hours before daylight. He had felt that someone had been in his room just an instant before he had awakened. Had he merely dreamed that he had seen that weird face flash for an instant across his window? He walked over and leaned out, looking to right and left. All that he could see clearly was a ridge of concrete running parallel with the building, between which building and ridge was an open space about a yard wide in which the commanding officer expected to plant flowers. This ridge was about six inches in height, and a barefooted person could have run along it in either direction without a sound and without leaving a footprint. Thus thought Alexander. He was positive he had see that face at the window. Or had he dreamed it?

The telephone rang so insistently as to startle Alexander half out of his wits. He knew before he answered it that something terrible had happened.

"This is the senior dental corpsman speaking, sir," came a voice that quivered with excitement and dread. "Commander Danvers is dead, sir! I am sure he has been murdered!"

FIVE minutes later Alexander, fully dressed, stood in the office he had quitted but a few hours before, and gazed down upon all that was mortal of Commander Danvers. The dentist lay in the narrow service bunk, flat on his back, arms flung wide. The bed clothing was dyed with crimson stains! There was a hint of froth on Danvers' lips, and his eyes were wide open—protruding—staring up at the vaulted ceiling which they never would see again.

Alexander looked steadily down at the corpse. Then his face went gray with horror. For on the white neck of Dr. Danvers, above the jugular vein, were the teethmarks of a human being! And the only marks distinguishable as teethmarks were those of a right upper jaw! There was naught but a livid bruise where the other marks should have been—a bruise that resembled the teethmarks of nothing in the world—just a blue, swollen blot! As if a model had been tramped or pressed into the throat so deeply that the mark of the pressing agency could be seen.

Alexander raised his head and looked at the corpsmen.

Every corpsman on duty in the hospital stood inside the office, each with his back to a door or window, and each with an automatic pistol in his hand, pointed directly at Alexander himself!

"What does this mean?" demanded Alexander hoarsely.

"It seems strange," replied the senior corpsman, "that the very thing happened to Dr. Danvers that happened to the supposed victim in your little outline to Dr. Danvers himself, only a few hours ago. You have much to explain, sir. Why did you come back and kill him like that?"

"But I didn't!"

Alexander almost screamed it.

He saw five hands tighten on as many automatics at his vehemence.

"Danvers was alive when I left here," he continued, "and the sergeant of the guard knows that I haven't left my office since then."

"He knows, perhaps," replied the corpsman, "that you never left by way of the door. But we all know that there is a rear window to the office of the Officer of the Day. And it is almost always open. You could easily glide out and back in again, with no one the wiser."

Alexander realized then the terrible predicament in which he found himself. He was compelled, under the mute threat of four automatics, to stand by while the corpsman called the Commanding Officer by telephone and arranged for Alexander's relief, explaining why in detail. Hanging up the receiver, the corpsman announced that another officer would come immediately to the camp to relieve Alexander.

A half hour later, moving as one in a daze, he turned his sword over to his relief, and marched ahead of that officer to the brig, where he was confined in the dark cell, awaiting the morrow's hearing and the result of the inquest.

He sat out the remainder of the night there, trying to think it all out. Had he crept from that rear window in his sleep and committed that terrible deed? He had dreamed of worse horrors that night. Had he lived them without knowing it? The last thing that had been called to his attention by the corpsman was that same plaster model about which he had woven the story he had told to Commander Danvers. The model had been stained with blood! There had been real blood on the neck of Dr. Danvers—Alexander had seen the blood himself.

Besides these mental shadows, which filled the dark cell as Alexander sat there, was the recollection of that terrible, bodiless face, minus the upper right jaw (or was it the left?), which he had seen at the edge of the light path from the open door of the dental office. Was there any connection?

Alexander could see no light ahead. He saw only shadows of uprights, cross-bar and hangman's noose—and the shadows of horror that abode with him in the dark cell.

The inquest was a hurried one, and every detail of the night's happenings was raked out and scrutinized by the board—from Alexander's ridiculous story to the killing of Danvers. Danvers had been poisoned and this brutal mark made upon him as if in terrible irony.

But there was new testimony. Alexander's shoes were muddy halfway to the insteps! And there were marks of his shoes in the damp earth below the Officer of the Day's room—a trail through a section of soft earth where, all the preceding day, water sprinklers had been busy dampening the ground for the planting of grass and flowers! The trail led directly to the dental office—and there were marks on the concrete walk where he had stopped and stamped some of the mud off his shoes. Even if Alexander could prove that he had moved in his sleep, he was ruined forever as far as his beloved service was concerned.

He was weighed down with utter hopelessness—which was noted officially by the board of inquest.

IT WAS unfortunate, indeed, that neither Alexander nor any member of that board was able to see into the room occupied by the senior corpsman that night after the inquest. Had they done so they would have seen the corpsman do a strange and horrible thing, there in the solitude of his room.

The corpsman had entered his room, closed and locked the door, gone to the mirror that hung on a wall, and addressed his reflection thus:

"Well, Danvers," he said musingly, "I guess we are square now. I wonder, when Alexander told that story of his, if you recalled a certain day some fifteen years ago, when I was a humble apprentice working under your supervision? How I bungled an important case and you knocked half my face off with your fist? You covered yourself then, by lying. Your word was better than mine and you went free. But, even out of the service, and with the passing of the years, I never forgot. How could I, with half my face gone because of your brutality? The war did many things for surgery, and I was made over, after a fashion. You didn't remember me when I came back to you as corpsman. The devil protects his own, I guess. He even sent Alexander to show me the way out. Alexander's story—with my variations! The poor fool was rolling on his bed and raving to himself when I sneaked in and stole his shoes. And when I returned them later. Pretty slick, I'll say! Putting that blood on the model was fortunate—a masterpiece. Any good doctor would know at once that the poison in Danver's system was inert.

"Fortunate for me, too," continued the Thing, "that Alex thought it was the right side of that apparition's face that was gone, instead of the left! Shows what imagination will do to a smart man's mind."

The corpsman grinned horribly to himself.

But that grin was an angelic smile compared to the grin that the corpsman achieved a moment later—after he had slid his hand into his mouth and literally pulled his right upper jaw out of that mouth! His face then was a mask even more hideous than the bodiless, jawless shadow that Alexander saw always, there in the darkness of his little cell—the shadow that was to stay with him as long as he lived. Then the corpsman slid the false work back into his mouth and grinned anew—another man and another face.

Then, reaching in his pocket, he drew a square piece of ordinary cardboard forth and gazed at it. Upon its surface was the print of the other teeth that should have shown on the throat of the murdered man—and would have shown there, too, had the corpsman not held that cardboard between the teeth and Danvers' throat!

Slowly chuckling to himself, the corpsman tore the cardboard into little bits, made a pile of the pieces, and touched a match to the result.

NEITHER Alexander nor any member of the inquest saw this, as I said before. But the very Officer of the Day who had relieved Alexander per arrangement of the corpsman, was just passing the window outside after having visited his sentries. He saw, and understood what he did not hear. A smile of satisfaction shone on his face as he glided away from the window to take the story to Alexander—and to make ready the cell for a new occupant.



A Wild Night of Adventure with Three Fiendish Men in Red Turbans

Dead in Three Hours

By ELWIN J. OWENS

A PITCH-DARK night, a pelting rain, a fierce wind. Three disagreeable elements, the end of the car line, and four blocks to go in the sparsely settled suburbs.

Head down, hat pulled tightly over his eyes, top-coat buttoned up snugly, hands thrust deep into the pockets and key between his fingers, Roland Downs walked briskly, for he was in a great hurry.

He clattered up the wooden walk, jerked out the makeshift key his sister had given him, inserted it in the lock; a quick turn and he bolted through the door, banged it shut, and searched for the electric light button.

No button! He struck a match, and was dumfounded.

"Great God!" he gasped between chattering teeth; "I'm in the wrong house!"

Wheeling about, he seized the knob with both hands; but the thing was locked—and the key was on the outside.

A door in the rear squeaked, the rays of an oil lamp stole across the unswept floor, and three fiendish voices gurgled.

Roland Downs turned on his heel, and looked down the glistening blades of three ugly knives thrust toward him through the opening. Behind them grinned three semi-human countenances.

The college athlete stared at them, amazed, excited. Red turbans were set slightly to one side on heavy growths of jet-black hair. Bushy black beards completely covered their broad faces save for their large noses and piercing eyes. Each wore a mantle of crimson, tightly buttoned below the burl of beard, and girdled at the hips. Large men, all of them.

"I came for my sister's wraps, and entered the wrong house," ventured the young man nervously.

Rows of uneven pearly white teeth glistened through the unkempt beards. A malevolent smile in the corners of their eyes, they advanced upon the man at the outer door, blades still pointed toward him.

Roland Downs lunged for a side window, intent on jumping through it. Steel bars extending from casement to casement threw him back. His hat fell to the floor.

The turbaned beings laughed derisively while Downs gained his equilibrium. He squared himself, back against the door. Slowly, the men in red raiment continued toward him, their sharp eyes watching his every movement.

"Let me out! I meant no harm! I am a stranger in the city, and this is the first trip to my sister's place alone," offered the college man weakly, his face white and his lips quivering with fear. "It is an accident, I say! I must have taken the wrong street."

"Burglar! Artful housebreaker!" hissed one.

"More than likely he's seeking the golden goblet," suggested another in a guttural undertone.

"Yes," grinned the third one quickly, slightly nodding his large head, "men don't go for their sisters' wraps at 3 o'clock in the morning, especially in a strange city."

"Bring the lamp that we may better see this smooth-tongued one," ordered the first speaker, lowering his blade and gesturing toward the rear.

One of the number moved back with hastened step. The frightened man turned quickly round. Gripping the knob, he braced his foot against the wall and jerked violently. The door remained firm.

"No, no!" admonished one in rounded tones; "you are here, and you will remain here until we are through with you. Turn round!"

Roland Downs paused a moment, his face to the door. If he must fight, he might as well prepare! Instantly he pulled off his coat and turned.

Two glittering blades of steel, close to his sides, defied a further move. Grim smiles twisted the ugly, determined countenances of the turbaned men, and their small, black eyes were painfully piercing.

With noiseless tread, the third member of the robed gang returned, an oil lamp held high above his burly head—even as ancient plunderers carried torches,—his knife swinging at his girdle.

"Your name!" demanded one.

"Roland Downs," replied the younger man, his hands falling limply to his sides.

The men nearest him lowered their blades until the ends touched the floor and, turning to the one with the lamp, called him to them. Mumbled conversation, earnest gestures, heads close together, they stood.

While they were thus engaged, Roland Downs' brown eyes roved about.

An old table stood in the center of the barren room. The walls were dingy, and black shades were tightly drawn at the windows. A wide opening, with crudely carved wooden images set on each side, disclosed a middle chamber. Its floor was covered with litter; strange paintings and charts were numerous about the walls. At one side, in a fireplace where struggled a few dying coals, a languid white smoke curled upward.

THE men in crimson had ceased to talk. All was silent within—so deadly quiet that Roland Downs could hear his own irregular breathing. Outside, the incessant patter of the rain, the whistle of the wind, rumbles of thunder, and an occasional report of the lightning's flash. A strange predicament, a devilish night! He shuddered involuntarily.

When he turned back to the robed men before him, their catlike eyes were focused upon him. Those broad, coarse faces, masked in red turbans and the ruffled growths of beard, were more hideous than before.

An inaudible word. The men in scarlet were resolute. Each glanced at the other two in turn. They nodded. Decision! The one who held the lamp set it upon the table, and returned to his place beside the others. Then, turning, he pointed to the middle room.

"Go there!" he ordered firmly, coldly.

Roland Downs hesitated. His trembling lips parted as he attempted to speak.

Bang! Two dropped their blades upon the floor and seized him. Lifting him off his feet, the crimson-robed men carried him between the carved images and set him in a cumbersome chair.

Again, mumbled words. Silence. A whispered command from one. Instantly, a black cloth dropped over Roland Downs' head. His hands were bound to the arms of the weighty chair, and his feet were tied.

One touched him on the shoulder and ordered that he be calm. An-

other stirred at the coals upon the grate.

Rain fell in torrents and the place trembled from a gust of wind. Thunder drowned all other sounds.

"What do you intend?" inquired Downs, as they made no further move. No voice answered him.

A lull in the storm. He heard the men treading softly in the litter. Then, a peculiar snapping, sizzling in the grate. A strange odor, like the burning of incense, assailed his nostrils. He began to feel drowzy, dreamy, head-heavy.

The three men settled down with a groan and, through the draped thing that covered his head, he could discern the faint flicker of candles. The oil lamp was burning low.

Weird strains now crept upon his ear—notes strummed languidly upon a muffled stringed instrument, clear but almost inaudible, as if played in the distance.

Moans rose above the music. Little by little, these died out. He heard the turbaned men changing position. Unbroken silence for a minute. A single, long-drawn note. Three voices blended in whispered unison, chanting a doleful melody.

The man in the chair was fast growing heavy-lidded. He feared he would fall asleep. What the men were doing, he could not tell. He cautiously tried the cords that bound his hands to the chair. He believed that he could break them.

Gathering his full strength, he leapt to his feet. The chair was lifted a foot from the floor. Snap! He was free of hand. He flung the covering from his head.

The others did not move. Their turbaned heads bowed, and huddled about a something that occupied their entire attention, they sat, legs folded under them, their arms crossed upon their chests.

ROLAND DOWNS stealthily untied the rope about his feet and stepped forward. To his surprize, there upon a pedestal was what represented the dismembered torso of a woman with a huge animal head—a waxen thing two feet high, with a large mouth, gulping mechanically. Fiery eyes rolled from side to side.

Suddenly, the three men in crimson vesture removed their turbans and began bowing ceremoniously to the object. This action continued for some time. Then one of them lifted a golden goblet to the animal lips, and poured in a reddish liquid. All raised themselves upon their knees. Again they bowed; then to their feet, making low salaams. Carefully lifting the idol of their reverence, they carried it to a corner and, setting it down, drew heavy crimson drapes, secreting it from view.

As one man, they turned quickly, even before Roland Downs could move.

"You are guilty, young man," said one, calmly. "We shall not suffer for any punishment we shall choose to visit upon you." He scanned the younger man from head to foot. "By our laws a night robber is subject to death, based on the indisputable truth that to prowl at night-time is illegal; and, furthermore, a man who would rob in darkness, we hold, would murder to gain his loot."

He nodded commandingly to the other turbaned ones. They sprang forward and seized the college man, each by a wrist.

"Now that you are securely held," continued the spokesman in a deep undertone, "we shall proceed."

"But I can prove my innocence," pleaded Downs, his brown eyes turning from one to another of the bearded men.

"Innocence!" hissed one at his arm.

"A smooth tongue," added the one at his other side.

"True," agreed the leader, grinning broadly. "You have not robbed, that we admit; and our punishment will prevent such an act. Our laws punish for intent. Do men enter strange houses at 3 o'clock in the morning for any good reason?"

Roland Downs did not raise his eyes, neither did he reply.

"You shall be dead in three hours!" declared the one who had previously pronounced the law.

"Dead in three hours!" chanted the men at his back.

"'Tis a bad and stormy night," continued the spokesman grimly. "He says he is a stranger in the city." He chuckled gleefully, his small black eyes sparkling; and, stroking his bushy beard, continued shrilly: "The sewer for his body when we are through with him. Nobody will know. Nobody!"

"How do you like it, stranger?" asked one close by, settling his fingers deeply into the flesh of the younger man's arm.

"Take him below!" ordered the leader, picking up the oil lamp.

QUICKLY the two men grabbed him. Through the opening between the carved pillars, past the fireplace, and into the rear room, the men in crimson guided him. The leader glided past and opened the door to the basement. Down he went, lighting the way.

When he reached the door, Roland Downs glanced at the two men at his sides. He hesitated. Grim determination on the bearded countenances answered him. They pulled him on.

The odor of musty clothes, moldy leather, and decomposed flesh was nauseating. When the basement floor was reached, many steps below, Roland Downs was frightened, weak, ill. He asked for a swallow of water.

They laughed at his request, and led him to a door in the side wall. They opened it. A hand-made door of mortised plank, six inches thick, beveled at the edges, securely bound with iron straps, and swinging heavily on hinges of hammered steel, all as strongly built as those common to refrigerators, though not so tightly fitted.

They pointed down. A concrete floor walled in with stone, in the center of which was a manhole, open, dark. Far below he faintly saw a black stream of water, filled with débris, rushing, gushing, foaming.

"That's the sewer. Your body goes there. You'll get several swallows of water then," said the bearded one at his right.

The man with the lamp was holding it so that Roland Downs could see clearly. From the bottom of the door to within about ten feet of the underground current a steel ladder was bolted to the wall of stone—a wall worn smooth as polished glass, greasy and bespattered with filth.

Downs computed the distance from the water to the ladder, and the swiftness of the current. No chance of escape, once there! He stepped back with a gasp.

Three grinning, fiendish faces greeted him. Three beings in scarlet robes stepped back, taunting him with low gurgles.

His puzzled, bewildered eyes strayed to the unfinished weavings on the basement walls, partly cured hides, and hideous, carved images. In one corner of the room was an immense fireplace, over which swung a huge kettle; about it lay pounds and pounds of unrendered tallow, lumps of wax, and numerous molds. Just opposite was a pile of bones, scraped clean. Empty boxes, here and there.

"Dead in three hours!" escaped his feverish lips.

"Dead in three hours!" mockingly repeated the red-turbaned men in doleful unison.

A SHARP command in a tongue that Roland Downs had never heard. The leader placed the lamp upon an empty box. Three men stood in front of him with clutching, menacing fingers.

In those critical, uncertain moments, Roland Downs heard the patter of the rain, the raging of the wind, and the creaking of the structure above him. His mind wandered in reflection. Seldom had he heard such a gale, such rolling thunder, and sharp reports that he knew were coincident with the lightning's flash. A storm that was certain to bring destruction, perhaps death to someone.

These thoughts flitted quickly through his worried mind. Though he did not realize it, his face was one of agony.

Three fiendish men in red had watched his changing countenance. Had they let him ponder over death until he was suffering all of the inward pangs? They believed they had.

Roland Downs was suddenly startled. Three crimson robes moved forward instantly. Three savage grumblings, and the muscular fingers of three pairs of hands settled into his flesh. They bore him down. He was flat upon the concrete floor.

Once he grappled them, and in the scuffle they tore his clothing. They gouged him relentlessly, rolled him, pounded him. Twice more the younger man fought back and struggled to his knees, only to be violently beaten down, scratched, battered, sore and limp.

Noting that his muscles had relaxed, the three men drew back and stood erect.

"Roll away the rendering kettle," said the leader sternly, "and kindle the flame!"

The other two hesitated.

Placing his foot heavily upon the victim's breast, the speaker urged them on.

"Be quick!" said he. "Nothing to fear! I'll hold him firm."

"Should we do this?" ventured one.

"Why not?" countered the other instantly. "Did we not have the sanction of our sacred one? Did we not satisfy her with wine from the golden goblet?"

Roland Downs moved his eyes to follow them. He saw two of the men in crimson turn around to carry out the order. They rolled out the huge kettle. Carefully they kindled the fire, placing wood upon it until the flames leapt high up the broad chimney.

"The wire cable!" commanded the one who had remained with the exhausted man. "Get that and place a loop under his arms and one about his feet. Drag him into the fire! When his body is completely charred, dump him into the sewer, and away!"

Bringing the cable, the two bound him as they were ordered. Then, as if conscience-stricken, one allowed the cable to slip from his hand. With bowed head, he stepped back and gazed upon the helpless man. He spoke in a foreign tongue.

Though the man on the floor could not understand a word, he knew from the gestures and the expressions of the face that this one was averse to further punishment. The foot was lifted from his chest as the leader, troubled, moved to join the other two in whispered words.

Roland Downs gathered his courage. He felt that if this man had rebelled there was still a chance. An effort on his own part might mean his freedom. At least, he would die trying.

SUDDENLY, the storm caught his attention; heavy thunder, a terrible gale, the timbers above him creaked

The house rocked perceptibly. Crash! A door upstairs was blown open. Windows were shattered. Now or never! He lifted himself to his elbow.

Three pairs of sharp black eyes rolled wildly. Up the stairs went the leader, closely followed by the other two. Crimson robes fluttered as they hurried up, up, up.

In the glare of the fire, the college man spied several tools and implements. He would be able to fight his way out with them. Freeing himself from the cable, he got to his feet and started.

One step. He stopped. A corner of the house was being lifted. It dropped back. Timbers snapped. Splinters fell about him. He looked for safety. The door to the sewer! He was there in an instant. A pull, and it was open. He noted how narrow was the concrete shelf about the manhole, scarcely a foothold. He paused.

No time to spare! The structure was being swept from over his head. He saw it twisted like paper in a whirlwind. Already, one foot was on the top round of steel. He closed the opening, and held to the ladder.

He placed his ear against the heavy door. A crash! Flying timbers were being driven against the door. Water poured in through the cracks. Presently, the wind died down, nothing was audible save the pattering of the rain.

He groped for a firm footing. Lunging against the door with his full weight, he forced it the width of his hand. Through this opening he secured a board; and, with it, little by little, he moved the débris until he could squeeze through.

Over broken boards, brick, small branches of trees, and rubbish, he finally crawled to the top. Day was breaking.

Cautiously, he looked about him. Débris, destruction everywhere. Something red caught his eye. He went to investigate. Three heads of black hair; and below them, to the waistline, three crimson robes were exposed to view. Their bodies crushed and mangled, all were in a death-grip, clinging to their gulping, blinking half-woman, half-beast.

"Dead in three hours," he repeated slowly, reflectively.

He glanced at his tattered clothing; his bruises pained him, and he was cold. Yet, he smiled. Head erect, he started for his sister's home. He went straight as an arrow would travel, looking neither to right nor to left.

Roland Downs was in a hurry!



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are missing...

ing at his slight advantage, the creature drew me into the shadows.

"*Monsieur*, you are American—yes? It is good. In English I will tell my story and you will help. You will surely help, *Monsieur*. Americans are good and kind. These Germans and Portuguese are swine, *Monsieur*, swine. Englishmen will not believe. Englishmen have no imagination, *Monsieur*, but you Americans are different. You will help me. Do not look at me, *Monsieur*—only listen. I talk like a white man, *n'est ce pas?* You'll admit that, *Monsieur*. Forget this shell, this hideous shell! Only the soul of man is divine, *Monsieur*, and the ego is all that may claim existence. See, I have studied much. I am in this shell, but I am not a part of it. *Monsieur*, I swear to you that I am a white man."

By this time my interest was aroused. I forgot the repulsiveness of the man in the interest that I felt for his story. Despite the evidence of my eyes I was beginning to believe his oft-reiterated claim that he was a white man. Never had I heard a negro talk as did he; then, too, there were his eyes! The man had plunged into his story without waiting for my permission. Sitting beside him on the curbing of a forgotten side street, I heard him through, and never will I regret my stay.

"*Monsieur*, it is a long tale that I tell, but I will bore you not if I can help. Years ago—oh, many years—I came to your country for study at your great Cornell. Those were happy days. I was handsome then, *Monsieur*, and I was white. The best schools in France had given me much of knowledge. To America I came for those things which I might learn nowhere else. I was going to write stories of France in English, *Monsieur*, and I was going to write stories of America in French. Mine was to be a great name on two continents, and Destiny was smiling upon me.

"Then was I told of this accursed South America, which was so romantic and so profitable to the adventurer. Ten thousand furies upon the country and upon the man who told me of it! It is *un pays infernale, Monsieur*, and I have been where the cohorts of Satan held court and spoke without language. But I am anticipating, and *Monsieur* will think me mad. I am mad, I think, but I am white. The good God knows that I am white.

"We started from this blighted city of uncouth ignorance or from a city like it. *Monsieur*, I can not remember dates or places. Far off into the interior we went, far into a country that was rank with vegetation and foul with insects and reptiles. We sought a temple that was built from the salvage of Atlantis, *Monsieur*, and we laughed at a country that was trying to send us back unsatisfied. Would to God it had beaten us!

"Fever swept our camp, far from the haunts of men. Often at night strange music came from the heart of the forest, and the native guides murmured. Discipline was ruined, you understand, by the fever, and we could not hold those black natives of this despicable country. They deserted us there in the heart of that reptile-infested jungle; three white men with the fever and no food. George (I forget the rest of his name) died the next day, and Miller, who was a German and a blunderer, was bitten by a snake. He squealed like a pig, *Monsieur*, and then he started laughing. The laughing was worse than the squealing—oh, much worse! I think that I shot him. I don't know. I must be very old, *Monsieur*, and I have suffered much.

"That first night alone was like a page from your Poe or from our great de Maupassant. Trees live at night in this devil-country; like snakes, they move and they speak in

a language that is most obscene. No tree in your country or in mine would speak as do these, my friend. Our trees in my beloved France or those about the campus at Cornell are fine and noble trees; when they whisper it is the language of God. These trees are moved by the breezes of obscenity and they speak in the language of hell. They do, *Monsieur*, for I have heard them.

"Snakes there were, too, that were not snakes of the earth. In circles they wove themselves and danced about me. I crouched by Miller, who was a pig of a German, but who was better than any other German, and I mocked at the trees and at the snakes. I had to kill him when he laughed, but, *Monsieur*, I could not let those snakes suck the soul out of him. You wouldn't either, *Monsieur*. Even a German soul was too good for them. But I failed. Ten thousand oaths upon them, I failed! It was all right until the music started; then I was helpless. You may thank God, *Monsieur*, that you have never heard such music. It came up from the ground and it was as foul as the breath of that accursed jungle. I was helpless in the spell of it. As I sat there helpless the snakes crawled upon me, but they didn't strike—curse them, they didn't strike! They fondled me and gloated over me with their slimy touch and miasmic breath; writhed across my body until I thought I should go mad, *Monsieur*.

"Then came the supreme horror. One snake, a treacherous, slender demon, sprang from my body and over on the body of the dead. Did you ever see a German die, *Monsieur?* They die with their mouths open, like stuck pigs. That is how Miller died, and he lay there in that infested jungle with his mouth open. Imagine! That any man should have such rotten taste in dying! But he was a German. If only he had closed his mouth, it could not have happened; but may the saints disown me, that snake, who was a devil, curled about that disgusting body which had an immortal soul, *Monsieur*, and then he went right into that open mouth. For the moment I forgot the music that was paralyzing me, and I sprang toward him. Then Miller moved. His stomach moved in and out as a German's does when he drinks beer. It was so horrible, *Monsieur*, that I fainted. That is shameful, but you, perhaps, would faint, too, *Monsieur*.

"WHEN I awoke I was in a big room and the snakes were gone. Miller, too, was gone, and the music was still. All was peace and I was again happy. Not for long. There is no happiness in this accursed country. When next I opened my eyes there were men around me; brown, handsome men with great beards. Great robes reached to their feet, and high peaked caps rose from their foreheads. Scientists, I thought, and I was content. With scientists I was safe, for I had studied much science. With an effort I spoke. My tongue was swollen with the fever. There was no response from that silent group about me. They just looked, *Monsieur*, and their eyes burned me. I closed my eyes and tried them again in English, in Spanish, in German and in Latin. They gave no evidence of even having heard me and they uttered no sound.

"I shrink from telling you what came next, *Monsieur*. I am a blight upon earth, but I have been always a gentlemen. We French have pride and, *Monsieur*, it was so humiliating. Those men fastened to my neck a collar like to that which is worn by dogs. Leading me by a chain, despite my protests, they dragged me from the room.

"Immediately upon entering the other room, I knew that that which had called me so far had been fulfilled. *Monsieur*, I was in a temple of Atlantis! I have studied much,

my friend, and I am sure. It is such irony that I should enter that beautiful temple on the end of a leash. Like a dog, *Monsieur*, like a dog!

"Fully forty creatures like those who led me were in that big temple room. As I followed them I observed them with most intenseness. Never once did anyone speak to another. All was of a great silence. Each man wore to his waist a great beard; his dress was a simple robe of one piece, from which hung a sash which trailed to the ground beside his sandals. Strangest of all sights to me was the instrument which each man carried on his back. *Monsieur*, those instruments were curled snakes of gold writhed into many looped letter S's and strung as is a violin. Most fascinating and unusual.

Across the room I was dragged and hurled to the ground. A gentleman of France, *Monsieur*, and I had not the strength to rise! I lay there with a thousand curses in my heart, *Monsieur*, and then the devil's art began. One of my captors took from his back that serpent instrument and began to play upon it with a tiny bow. It was not music, *Monsieur*, and yet it was. It was not music as you know it and yet it was a series of notes. For a moment I was as one stunned, and then I understood. *Monsieur*, may the Virgin protect you from it, that bearded creature was speaking with that serpent string. As that sound wailed through the temple I became aware that it was more than music; it was sound reduced to the elements of expression; it was a universal language, a language that I might understand though I could not express it in my thoughts.

"No word was spoken, yet in that plaintive sound I heard the expressed thoughts of that bearded man as plainly as I could have heard and understood the language of my beloved France. 'Fellow-worshipers,' he said, 'we have here a strange animal that utters guttural sounds of no meaning.' (I shuddered, *Monsieur*, to be called an animal.) 'He will doubtless be interesting to our scientists. He seems of a species of animal close to man; probably one of the beastlike progenitors of our race similar to that other creature from which science has learned so much. His skin is much fairer, but he is undoubtedly of the same species. I move that we turn him over to the learned doctors.'

"From all over that room, *Monsieur*, those devil instruments twanged. It was conversation — a conversation most unnerving. I understood their language; if only I could talk with them! *Monsieur*, may you never know the terror that was mine. Condemned to perhaps vivisection like an animal and no way of making myself known as a human being! Desperation was in me in that moment. With all of my weakened strength I hurled myself at the man closest to me, and before he could recover from his surprize, *Monsieur*, I had wrested from him his instrument. Fleeing to the far end of the temple, I strove vainly to play it. I was not unfamiliar with the violin, but this instrument was not for my uneducated hands. I succeeded only in wringing from it a few discordant sounds when they were upon me. Left alone, perhaps, I might have solved it; attacked on all sides I went down to the marble flagging of the temple. Then came the darkness.

"WHEN next I came to my senses, *Monsieur*, I was in a cage like an animal; naked and chained. Such is the fate of a gentleman in this uncouth country. For days, it seemed, I stayed there and saw no living creature. Then came the scientists. For weeks I prayed for death. Despite my pleadings, they strapped me to operating tables and carved me with ghoulish interest. They understood no language but their accursed

music and I was as helpless as a dumb brute. *Monsieur*, when you go back to your America, pray them for the sake of a Frenchman who has suffered to cut up no living animal. Hell, *Monsieur*, would not be so unkind.

"At first they were merely content with causing suffering and counting my pulsebeats. Their conferences, which I heard, decreed this as necessary to gage my nearness to man. Then they became more curious. Six of my teeth, *Monsieur*, were twisted from their sockets and examined under microscopes of queer design. A long incision was made in my abdomen and my intestines examined. After this operation only was I given any treatment. This was not mercy; it was solely that I might live.

"Life was just one nightmare in which I prayed for death—a death that did not come. But I had not conceived of the horror before me. Had I dreamed it, *Monsieur*, I would have willed an eternity on that hellish operating table. To what I next faced, the tortures of the knife were tame.

"There came a time when I heard them say that the examination was finished. Like a fool, *Monsieur*, I sighed with relief. They spoke (if music is language) much that I comprehended not. They said that they had found my vibratory chord which proved that I was very close to being a man. The humiliation of it, *Monsieur!* They spoke much of that chord and I comprehended not *then*. If I had, perhaps, the saving grace of madness might have been mine.

"For weeks of lovely peace, *Monsieur*, I was left alone with my gaping wounds. You can not realize the bliss of that aloneness—you have never suffered. Then I was led on my chain to yet another room; a strange room which housed the hordes of hell. They were not visible, but I know that they were there, *Monsieur*.

"I was strapped in spread-eagle fashion as on a crucifix before a terrible stringed serpent, of amazing size and many strings. A most horrible serpent, *Monsieur!*

"Then started the ordeal. One of my captors struck from that serpent a most terrible chord. As it echoed in the room I felt my arms go numb. It rang again and the most terrible agony traveled along my arms and into my back. I screamed with pain and my captors looked at each other and nodded. Another chord and the pain was in my feet; another and my intestines died within me. Man knows no agony that can be compared with that.

"For weeks those fiends experimented with those chords, and at each new combination I felt a new agony. I wonder that I did not die. It was, I guess, *Monsieur*, that they were far too clever. For a long time I was blind with a raging fire where once I saw the world; then was I dumb with an agony that I could not voice. No torture that a body can suffer was spared me in that terrible period.

"At last they were satisfied. I could react no more. With a feeling of utter indifference and despair I heard them say that the experiment was over. I had ceased to hope for pity or for freedom, *Monsieur;* I welcomed only death. But they were not finished. One more horror awaited me, and that was the most cruel of all. That was the living death. One day they spoke of the riddle of the universe. Evidently, *Monsieur*, they had not solved that, any more than we. They speculated on whether man possessed a soul and lived hereafter. Then they grew bolder and questioned whether animals such as I possessed souls. Then the hellish suggestion came. The other creature of experimentation lived. Why not try the experiment of changing his soul from his body to

mine, and mine to his? One pointed out that they could tell from the eyes if a change took place and the fact that the vibrations would differ. *Monsieur*, I was sick of heart. That was the crowning decree of despair, and could I have caused my own death, I would not be talking to you tonight.

"The other creature was brought in and I recoiled with horror. He was a native of the lowest type. With such was I classified, *Monsieur*—I who was, and am, a gentleman of France! He was black and horribly maimed; a most terrible sight, *Monsieur*. He shrank back and had to be clubbed into the room. Evidently he, too, had had his fill of horror.

"THE experiment was slow in starting. Much had first to be arranged. I forgot (*Monsieur*, you will pardon me), I told you not of the other invention they had. Every night they played to me a most bewitching and stimulating melody which I could not understand. Later I knew. It was a nerve tonic which helped me to stay alive. When I knew, I cursed it, and I cursed it again now as they played it for that poor native and myself. It was exhilarating, though, *Monsieur*, and I felt new strength in me. Strength when I prayed for weakness!

"At last they were ready. The torture commenced all over again; the torture of nerves. One thing I noticed through my pain. Those notes which caused me to shriek left my companion unmoved; his agony meant relief for me. Evidently his vibratory chord was far different.

"For a while we both rested, and no more notes resounded in the room. I slumped against my straps in sheer fatigue. Then I straightened with horror. One of our captors had walked up to my companion in pain and, *Monsieur*, he placed against his forehead a sharp needle with a fan-shaped base. This he slapped, driving the point in some inches. As it entered his forehead, the native slumped down and I believed him dead. I was glad, *Monsieur*, and I awaited my needle with joy. I was disappointed. Death was not so easily won. Deep into my head went that horrible point, but unconsciousness did not come. I was ever doomed to suffer.

"After a while one of the fiends started to play upon that serpent. Music beat about my ears, a wild beat of sound that silenced pain and shook my nerves with an ecstatic thrill. For the moment I knew a wild and untrammeled joy. Across the room I could see my fellow captive. He, too, had returned to life and seemed in the thrill of delirium. It was wonderful, *Monsieur*, and horrible. I hated myself for liking it.

"The music changed. A sudden pain shot through me and I felt something wrenched from within. The next sensation was of looking down on the room from above my body. Something cold passed me in the air and another note, two notes, sounded below me. I felt myself wrenched again violently and I was (horror of horrors!) back in the room again looking out of (*Monsieur*, I swear it!) —out of the body of the native; out of this body, *Monsieur!*

"That was the climax of my sufferings. My French soul could stand suffering and humiliation, but, *Monsieur*, it could not stand that. It was too much and I fainted. Weak? Perhaps. But, *Monsieur*, you can not understand.

"I never saw the temple or the fiends within it again. Maybe some day in hell I may, *Monsieur*, if I have not already suffered enough for the sins of my miserable life. Ask me not what happened next. I do not know.

"I next remember a boat on a river and a negro who lived in my body sitting opposite me. I killed him, *Monsieur*. With these two hands I choked him. I could not stand, *Monsieur*, a negro soul in my body. You couldn't either, *Monsieur*. I had to kill him. Besides, he laughed as Miller did. From that day, *Monsieur*, I have worn this rotten body and no one would hear my tale. But you—you are an American; not a German pig, or an accursed Spaniard—you are an American, and, *Monsieur*, you will give me the price of passage to France? I can not die in this accursed country, *Monsieur*, and that is all I ask.

"Ah, *Monsieur*, a thousand blessings upon you. May you never, *Monsieur*, hear music such as I have heard, and may the Virgin guard you. Good night, *Monsieur*."

THE night I left Rio de Janeiro I passed a small crowd of people gathered about the entrance to an establishment of doubtful fame. With the curiosity which is normal to an American, I stopped. "What is it?" I asked.

A man in uniform answered me. "It is nothing, *Señor*, a black man has killed himself with too much dope. It is better so."

I edged in through the crowd, spurred by some intuition that I could not define. On the ground lay my raconteur of a week before, wrapped in the mantle of death. Seen in the full light of the window, he was unmistakably negro, and two vessels had left since the night that I had given him passage.

I may have been an easy mark, and yet . . . . . he did not speak as does a negro. . . . .

WEIRD STORY REPRINTS

No. 9
The Mask of the Red Death

By EDGAR ALLAN POE

THE Red Death had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its avatar and its seal—the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution. The scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men. And the whole seizure, progress, and termination of the disease were the incidents of half an hour.

But the Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and sagacious. When his dominions were half depopulated, he summoned to his presence a thousand hale and light-hearted friends from among the knights and dames of his court, and with these retired to the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys. This was an extensive and magnificent structure, the

creation of the prince's own eccentric yet august taste. A strong and lofty wall girdled it in. This wall had gates of iron. The courtiers, having entered, brought furnaces and massy hammers and welded the bolts. They resolved to leave means neither of ingress nor egress to the sudden impulses of despair or of frenzy from within. The abbey was amply provisioned. With such precautions the courtiers might bid defiance to contagion. The external world could take care of itself. In the meantime it was folly to grieve, or to think. The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure. There were buffoons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet-dancers, there were musicians, there was beauty, there was wine. All these and security within. Without was the Red Death.

It was toward the close of the fifth or sixth month of his seclusion, and while the pestilence raged most furiously abroad, that the Prince Prospero entertained his thousand friends at a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence.

It was a voluptuous scene, that masquerade. But first let me tell of the rooms in which it was held. There were seven—an imperial suite. In many palaces, however, such suites form a long and straight vista, while the folding doors slide back nearly to the walls on either hand, so that the view of the whole extent is scarcely impeded. Here the case was very different; as might have been expected from the duke's love of the bizarre. The apartments were so irregularly disposed that the vision embraced but little more than one at a time. There was a sharp turn at every twenty or thirty yards, and at each turn a novel effect. To the right and left, in the middle of each wall, a tall and narrow Gothic window looked out upon a closed corridor which pursued the windings of the suite. These windows were of stained glass whose color varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the decorations of the chamber into which it opened. That at the eastern extremity was hung, for example, in blue—and vividly blue were its windows. The second chamber was purple in its ornaments and tapestries, and here the panes were purple. The third was green throughout, and so were the casements. The fourth was furnished and lighted with orange—the fifth with white—the sixth with violet. The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in black velvet tapestries that hung all over the ceiling and down the walls, falling in heavy folds upon a carpet of the same material and hue. But in this chamber only, the color of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations. The panes here were scarlet—a deep blood-color. Now in no one of the seven apartments was there any lamp or candelabrum, amid the profusion of golden ornaments that lay scattered to and fro or depended from the roof. There was no light of any kind emanating from lamp or candle within the suite of chambers. But in the corridors that followed the suite, there stood, opposite to each window, a heavy tripod, bearing a brazier of fire, that projected its rays through the tinted glass and so glaringly illuminated the room. And thus were produced a multitude of gaudy and fantastic appearances. But in the western or black chamber the effect of the fire-light that streamed upon the dark hangings through the blood-tinted panes was ghastly in the extreme, and produced so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered, that there were few of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all.

It was in this apartment, also, that there stood against the western wall a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum swung to and fro with a dull,

heavy, monotonous clang; and when the minute-hand made the circuit of the face, and the hour was to be stricken, there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear and loud and deep and exceedingly musical, but of so peculiar a note and emphasis that, at each lapse of an hour, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause, momentarily, in their performance, to harken to the sound; and thus the waltzers perforce ceased their evolutions; and there was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company; and, while the chimes of the clock yet rang, it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused revery or meditation. But when the echoes had fully ceased, a light laughter at once pervaded the assembly; the musicians looked at each other and smiled as if at their own nervousness and folly, and made whispering vows, each to the other, that the next chiming of the clock should produce in them no similar emotion; and then, after the lapse of sixty minutes (which embrace three thousand and six hundred seconds of the time that flies), there came yet another chiming of the clock, and then were the same disconcert and tremulousness and meditation as before.

But, in spite of these things, it was a gay and magnificent revel. The tastes of the duke were peculiar. He had a fine eye for colors and effects. He disregarded the decora of mere fashion. His plans were bold and fiery, and his conceptions glowed with barbaric luster. There are some who would have thought him mad. His followers felt that he was not. It was necessary to hear and see and touch him to be *sure* that he was not.

He had directed, in great part, the movable embellishments of the seven chambers, upon occasion of this great fête; and it was his own guiding taste which had given character to the masqueraders. Be sure they were grotesque. There were much glare and glitter and piquancy and fantasm —much of what has been since seen in *Hernani*. There were arabesque figures with unsuited limbs and appointments. There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There were much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the bizarre, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust. To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams. And these—the dreams—writhed in and about, taking hue from the rooms, and causing the wild music of the orchestra to seem as the echo of their steps. And, anon, there strikes the ebony clock which stands in the hall of the velvet. And then, for a moment, all is still, and all is silent save the voice of the clock. The dreams are stiff-frozen as they stand. But the echoes of the chime die away—they have endured but an instant—and a light, half subdued laughter floats after them as they depart. And now again the music swells, and the dreams live, and writhe to and fro more merrily than ever, taking hue from the many-tinted windows through which stream the rays from the tripods. But to the chamber which lies most westwardly of the seven there are now none of the maskers who venture; for the night is waning away; and there flows a ruddier light through the blood-colored panes; and the blackness of the sable drapery appalls; and to him whose foot falls upon the sable carpet, there comes from the near clock of ebony a muffled peal more solemnly emphatic than any which reaches their ears who indulge in the more remote gayeties of the other apartments.

But these other apartments were densely crowded, and in them beat feverishly the heart of life. And the

revel went whirlingly on, until at length there commenced the sounding of midnight upon the clock. And then the music ceased, as I have told; and the evolutions of the waltzers were quieted; and there was an uneasy cessation of all things as before. But now there were twelve strokes to be sounded by the bell of the clock; and thus it happened, perhaps, that more of thought crept, with more of time, into the meditations of the thoughtful among those who revelled. And thus too, it happened, perhaps, that before the last echoes of the last chime had utterly sunk into silence, there were many individuals in the crowd who had found leisure to become aware of the presence of a masked figure which had arrested the attention of no single individual before. And the rumor of this new presence having spread itself whisperingly around, there arose at length from the whole company a buzz, or murmur, expressive of disapprobation and surprize—then, finally, of terror, of horror and of disgust.

In an assembly of fantasms such as I have painted, it may well be supposed that no ordinary appearance could have excited such sensation. In truth the masquerade license of the night was nearly unlimited; but the figure in question had out-Heroded Herod, and gone beyond the bounds of even the prince's indefinite decorum. There are chords in the hearts of the most reckless which can not be touched without emotion. Even with the utterly lost, to whom life and death are equally jests, there are matters of which no jest can be made. The whole company, indeed, seemed now deeply to feel that in the costume and bearing of the stranger neither wit nor propriety existed. The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat. And yet all this might have been endured, if not approved, by the mad revellers around. But the mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death. His vesture was dabbled in *blood*—and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror.

When the eyes of Prince Prospero fell upon this spectral image (which, with a slow and solemn movement, as if more fully to sustain its rôle, stalked to and fro among the waltzers) he was seen to be convulsed, in the first moment, with a strong shudder either of terror or distaste; but, in the next, his brow reddened with rage.

"Who dares" — he demanded hoarsely of the courtiers who stood near him—"who dares insult us with this blasphemous mockery? Seize him and unmask him—that we may know whom we have to hang, at sunrise, from the battlements!"

It was in the eastern or blue chamber in which stood the Prince Prospero as he uttered these words. They rang throughout the seven rooms loudly and clearly, for the prince was a bold and robust man, and the music had become hushed at the waving of his hand.

It was in the blue room where stood the prince, with a group of pale courtiers by his side. At first, as he spoke, there was a slight rushing movement of his group in the direction of the intruder, who, at the moment, was also near at hand, and now, with deliberate and stately step, made closer approach to the speaker. But from a certain nameless awe with which the mad assumptions of the mummer had inspired the whole party, there were found none who put forth hand to seize him; so that, unimpeded, he passed within a yard of the prince's

person; and, while the vast assembly, as if with one impulse, shrank from the centers of the rooms to the walls, he made his way uninterruptedly, but with the same solemn and measured step which had distinguished him from the first, through the blue chamber to the purple—through the purple to the green—through the green to the orange—through this again to the white—and even thence to the violet, ere a decided movement had been made to arrest him. It was then, however, that the Prince Prospero, maddening with rage and the shame of his own momentary cowardice, rushed hurriedly through the six chambers, while none followed him on account of a deadly terror that had seized upon all. He bore aloft a drawn dagger, and had approached, in rapid impetuosity, to within three or four feet of the retreating figure, when the latter, having attained the extremity of the velvet apartment, turned suddenly and confronted his pursuer. There was a sharp cry—and the dagger dropped gleaming upon the sable carpet, upon which, instantly afterward, fell prostrate in death the Prince Prospero. Then, summoning the wild courage of despair, a throng of the revellers at once threw themselves into the black apartment, and, seizing the mummer, whose tall figure stood erect and motionless within the shadow of the ebony clock, gasped in unutterable horror at finding the grave cerements and corpselike mask, which they handled with so violent a rudeness, untenanted by any tangible form.

And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.

The Inland Sea

***By* FRANK BELKNAP LONG, JR.**

I know a sea within a western land
Where winds of silence blow, and all forlorn
The black waves wash, from lonely morn to morn,
Upon a gale-blown stretch of whitened sand.
No petrels sweep above that somber strand,
No living thing of any creature born,
Save on the hilltops where a sullen band
Of gaunt wolves crouch beneath the lunar horn.

In icy shallows polar lilies grow,
Which sunder to reveal Jurassic clay:
A bullet-head with motion weird and slow
Precedes a bulk which drives the wolves away,
A dark and monstrous lizard-shape that glides
Upon the waters with the inland tides.

The Luster Of The Beast

by Charles Christopher Jenkins



"I wore smoke-colored glasses with great dark rims, so that none might see my eyes or the bestial luster that came into them in moments of excitement."

I AM no longer alone!

How many of you who read understand what that means? How can I best describe the transition from what I was to what I am?

Most people, no doubt, have experienced those inexplicable periods of mental distress when one becomes singularly detached, cut off from sympathetic communion with his fellows, as it were; an unreasonable despondency which makes one feel like an isolated element of humanity meandering through a part at the whim of a fate that for the time being has no particular plan for him or definite excuse for his existence.

It is as if one were an extra unit in current activities, a being not included in life's normal scheme of things.

Imagine, then, a man who has spent over a third of a lifetime continuously in such a woful state.

I, Amos Redfield, M. D., have had a colorless albino soul for twenty-nine years. Let me hasten to state that this unhappy condition did not arise from any fault which I was in a position to correct. Looking back over that dreary twenty-nine years of my life, which should have been the gold of my youth, I feel here obliged to pay tribute to the Amos Redfield that went before—the patient, deep-suffering Amos Redfield who bore it all without bitterness or outward show of complaint and who thus made it possible for me to step into this new existence clean of body and unsoured of mind.

I have not been a voluntary recluse, nor an esthete with dreams beyond the ken of my fellows. Neither have I been one of those individuals who claim they are misunderstood by the world. I could scarcely have been classed as eccentric; indeed I would have been happy to have enjoyed the independence of mind possessed by genius and the so-called crank.

As nearly as I can express it with definite clarity I was a nobody, a man with all the normal gifts of physique and mentality, but lacking that magnetic element of personality which psychologists call color. To make it still plainer, I never felt in those dark days that I was even complete companionship for myself, which is a sorry state indeed, and can be known only to those who have experienced it.

Tonight I know what has been behind it all—a stranger fate than I

have ever heard of befalling any man. Yes, here beside me, on my writing desk, lies tangible proof of what, to make the record complete for others, must be detailed at some length.

For tonight I am no longer what I was. I am no longer alone.

God, what a wonderful thing it is! Tonight, when by all the calls of good form, even decency, I should be torn by deep grief, I am in the grip of such emotions of joy that I can scarcely refrain from rushing into the streets shouting to everyone the glad, glad tidings.

2

I WAS born in Detroit, the son of Septimus Redfield, a manufacturer of carriages, who, on the advent of the automobile, sold out his plant and its good will to one of the big corporations, and who from then on until the time of his demise lived retired in a great graystone house he had built in the beautiful suburb of Woodmere.

I was one of Siamese twins, who, just after birth, were successfully separated by a noted surgeon. My twin brother and I bore striking resemblances to one another, growing up of an equal height, both being tall, dark and brown-eyed.

One would have thought that two such brothers would make an equal impression upon their fellows. Such was never the case. My brother Philip made friends and admirers everywhere; I was always a nonentity. He was sought after, lionized. I was consistently ignored, was socially nil, no matter how I tried to please others or cultivated those traits of character that usually make a man not merely popular but substantially worth while.

From my earliest boyhood I could sense this baffling difference between us. At school I made much more progress with my studies than did Philip, but when I carried off honors it seemed to excite neither admiration nor envy in anyone. No one seemed to notice, let alone share, my little triumphs—save my mother. And that loving little gray soul slipped out into the golden west one summer's evening with the setting of the sun. When she was gone the cup of my loneliness was filled.

My father was not a hard man, but his heart was set upon Philip, and, like the others, he could see little worth while in me. He, however, faithfully kept the promise he had made to my mother and left to me by his will the old home in Woodmere with its trees and flowers that to me breathe of her gentle memory.

My twin brother Philip always held a supreme contempt for me, which he was never at great pains to hide, and on occasions of exasperation even worse meannesses stored in his back mind would be heaped upon me. Once we had words over the relative merits of two baseball pitchers, when he cried in a fit of temper: "Oh, what's the use of arguing with a dead one? Your opinion isn't worth anything! You never will be anybody, no matter what you do or say."

Those words hurt for a long, long time, for the subtle sting of the truth was in them.

At another time we were at play in the great front hall. It was an October afternoon, and the sunshine was filtering through the old-fashioned, stained-glass transom. Philip suddenly seized me and pulled me alongside of himself before a wall mirror where the shafts of sunlight played upon us.

"Look, Amos," he cried, "at our two faces. Notice the difference in our eyes?"

Gazing intently, I saw what fascinated him.

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are missing...

any mental phenomena would be physical and the proper study of a materialistic investigator and not of a ghost-hunter.

We devoted considerable time to telepathic experiments along the lines followed by the Society for Psychical Research, but with results not very startling, and to us quite inconclusive. So we began our work along entirely different lines. "Thoughts are things" was our argument, physical in all respects, just as speech or any other bodily attribute; so why may they not be made to react with an audible sound, like the voice over the telephone? Our efforts to produce instruments for this purpose, which would record our thoughts in audible sound, met with failure after failure, making us wonder if after all we were wrong and should never succeed. But after years of discouragement we finally met with partial success. It was then only a question of a little more time.

In the end we produced two finished instruments, very small, which fitted into the ear of the user and were almost invisible. With one of these little receivers fitted into the ear of each, Professor Bohmer and I could converse readily without a word being uttered. These "mentaphones," as we called them, would not record every conscious thought, but when an effort was made to reach the understanding of the recipient, as in telepathic experiments, the result was everything that could be desired. In addressing me, Professor Bohmer would merely concentrate and speak mentally instead of by word of mouth. Clear as a bell and just as a spoken voice his thought would sound in my ear. My reply, of course, was given in the same manner.

For several years after this all our attention was given to experimental surgery.

One cold November night we sat in our library before the fire, discussing our day's work.

"Jerbot," said Professor Bohmer, "I do not know whether your conclusions are similar to mine or not, but observation leads me to believe that the brain and in fact all parts of the body continue to function after death, imperceptibly as regards the purely bodily organs; but I believe the brain functions just as in life, at least for a time."

"Yes," I answered, "that possibility has occurred to me. In fact I have given it considerable thought."

We both then dropped into silence, each occupied with his own thoughts. The clock striking midnight roused me with a start to find Professor Bohmer gazing intently in my direction.

"Jerbot," he said sharply, "one of us shall prove it."

"Prove what?" I returned, my thoughts still wandering.

"Why, that the brain functions after death, the possibility of which we were just now discussing."

"Oh, that," I replied; "we shall both either prove it or disprove it."

"No! Only one of us! I want to exact a promise of you, and I shall make you the same one in return."

"What is the promise?"

"It is this, Jerbot: that if I should die before you, you will place one of our little mentaphones, as we call them, in my ear; that you will equip yourself with the other one, come to my grave within twelve hours after burial and attempt to open communication with me. Do you promise?"

"But why wait until after burial, Bohmer? Why not at once upon death being ascertained?"

"No, no! Wait! Do just as I tell you. Come within twelve hours after the grave is closed. I know best. You shall see. Do you promise?"

"Yes, I promise, but do not talk of death, Bohmer: you and I have years

of work laid out for us. Why, man, we can't afford to die."

"No, no, of course not, but who knows? I simply want to be prepared. And, Jerbot, my body is not to be embalmed. Good night."

"Good night," I responded, and walked slowly to my room. Bohmer's words had upset me. But why should they? My attention had simply been drawn to a disagreeable contingency which was bound to happen sooner or later. One of us would some time be left to continue our work alone.

It was long ere I found repose. It must have been along toward morning before I fell into a heavy sleep, from which I was roused by a furious pounding on my door. My first thought was that the house must be afire, but collecting myself I sat up in bed and shouted, "What's the matter? Who is it?"

I could scarcely recognize the voice which answered as that of Johnson, our laboratory assistant.

"Quick, quick! Come at once, Dr. Jerbot! Professor Bohmer is dead!"

This communication coming so soon after our conversation of the night before shocked me beyond measure. I sat in bed staring dumbly at the door for a few seconds until roused by Johnson's voice again: "Did you hear me, doctor? Professer Bohmer is dead!"

Getting out of bed and hurrying into my bathrobe, I unlocked and threw open the door where Johnson stood with ashen face and staring eyes.

"Where is he?" I asked. "In his room?"

"No, in the library sitting before the fire."

Johnson led the way, and I followed to the library door, where we both stopped. Yes, there he sat, dear old Bohmer, as if resting and gazing absently into the dead embers. He must have returned to the library after I retired, as he left at the same time I did, going in the direction of his bedroom.

Stepping softly forward I placed my hand upon his wrist. It was quite cold. He must have died shortly after our last conversation.

"Could he," I thought, "have had an inkling of this? But no; that is too absurd."

It was his heart, of course, and although he knew it was bad, we had both expected him, with proper care, to last for years. And he had been careful, very careful.

"There is nothing that can be done for him," I said, turning to Johnson. "We must remove him to his bedroom."

This we did, laying him gently on the bed. I drew a sheet over the still form and we both left the room.

I shall not describe how keenly I felt my loss, how my mind wandered back over the long years of my association with Professor Bohmer, from our school days to our conversation of the night before. I shall get on with the rest of my story. There is not much more now to relate.

Professor Bohmer had not a living relative, so the funeral was held the next day, with myself the only mourner. When the grave closed over his coffin, the only friend I possessed on earth was hidden from my sight forever.

I returned home with a very heavy heart and wondered if I should ever resume the work broken off by the death of my associate. As it turned out, I never did except at spasmodic intervals. I was so shaken by what I shall now detail that I have never been equal to concentrated effort since.

RETURNING home on that dark November day through light snow flurries and a howling wind, I seated myself in the library, where a roaring fire had been kindled, and gazed sadly at Professor Bohmer's

empty chair. I thought of our conversation on the night of his death and the promise exacted of me. I would fulfil it that evening, I decided. "Nothing can come of it," I thought. "It is too improbable, too grotesque, too awful."

Well, I would keep my promise to my friend anyway; so that evening, after fitting the little mentaphone into my ear, I made my way to the cemetery. Before burial I had placed the other one in the ear of Professor Bohmer.

It was a blustery evening with a chill north wind that howled through the trees, dying into a low wail. On reaching the grave I stood undecided, with a queer feeling, as if I was committing some unhallowed deed. How I wished my old friend had not exacted that promise of me!

Finally, taking a long breath, I concentrated my mind on the following question:

"Bohmer, Bohmer, do you hear me? Bohmer! Bohmer!"

For a few seconds, except for the wailing of the wind, all was silence, then clear as a living voice came the reply in my ear: "Yes, Jerbot, I hear you; yes, yes."

I felt stunned and sick, but rallying my wits answered, "Bohmer! Are you alive? Have we buried you prematurely? Shall I bring the sexton?"

"No, Jerbot, no; I am dead. You can do nothing."

I could stand no more, and turned and fled as if pursued by an unnamable thing.

On reaching home, bright with electric lights and a cheerful fire, I was able to regain some composure. What had I run from? Nothing but a new-made grave which enclosed my only friend. What had happened? Simply a confirmation of what Professor Bohmer and I had both suspected, that the brain functioned after death. I now understood why he had insisted that the mentaphone experiment should not be made until after burial. I do not believe I should have allowed him to be taken to the grave had it been made before. "Poor Bohmer," I thought, "I shall go back." But no; I decided to wait until the next evening, when my nerves would be in better shape for the ordeal—for ordeal it was.

THE next evening at about the same hour I again approached the grave. The sky was still overcast and the wind blew fitfully.

Now remember that all my questions in the conversations which follow were mental ones, while the replies, which would have been inaudible to a person standing at my side, sounded in my ear through the mentaphone like a spoken voice.

For a few minutes I stood looking down at the grave, hardly knowing where to begin, but finally said, "Bohmer, Bohmer, I am here again."

"Yes, yes, Jerbot," came the reply.

"Is there nothing I can do, Bohmer? This is awful."

"No, no; nothing."

"Have you any feeling? Are you conscious? It seems terrible. Is it certain there is nothing I can do?"

"No, no; nothing, I tell you, nothing. I am all right; death is not unpleasant. I have never lost consciousness, just a feeling of lethargic ease as if nothing will ever matter and all will be well."

"But your soul! If it still remains in the body, you must be alive! Alive, man! Alive!"

"Soul? No, there is no soul here, Jerbot, just life, consciousness. But it is hard to explain; I could not make you understand."

"Has your soul left your body?"

"No, I think not; but you could not understand."

"But you said there was no soul there. It must have left, then."

"No, no, Jerbot. You will know some day. Yes, yes, you will know. Not now, though, Jerbot; not now."

I turned and left the grave, my thoughts in a whirl. What could he have meant? Did he mean that his soul had flown or was still in the body? That there was no soul, or that he did not know?

I felt sick and upset after this, and it was a week before I again visited the grave.

The weather had changed and the day was sunshiny and mild when I again stood beside my friend's grave.

"Bohmer," I said, "I am here."

The answer came, but very faint: "Yes, Jerbot, yes."

"Are you at peace, Bohmer? Is there nothing, nothing at all I can do?"

"No, no; nothing. I am dead—dissolution has set in and I shall soon be gone. Yes, soon be gone, Jerbot; soon be gone. All is peace; peace and quiet, Jerbot; nothing matters."

"Is your soul still in the body? Is it leaving as dissolution advances? Has it gone?"

"No, no! No soul, Jerbot. I don't know; I don't know. You will understand some day."

I felt a nausea stealing over me and returned home as quickly as possible. How I wished that promise had never been exacted, or that I had not kept it. I felt I should never know another moment of peace. I had never dreamed how horrible it would be should our conjectures prove true. My nights were a long nightmare, my days were spent with but a single thought.

ANOTHER week passed before I again visited the grave of Professor Bohmer, for the last time. Again I stood irresolute, finally calling as before.

"Bohmer, Bohmer, I am here."

I waited, but no reply.

"Bohmer," I repeated; "Bohmer! Bohmer! I am here!"

After an interval the reply came, but oh, so faint! a mere whisper in my ear: "Yes—Jerbot—yes—yes."

"Is all well, Bohmer?"

"All—well—yes—yes. All—well. I—am—going—Jerbot—am — going. Oblivion—Jerbot — complete — rest. All—well."

"And your soul, Bohmer?"

"Soul?—Yes—yes—soul—no — no —I—don't—know—but—it— . . ."

The whisper ceased. I called frantically, becoming so wrought up as to forget myself and shout, but got no further reply. Dissolution had triumphed. That virile brain had become food for the worms and its animating intelligence had gone—where? Or had it been blotted out?



On the Dead Man's Chest

An Occult Serial

***By* ELI COLTER**

The Story So Far

FELIX UNDERWOOD, a hideous cripple with a heart of gold, is led by his love of nature and its beauties to believe in God and a life after death, despite his membership in the *Squared Circle*, a club composed only of atheists.

Told by specialists that he has not long to live, Underwood denounces the atheistic views of his fellow club members, and promises that when he sheds his monstrous husk he will come back after death in the most beautiful body he can find—a body patterned after one of the club members. His death comes suddenly, and Lafe Daniels, president of the *Inner Circle* (the select inner group of the *Squared Circle*), pins a green-dyed white immortelle in the center of Underwood's chest. Underwood has promised to come back from beyond the grave and show the flower to him.

After Underwood's death, a new member, Gene Lane, is taken into the club to fill the vacancy. He is an athletic, handsome fellow; and to the astonishment of the club members Underwood's body, in its hermetically-sealed coffin in Dr. Hammerton's study, slowly changes until it seems to resemble the new club member.

Pete Garvin, who had been Underwocd's boon companion, is injured in an automobile accident, and Lane gives him a pint of blood in order to save his life.

PART 3

DURING the succeeding three weeks Lane and Garvin recuperated in the hospital, side by side; found strength returning; began sitting up in bed, reading, jesting and arguing; took their first few steps across the room and down the hall. Though the subject was never mentioned, there was little room for anything in Pete's mind save the thing Gene Lane had done. He began to realize fully for the first time what kind of man lived inside Lane's beautifully molded flesh.

The others of the *Inner Circle* came frequently. There were no dull, dragging hours for the two in the hospital. When Lane had quite recovered and was ready to leave he refused to go, but lingered, waiting for Pete. But wise Pete Garvin suspected that he was not the only thing holding Gene Lane in the hospital. The slim, brown-haired nurse who had waited on them patiently, cheerfully, had found the way to Lane's heart. The day the two were discharged as fully recovered, she came into the room and stood looking at them with a sober face. Her name was Glory Faire, and she fitted her name.

"You've been good patients," she said lightly. "I shall miss you."

"You mean you'll miss Gene," Pete answered, with humorous impudence, reading that the lightness was a lie. "He's a good egg, eh?"

Glory averted her eyes, but both men caught the expression that shadowed them. Gene's fine face paled, and his eyes sought Pete Garvin with a look of strange, quick appeal.

"I'm going out into the hall," Pete added hastily. "Good-bye, Glory, and thanks for all you've done. I'll wait for you in the hall, Gene." He paused to wring the girl's hand in a parting grip of gratitude, and walked through the doorway, closing it behind him.

Glory stood as though unable to move, looking down at her hand, still pink from Pete's grip. Lane's black eyes, enormous in his thinned, pale face, searched her as he moved to within three feet of her and stopped, waiting for her to raise her eyes. But she did not raise them. Her own cheeks had lost their color, and she stared at her hand as though fascinated by it.

"Glory!" Lane's evenly modulated voice was strained. "Do I have to say it?" Glory shook her head, but still did not raise her eyes. "You know, don't you?" Glory nodded,

but still the brown eyes were fixed on the slim hand. Lane reached out to lay his own hands on her shoulders, drawing her toward him as both arms slipped around her. She made no effort to resist him, passively allowing her cheek to rest against his breast. For an unmeasurable space of time they stood so, and finally Lane's voice went steadily on with words that were not easy to say.

"I'm not asking you to say anything, either. I know, too. I haven't spoken before, but I couldn't go away without an understanding. I have loved a few women, Glory—but none like you. Yet nothing can come of it. There is something in my past life, something that even Pete doesn't know, that keeps me from ever claiming you. Some of these days I'm going away from Bass City. Before I go I shall tell Pete, and he will explain to you. I—can't!"

The girl placed her hands on his breast and pushed him back from her so that she could look up into his face. The black eyes looked steadily down at her, but in that look was something remote, inexorable and impenetrable. She shook her head, slowly, not speaking, but under the appeal in her face Lane winced.

"Don't look at me like that!" he said roughly. "You've got me, all I am—all I'll ever be."

"Then why go from me?" she said, her gentle voice tense. "If you care half as much as I do, nothing else matters."

"I'd give my life to have it otherwise," Lane answered, and the grip of his arms forced her close so that she could not see his whitening face. "Just that—my *life!* But I gave my word to somebody else, and I have to go. No"—he sensed her sudden thought in the rigidity of her body—"not a woman. There isn't any other woman. There never will be. I gave my word to another man."

"Was it"—Glory halted over the words, starkly—"something you've—done? P—prison?"

"Yes." Lane's voice was harsh with emotion and the pain of denial. "I've been in prison. Don't ask me any more; I can't tell you now. After I go away Pete will make you understand. Pete—Pete is a great chap, Glory. Be good to him after I'm gone."

"I'll—try," Glory promised, with difficulty. "Does he know you're going away?"

"Not yet. I shall not tell him till I am ready to leave. If——"

"Gene! Gene!" The girl beat her hands upon his chest, in a panic of despair. "I can't give you up! Don't go! Oh—what was it? What did you do?"

Lane's white face set into hard lines, and he gripped her close to still the beating hands.

"I killed a man!" he said, and the black eyes were like ice in the sun. "*Don't* ask me any more! I must go. I was in prison, and I killed a man to get out. I'm here on parole. It's nearly up, and I've got to go back. Don't grieve, don't blame me—don't judge! I never figured on anything like this—but it's worth everything it costs, just to know that you've cared. There's no use torturing ourselves, Glory! Kiss me and let me go!"

Out in the hall, leaning against the white plastered wall, it seemed an eternity to Pete Garvin, waiting. Lane joined him, finally, and the fine face was somber and white, the black eyes shadowed with pain. Without a word Pete fell into step with him, and the two moved off rapidly down the hall and along the walk to the taxi awaiting them at the curb. Just as the car halted before the doors of the club, Lane laid hand on Garvin's arm.

"Pete, that half hour back there with Glory was painful, but it was worth all the rest of my life. I can't see her again. It would only bring her more sorrow if I did. Some day I'll explain. But we—stick, see?" Garvin nodded silently as the cab stopped, wondering just exactly what Lane meant, anyhow. If he loved Glory and she loved him, what was to prevent his seeing her again? What was to prevent his seeing her always? But he said nothing of his thoughts. What Lane wanted him to know, he would tell.

In the interest caused by the accident and its subsequent development, Felix Underwood's body and his wild plans were temporarily forgotten, laid on the shelf. The evening Pete Garvin and Gene Lane returned from the hospital a round month had passed since any of the men had been in Hammerton's study. What time they had to spare had been given to the two in the hospital room; they did not believe in robbing the living to pay the dead. There was a rousing reception awaiting the two in the Holy of Holies. The *Inner Circle* was gathered in the comfortable lounge, hilariously expectant, and when the two convalescents entered the door they were instantly the center of a delighted group of friends.

"Welcome to our city!" Wardell cried facetiously, wringing Pete Garvin's hand. "You gave us an awful scare, you old bum. Better wear glasses for night-driving in the future."

"I'm here because *he's* here," Pete reminded him, his luminous eyes flashing to Lane's face. And in the words Wardell saw evidence of the well of gratitude that deepened in Pete Garvin's soul for the man who had given him back to life. "It might have been any of you, I appreciate that. I shall always look on all of you as potential savers of my life. But I'll always have to remember it was Gene who *did* it, you know." There was no sting in the words, but Wardell turned quickly away, and Pete, unobserving of his moment of confusion, drew apart from the boisterous group and sauntered into the other clubrooms, glad to be alive and home again.

He strolled down the hall, seeking sight and touch of the old remembered places, to remind himself that he was really *here*. He had been so nearly Over There—with Felix. With *Felix!* Garvin glanced back at the men in the lounge, swept with a sudden wave of remorse, and turned quickly into the billiard room where hung a photograph of the initiation class including Felix Underwood. Felix!

With a regretful sense of having forgotten Felix for a long time he walked up to the picture and paused beneath it, raising his eyes, seeking Underwood. A startled exclamation escaped him, and he took a step backward with involuntary haste. Not only had he forgotten Felix in those last few weeks. Drugged with pain and flooded with gratitude toward Gene Lane he had also forgotten the thing Felix had planned to do, the remarkable change in the embalmed body, and the seeming gradual fulfilling of Felix's vow. But now it came back to him with sharp clarity, overwhelming him with something very akin to fear.

For in the place once occupied by Felix Underwood now stood a tall, sculpturelike figure, whose brilliant black eyes looked out at him from under heavy black brows and thick waving black hair. Garvin wheeled and rushed to the door leading into the lounge. He stood there, breathing heavily, till he caught Wardell's eye. He made a frantic, beckoning gesture that caused Wardell's gaze to fix in an astounded stare, turned and hurried back to the picture. Wardell entered the billiard room in quick re-

sponse, and Garvin turned to him, his face whitening, as he pointed to the framed photograph.

"Wardell, take that thing down, quick! Before Gene sees it!" He was shaking, still too weak from his long incarceration in the hospital to bear an abrupt shock with no ill effect.

"What? Why?" Wardell stepped closer, and scrutinized the class picture. "Oh—why, for God's sake!" He stood rooted to the floor, staring at the form which should have been the monstrous bulk of Felix Underwood, while Pete Garvin dropped limply into a chair and placed his hand over his eyes.

"God! It's uncanny—inhuman!" Garvin's voice was a rasping whisper. "Felix lives somewhere. Oh, yes—I know it, now. Doc tells me he had you take his name off the register. He must have been bent on destroying every trace of the old Felix we knew. But he shouldn't have taken Gene! Doesn't he know Gene will always be Gene? Doesn't he know, no matter what he does to make himself over, he will always remain the same old ugly Felix? We loved him as he was—couldn't that have been enough? There can't be two Genes! He can't lose his hideous old self by trying to absorb another man's personality and looks. Poor old Felix—Doc was right, he must have been mad! But we've got to protect Gene!"

"Right." Wardell, pale as Garvin, his mouth compressed into a straight line, reached up to loosen the photograph from its hanger. "I'll put this where it won't be found very soon. You return to the others—and not a word! No one has noticed this yet. I'll be with you immediately. Tomorrow night we'll go up to Doc's and take a look at that ghastly body. Get a grip on yourself, Pete."

"Yes—yes, I will." Garvin, fighting to regain his control, got to his feet and made his way back to the lounge. He paused in the doorway, watching the hilarious group of men gathered around Lane. The others saw him and called him imperatively to come in, whyinell was he running away like that? He went toward them, slowly, determined on two things; to see the body in Hammerton's study on the following night, and to protect Gene.

AT THE earliest possible moment he made excuse to get away to his room on the third floor, pleading drowziness and fatigue. Lane instantly excused himself from the circle and followed Pete. Lane had taken Underwood's old room, adjoining Garvin's, and the two habitually kept the connecting door standing open. Once arrived in their rooms, however, Garvin made no attempt to retire, but threw himself into a chair, lit a cigar and sat smoking and staring in silence at the wall.

"What's wrong, **old scout**? Fagged?" Lane stood looking down at him in concern. "Want the doc to give you a shot?"

"No!" Garvin answered explosively. "I want to talk to you."

"Oh." Lane laughed, throwing himself into a chair. "Well, go to it. What's to be the subject of conversation? The *Inner Circle?* Vivisection? Or beauty culture for the feet?"

"Glory Faire," Garvin answered shortly, still looking at the wall.

Lane's face sobered instantly and the black eyes clouded with pain, but under the pain a strange light shone through. His fine features set into cold lines, but he said, rather gently: "Yes? And what do you want to know about Glory?"

"Why do you think you have to give her up?" And now Garvin turned to look straight into the black eyes. "Is it something you have done?"

"Yes." Lane nodded, giving back Garvin's gaze. "I will not try to explain everything now. Suffice it to tell you what I told her. I have been in—prison; I killed a man to get out; I am here in Bass City on parole: I have given my word to go back. She may grieve slightly for a time, but after a while she will forget—perhaps. I—I do not forget. But why should it trouble you?"

"You know mighty well why!" Garvin returned curtly. "So you're going away, eh? What a mess! Felix died—and you've got to go back to—to—no, by God, I won't say it! Gene—can't you skin out across the line somewhere? Mexico — Cuba — India—anywhere, and take Glory with you?"

"No!" Lane's reply was like the snap of a bone.

"Don't get sore," Garvin pleaded, quickly. "Life is such a mess all the way round, Gene. This infernal *Circle* is the bunk. Oh, the men are all right, don't mistake me. Fine fellows, all of them. But they're blasting their lives with a damnable creed and atrocious ideas of living. I've been as bad as the rest. We've derided all that is beautiful, all that is noble and worth while. We've jeered at love, called it a fleeting ephemeral thing that is more bother than anything else. That isn't so. Love's the biggest thing on earth. I know."

"You're right—it is," Lane agreed, nodding.

"I was to have been married, seven years ago, Gene. Something came between the girl and me—and I turned bitter, as only a weak fool can. I discarded all my old beliefs and ideals in a junk heap, declared myself an atheist and joined the *Squared Circle*. And I tell you this, Gene; every member of this misguided outfit is a man disillusioned, a man who has lost love and all that goes with it, who has allowed himself to turn into a pompous fool. Don't let yourself go that way, Gene. No matter what you've done, no matter to what you must return, I want to see you go with a sane look on life and a firm belief in the things beyond."

"I joined this *Circle* because I believed myself fit to become a member. Are you telling me you are going to renounce the creed by which we all swear? Are you asking me to renounce it?" Lane asked evenly, his eyes boring into Pete's face.

"Just that!" Garvin replied, with tense earnestness. "For Daniels and Miller and some of the other old boys I fear it's too late. Daniels himself founded this crazy club. Founded it the month ofter his girl ran away on the eve of their marriage—with another man. He's grown into a bitter, cantankerous crank, like Doc Hammerton. I don't believe they'd acknowledge God if He came down and shook hands with 'em!"

"No?" Lane smiled. "Would you?"

"Yes!" Pete answered violently. "I've been a silly ass long enough. I *know* there's a God, a just and forgiving God, who is willing to pass over our mistakes and follies when we recognize the error of our ways and ask Him to set us right. I've seen the evidence of His handiwork, I tell you, and I'm pulling up short before it's too late. Gene—don't let this iconoclastic bunch ruin your life! Do you really not believe in God, Gene?"

"I gave my oath to that effect when I joined this club," Lane answered, studying Garvin closely. "What's upset you so?"

"I'm not upset," Garvin replied, with a hopeless sigh. "I know I've been as wild a scoffer as the rest. I've spilled our damnable doctrine to you by the hour. But I know now I didn't believe it when I said it. I'd like to undo whatever harm I've done to you. That's all. I—yes?" He

turned his head quickly, as a rap came on the door. "Come in." The door swung open, to reveal Daniels standing on the threshold.

"Pardon if I intrude, but I was coming down the hall and I heard you speak my name, Pete. I deliberately stopped and listened. May I join you?"

"Surely. I can't sleep—I just wanted to get away." Pete Garvin watched the banker with narrow eyes as the elder man closed the door, drew up a chair and seated himself by Lane.

"So—I'm a bitter, cantankerous crank, am I?" the banker inquired, without malice.

"I said it!" Garvin stuck out his jaw belligerently. "I didn't mean it for your ears, but I don't back down, Lafe. God himself is the only one who can estimate the harm we've done, spreading our rotten doctrine of aggressive atheism. I'm through. I've been bad enough, Lafe, but I shouldn't want to stand in your shoes at the final roll call if you don't pull up and change your tune. Now—expel me whenever you get ready!"

"No—I shan't expel you." Daniels turned inscrutable eyes upon Gene Lane, studying him in a long, penetrating gaze. "I've just come from Doc Hammerton's study," he added irrelevantly. He turned his eyes for a keen, significant look into Garvin's intent face, nodding, then resumed his scrutiny of Lane's features.

"What's the matter, Lafe?" Lane bantered. "Do I remind you of your dead uncle, all of a sudden? Or is my face dirty?"

"I was looking to see if you had false teeth," Daniels replied. "Do *you* really believe in God, Gene? Under the skin?"

The tall Greeklike figure straightened and the black eyes twinkled as Lane deliberately chose his answer.

"I can't say that I do. I can't believe in any God who would create such an unjust world, give us sight, hearing and intelligent thought, then blast us into dust at the twist of a wrist. Can you?" Daniels' sigh was like a high breeze in the tense silence of the room. How many times had he said almost that identical thing, expounded the same ideas to them all. But his keen eyes did not waver, his expression did not change as he replied: "We don't go down to dust, Gene. We *must* live afterward."

Pete Garvin gripped the arm of his chair, leaning forward to gape at Daniels as though he could not believe his ears.

Lane ignored Garvin's astonishment, laughing at Daniels with a trace of impatience: "Rot! Have you ever seen it proved? If we live afterward we should be able to come back. And no one ever has. That's sheer nonsense, Lafe. You go to sleep every night for a few hours. Why be afraid to go to sleep for eternity? I'm not. I don't have to possess any puerile ideas of everlasting life to bolster up my courage when I shuffle off."

"Don't!" said the banker, sharply. "I know that's the creed of the *Squared Circle*. I know I've talked just such piffle for years, preached it to every man who came my way. But it's heresy for a fine, clean young chap like you to hold such ideas. Snap out of it, Gene."

"Well, if there's anything in an opposite belief I should like to be convinced. As it is, I am content. I see no reason for altering my views in the least. Have you altered yours?" Lane's black eyes mocked Daniels as he spoke.

"I have," Daniels replied steadily.

"Lafe—do you mean you've come to believe in—*God?*" Garvin's tense whisper caught at the elder man, and swung him around in his chair to face him.

"I don't know what I believe, Pete—yet." The banker's face was somber. "But—you were right. I fought even the evidence of my eyes, the reasoning of all my intelligence. I'm fighting no longer—I'm waiting. I have seen things that shake my old beliefs and make them weak as water. I'm not ready to assert positively that I believe in a God. But I'm ready to say that I believe there *may* be one. You know what I've seen—you know for what I wait."

"You're waiting for—Felix?" Pete whispered. Daniels nodded and turned to Lane.

"Have you ever heard any of the men speak of Felix Underwood, Gene?"

"Oh, yes," Lane nodded, in quick reply. "Several of them. There seems to be some kind of mystery about him."

"He died seven months ago," Daniels said slowly. "He was a sincere convert to faith in God some time before he died, and he swore to come back and make us all believe as he did. I have so far seen enough to convince me that Felix lives somewhere, somehow. Pete"—the banker turned to Garvin—"may I call Hammerton up?"

"You certainly may!" Garvin's eyes were glowing with an inner light. "Call up the whole *Circle* if you wish."

"Thank you." Daniels rose and moved toward the house telephone on the wall. "I shall do just that."

PETE GARVIN, shaken with the portent of imminent crises, sat in a strained hush, his eyes now and then darting a look at Lane's calm, unruffled face, while Daniels called the lower floor and asked the members of the *Inner Circle* to ascend to Garvin's room. The hush endured after Daniels had resumed his seat, and while the three waited for the sound of feet in the hall. That came, presently, and a closed hand rapped on the door, followed by Hammerton's voice, asking: "Here we are, Lafe. Shall we all come right in?"

"Indeed, yes." Daniels rose and faced the door, as the wondering seventeen filed in and gathered around the three already there.

"I thought you guys were going to bed," John Morgan began jocularly, but his light words stopped abruptly when he caught the look on Garvin's face. "Why—what's wrong, Pete?"

"Nothing's wrong," Daniels put in quickly. "In fact, it may be that everything is going to be right, after a while. Doc——" He wheeled to face Hammerton, and his keen eyes were steady, with the valiant bravery of a man strong enough to face the music of his own making. "You told me it was Felix's wish that if the time ever came when I might sincerely say I could believe in a God, I was to tell you. Well—I think—I *could* believe."

Every man in the room was frozen into a sudden, astonished silence. Only Hammerton retained enough presence of mind to be able to make any coherent reply.

"I'm glad," he said simply. "I think we've all been hoping to hear you say just that. We're ready to believe, too. Felix has us where he wanted us. If it's possible for him to come back and finish it, he can't make it any too soon. If he fails now, I fear we'll all be worse than ever. If there is any logical explanation for——"

"There isn't," Daniels interrupted grimly. "I don't know what arrangements Felix left with you. But whenever you're ready for the final test, I am."

"We'll wait a week," Hammerton answered, glancing around the group. "And give Pete and Gene time to accumulate a little solid strength. I can't say anything, Lafe. Only—I'm

glad. I think we'd all better get out now, and let the boys have some rest."

He turned toward the door and the others followed him silently. Daniels brought up the rear of the file, and as he passed out of the door he shot Pete Garvin a look of affectionate fellowship. For a time Garvin stared at the closed door without speaking, then he turned to Lane, who was watching him with a curious, intent expression.

"I suspect this seems like a lot of hokum to you, doesn't it, Gene?"

"Not exactly. I'm rather interested in seeing the outcome of this thing. Do I take it you really expect to see your dead friend again?"

"He said we would," Garvin replied. "He said he would make his dead flesh rise among us——" Garvin stopped short, struck with a disconcerting thought. He himself had been foremost in wanting to protect Gene from any shocking disclosures, yet he himself had been the one to precipitate a thing likely to bring to Gene the severest shock possible. Hammerton had included Gene in the invitation for the final gathering. Fancy—if Felix did come back, and enter that transformed flesh! Fancy—if Gene should see his identical counterpart rise from the mauve casket! He gritted his teeth. If it knocked Gene out of his atheistic ideas it would be worth it. The die was cast. All he could do was wait.

"Well, old scout, shall we turn in?" Garvin rose, nodding assent.

THE following night Pete, determined to carry out his purpose to get a view of the body in the study, refused when Lane suggested a show, feigning weariness, urging Lane to go with some of the others, pleading a desire to lie and rest.

"I'll be fit as a fiddle when you get back," he insisted, "but I'd really rather not go out tonight." Lane finally allowed himself to be convinced, took John Morgan along and left Pete lying stretched on the bed.

As soon as Morgan and Lane were well gone, Garvin slipped down the back stairway and struck off for Hammerton's big house in flying haste. He arrived there to find seven others of the *Circle* around the mauve coffin, looking down at the enclosed body in somber intentness. They greeted him quietly, making way for him as he entered the room and approached the dead.

Pete Garvin had thought he was fully prepared for what he was certain of seeing there, but he was conscious of an unexpected shock when his eyes rested on the body under the glass. Form, feature and coloring, it was the exact replica of Gene Lane. The waving black hair, the fine, sensitive, beautifully molded face, the slim tapering hands, folded just under the bright green sprig of immortelle on the dead man's chest, were to the last line and shade the image of the man who had given him his blood. Pete stared, long, stirred with profound emotion, then drew back white and shaken, to look into Hammerton's eyes.

"I think we'd better go down to the club," Hammerton said, striving to speak calmly, and failing. "The rest of the men will be there, no doubt. Where's Gene, Pete?"

"Gone to a show with John. Don't tell him I was here," Garvin answered, gripping himself with hard control. "Yes—let's go."

DURING the following week Garvin and Lane spent most of their time out of doors, and both were feeling nearly normal again when the seven days dragged to a close. So far Lane had made no further mention of his intent to leave Bass City, and Garvin's conscious desire to be with him all that was possible spoke

his thought better than anything he could have said.

On Friday night Hammerton gathered them together in the Holy of Holies. Garvin relaxed in a chair, and watched Hammerton with fascinated eyes. He was conscious that the men were striving for an atmosphere of nonchalance. But that was more easily said than done with Gene Lane leaning against the mantel, warming his slim hands at the blaze in the grate, jesting at Wardell with the very joy of being alive; while at the same time in the mind's eye of each lingered the unforgettable picture of that mauve coffin in the doctor's study. One man alive, and another man dead—twins by the dead man's hand. Hammerton rose abruptly, strode to the fireplace and paused, throwing an arm over Lane's shoulder and facing the room.

"Well, boys—I guess it's time for the showdown. Felix said when Lafe Daniels should come to me and say that he could believe in God I was to call you all to the final meeting in my house. Gene—you may see some fearful demonstration, none of us has the slightest idea what may happen. But I want you there. Will you come?"

"Why, yes—surely," Lane assented. "Do you realize you haven't had me in your house before?"

"I do." Hammerton nodded, glancing quickly at Garvin. "It was not because I didn't want you. I—there are things I feared your seeing. But I've got to let you see them now. A short explanation is due you. Underwood was ugly—horribly so. His appearance preyed upon his mind. He had been facing death for nearly three years prior to that, without our knowledge. He had come to reject all the tenets of the club, he believed we live after death, and he swore to make that hideous body over, come back, re-enter it, make it rise and walk among us and jar us from our unbelief. That is all. We will meet for the final showdown tomorrow night."

"I see." Lane's face was very sober. "And you—do you believe he can do it?"

"I don't know. We're all on the fence, so to speak. Tomorrow night we either come to our senses in a cold, hard world of fact and materialism, or we wake to a new understanding and a belief in God, everlasting life and things of which we have not dared dream since our childhood's illusions were shattered."

"All right, we'll be there, Doc." John Morgan rose and walked slowly across the room, toward the hall door. "But let's get down to earth for the time being. Anybody join me at a game of billiards?"

THREE hours later the club was in early darkness. Pete Garvin lay on his bed, striving to sleep with small success, turning restlessly in the warm blankets. Tomorrow night! It held his thought as tenaciously as though there were no such thing as sleep. He had about resigned himself to a night of insomnia, when he suddenly became aware of a powerful memory of Felix Underwood. He lay very still, holding his breath, listening. Felix—the old Felix, as he had known him, somewhere a thousand years ago. Before his eyes was a clear picture of the bulky, misshapen body, the preposterous, repellent face that had once clothed the soul of the man he had loved better than a brother.

"Felix!" he said aloud, involuntarily, not realizing that he had really spoken till he heard the sound of his own voice.

"Yes, Peter—I'm here." The familiar deep rumble came from somewhere just beyond his bed, and Garvin felt the cold gooseflesh down his spine, and his hair tingled on his scalp. "Didn't I say I would come?"

"Yes." Garvin sat up in bed, his eyes strained into the darkness.

"You never really doubted me, Peter."

"But—you said—I can't see you, exactly. Yet in a strange way I can —almost."

"You'll see me tomorrow night," the heavy basso answered. "After that—it may be a long time before we meet again, and I wanted to see you alone just once before I go on. I want you to remember afterward all I say now. Will you, Peter?"

"I will." Pete was aware with a strange sense of astonishment that somehow this did not seem queer, that his fleeting feeling of the supernatural had passed. He'd known so long that Felix was there, just beyond, where he couldn't reach out and touch him. His first flare of panic was gone, utterly. This wasn't the Unknown—it was just Felix! "But I fear we may wake Gene." Casual—just like that, as if this thing were done every day. Why, hang it—Felix was *here!* He hadn't lost him.

"Gene is asleep," was the quiet answer. "I merely wanted you to know that I'll be waiting, Peter. Things aren't a great deal changed. We just go on from one plane to another, growing sounder and wiser, and a little nearer God all the time. I was right about God, Peter."

"I know," Garvin assented.

"And you're to remember that the hours I spent with you were enough of recompense for all the bitterness I'd suffered. Above all things, you're always to remember that. You may not see, you *can't* see why, now. But you will—tomorrow night. I couldn't quite say good-bye to you before the rest. We've been too close. I couldn't resist one word alone with you, before the end. You'll remember what I ask you to?"

"I couldn't do otherwise." Garvin strove to pierce the shadows, and his voice rose. "But when I think of all the frustration of your life, the things you longed for but missed—and believe me I have thought of it, Felix!"

"It's all right now," the rumbling bass interrupted swiftly. "You know how I loved beauty. That day on the hill, where the immortelles grew. I felt I couldn't reach you. I felt so impotent, thrown back upon myself. I've been up there, since, several times. And once when I was there I saw you come up the hill. That day, when the flowers were all beaten down by the rain, crushed and dotted with the wet, blackened with mud. I knew then you were close to the things I'd tried to make you see. Because you—you went down on your knees, Peter. And I was satisfied."

"Felix—where were you?" Garvin cried.

"Inside the cabin, watching you. I longed to call to you, then, but I knew it wasn't the time to speak. I had to wait. I haven't missed so much, Peter. It's all been crossed out and the score paid."

"Perhaps. I don't see how." Garvin shook his head, in the darkness, with an odd feeling that Underwood could see.

"You *will* see—tomorrow night." The heavy rumble was steady, serene. "Well—go to sleep, Peter. And watch me when the time comes. I'll see you tomorrow night."

"Felix!" Garvin waited in tense silence, but no response came. "Felix!" He leaped to the floor and groped his way to the spot from which Felix's voice had emanated, barking his shin on an unseen chair and bringing up with a muttered curse.

"What's the matter Pete?" Lane called from the adjoining room, and Garvin heard the spring creak slightly as the other man sat up in his bed. He stumbled through the doorway, his face gleaming whitely through the darkness.

"I heard you stumble. Hurt yourself?"

"No," Garvin halted, focusing his eyes on Lane. "Felix—Gene, Felix was there! Did you hear him?"

"I heard nothing." Lane reached up and switched on the bed-lamp, flooding the room with subdued light. "Aren't you imagining things, Pete?"

"I am not!" Garvin sat down on the edge of the bed. "Felix was there, I tell you. Think I don't know that voice? And he said things only Felix could have said. He spoke of things that passed between him and me, and that I have never told any living soul. And he also said he'd *see* me tomorrow night. I'm not so sure he wasn't seeing me then, but I couldn't see him."

"Well, go back to bed, old scout, and try to sleep," Lane answered easily. "Tomorrow night looks like a big night, eh?"

"I'm not sleepy." Garvin stared at Lane soberly. "Gene, when do you go away?"

"Too soon. Don't ask me about it. I don't want to think of that till I have to. Turn in, Pete. You're white as a sheet of paper."

"All right. Good night." Garvin rose and returned to his own room, and Lane switched off the light.

Contrary to his expectation, in half an hour Pete Garvin was sound asleep. It was Gene Lane who lay awake, his black eyes still wide when the dawn came in the window.

THE next day was an eternity to Pete Garvin. He rose early, refreshed by a sound sleep, to find Lane up ahead of him, ready to descend to breakfast. As the hours dragged slowly by, a sense of unreality began growing upon him, as though he were living in a dream, and nothing was corporeal, even the things he touched, and nothing true, even the sounds he heard.

The keenness with which he had been aware of the old Felix on the preceding evening, instead of passing, seemed to obliterate everything else. Only the old Felix was tangible growing closer as the day waned.

Gene Lane, oddly, seemed remote. he could not quite get back into the companionship they had known. If Lane saw his abstraction he made no sign, but maintained his usual demeanor, his customary good nature. Garvin tried to shake himself out of his mood, but it was something bigger than he.

Late in the afternoon he went up to Daniels' room and found the banker sitting by the window, trying to read a magazine that would not be read.

"Lafe, does any possible fear occur to you?" he asked, uneasily, seating himself by Daniels, gazing moodily into the street, three stories below.

"Why, no, Pete. What's bothering you?"

"This." Garvin gripped his hands together nervously. "I've got an uncanny feeling that Felix—if he does show himself—will only be the old Felix we've always known. That would—break his heart."

"What makes you say that?" Daniels asked quickly.

"I dreamed of him last night, after I went to sleep," Pete answered. "And he wasn't changed a jot. Same old ugly Felix. It worries me."

"Dreams go by contraries, old son," Daniels smiled.

"Maybe," Garvin admitted grudgingly. "But—if he remains changed, what's Gene going to think?"

"Gene is going to get shocked out of a year's growth, Pete. And, incidentally, some very deplorable ideas, perhaps." Daniels laid his magazine aside, and placed a hand on Garvin's knee. "Try to forget such thoughts.

I know you're all on edge, and it's easy to say—but not to do."

"All right." Garvin rose, with a wry smile on his face. "I'll get a grip on myself. What time are we to be there? Did Hammerton say anything about it to anyone?"

"Not that I know of." Daniels rose, also, and accompanied Pete to the door. "But no doubt we'll all be there bright and early, eh?"

"I fancy!" Pete's wry smile faded. "Let's see—what time is it now?"

Daniels paused in the act of drawing his watch from his pocket as a rap came on the door, and Lane's voice called through the panels: "Lafe, is Pete in there?"

"He is. Walk right in."

Lane opened the door, but did not enter, and his eyes rested, brilliant and searching, on Garvin's face.

"Pete, I'm going to run down the street on an errand. If I don't get back in time you go on without me. I'll come straight to Hammerton's."

"Wait a minute," Daniels interrupted. "I was just going to look at my watch when you rapped. Hmm. Six-thirty. Yes, we might as well be making tracks, I guess."

"Good enough. You go along with Lafe then, eh, Pete?"

Garvin nodded, making no reply in words, and Lane waved a light good-bye, closed the door and strode down the hall.

"He's avoiding going with me," Garvin said, eying the banker oddly. "Funny—Gene seems a million miles away tonight. I can't reach him at all. I can't think of anything but Felix. And—Lafe—it's Felix as he used to be."

"Well, let's get going." Daniels crossed the room briskly, reached for his hat, and took his latchkey from the pocket of a suit hanging in the wardrobe. "Ready?"

"Yes. My hat's in the hall, downstairs." Garvin squared his shoulders unconsciously, opening the door and waiting for Daniels to pass. "Yes—I think I'm ready."

Daniels, biting his lip at the double meaning in Garvin's slow reply, closed the door and followed Pete down the hall, answering quietly: "Yes—we're all—ready."

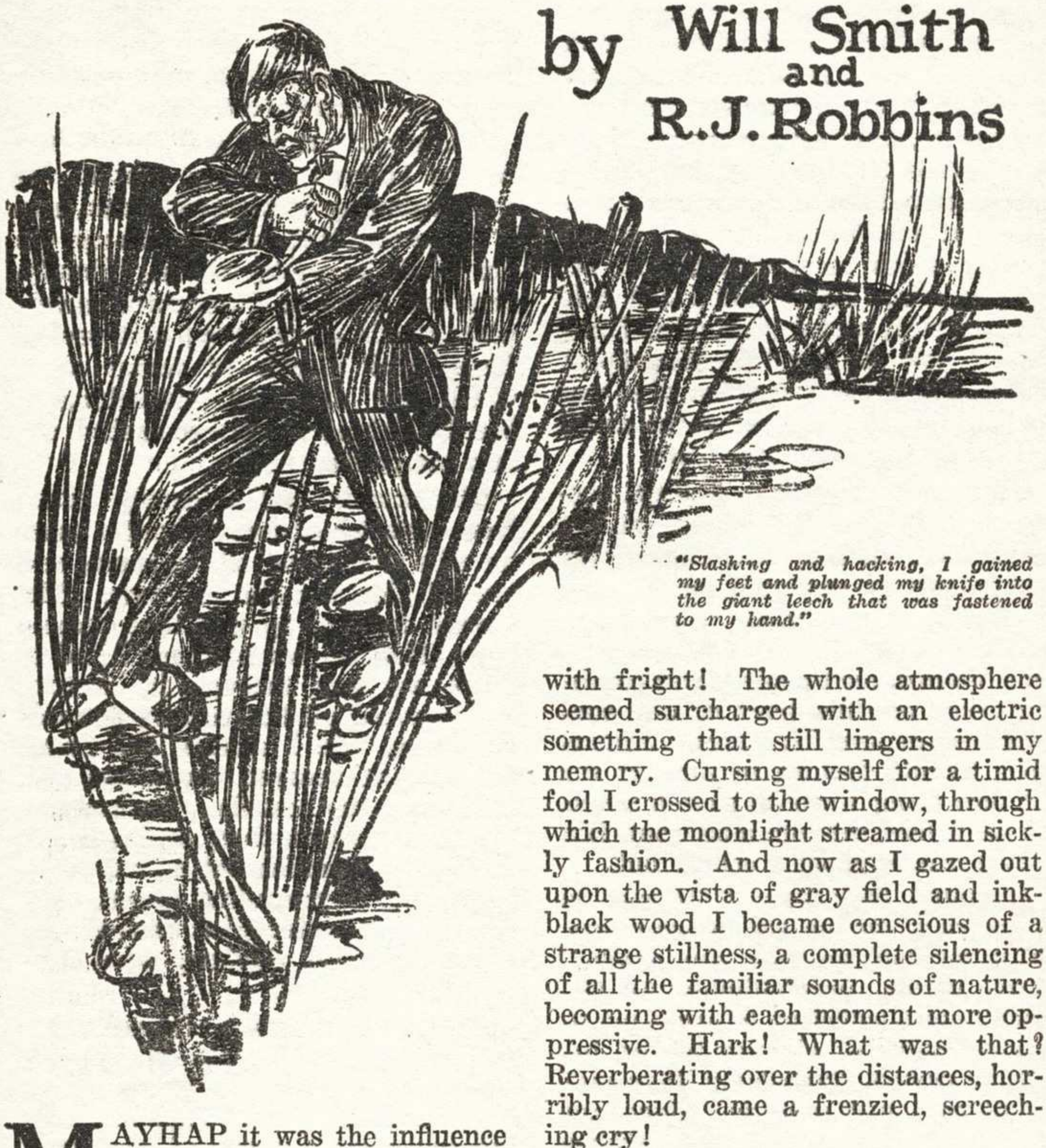
But neither of them, as they were incapable of seeing through wooden panels, knew that Gene Lane stood just inside the door of his own room, listening to their receding footsteps. And neither of them, as they were incapable of hearing a voiceless whisper ten feet away, caught the four halting words Lane spoke as the elevator door clanged and the lift dropped from the third floor:

"Good-bye, old man. Good-bye."

The thrilling drama in Dr. Hammerton's study, when Felix revealed himself to the Inner Circle, is narrated in the gripping chapters that bring this story to an end in next month's issue of
WEIRD TALES.

Swamp Horror

by Will Smith and R.J. Robbins



"Slashing and hacking, I gained my feet and plunged my knife into the giant leech that was fastened to my hand."

MAYHAP it was the influence of the moon's rays playing on my recumbent form—or was it a subtle stealing of that eery sound into the innermost recesses of my subconscious mind? I had suddenly awakened from a profound slumber, every nerve atingle with the premonition of evil. It was as if a ghostly touch on my brow had called me from the enshrouding incubus of sleep and brought me up all standing with fright! The whole atmosphere seemed surcharged with an electric something that still lingers in my memory. Cursing myself for a timid fool I crossed to the window, through which the moonlight streamed in sickly fashion. And now as I gazed out upon the vista of gray field and ink-black wood I became conscious of a strange stillness, a complete silencing of all the familiar sounds of nature, becoming with each moment more oppressive. Hark! What was that? Reverberating over the distances, horribly loud, came a frenzied, screeching cry!

As I stood at the open window wildly straining my ears, it came again. This time the cry had almost a human quality, but there had also crept into it a suggestion of eeriness that made my flesh tingle all over, and a tremor ran over my spine.

Now I am not a coward, and since early childhood have never feared the dark nor anything which might lurk under its cover. Still, to an essen-

tially city-bred man such an occurrence as this was bound to have a fear-inspiring flavor. I had always, indeed, detested anything rural, even before I suffered the frightful experience I am about to relate; had always entertained for the woods and swamps a nameless, unreasoning fear. It was in response to that same fear that I had migrated from the ancestral residence at the tender age of sixteen, getting a job as errand boy in the near-by city. After this I had held down several minor jobs until I had finally "got the bug" for telegraphy. It was the latter occupation that was earning me my living when the awful horror of the swamp took place.

That morning Sam Falton, operator and general factotum at my home town station, had started the ball rolling by engaging me in some small talk on the wire. Both being desirous of learning the Phillips press code, we had, for practise, been couching every possible word of our conversation in that language. Apparently he had decided to sign off for the time being when he gave a signal for me to hold the wire a moment. His next words gave me a severe jolt.

Literally, they were, "Ml man js ca in ses u btr cm ses trs smg myx ab it ur dad bn msg nry a wk." These words, unintelligible to the reader, were sufficient to cause me to demand leave of absence for an indefinite period. Translated, they are: "Mail man just came in. Says you better come. Says there's something mysterious about it; your dad been missing nearly a week!"

I had about decided to go back to bed when I heard the sound repeated again and again. It was nearer this time and sounded like the wail of some creature in a frenzy of torture. At times it would end in a long-drawn-out, strangling, rattling howl that made my blood run cold.

Could this have anything to do with my father's disappearance? The sounds might have been made by madman or beast, or by something altogether unearthly. My mind, ever used to quick decisions, was instantly made up. I resolved to see.

The night was hot and humid, and in the hollows a heavy ground fog was beginning to manifest itself, and I suspected that before sun-up the air would be pretty chilly. Plainly, time was short, so I contented myself with a pair of trousers, a sleeveless jersey and a pair of tennis shoes which lay at hand. Snatching a hastily lighted lantern I dashed out into the pulsing night.

The sounds had evidently issued from a stretch of forest about a quarter mile to the rear of the house, and toward this I made my way. The ground fog had by this time become quite thick, so that at times I had to grope my way through it. Nature had resumed all her various discordant notes. As I entered the forest the odor of decayed vegetation and mold smote my nostrils. The lantern, a relic of bygone days, cast a feeble circle of light which but served to intensify the surrounding gloom. My thoughts, as I struggled through the underbrush and thickets, were anything but cheerful.

At times fantastically formed roots took on the appearance of serpents ever waiting to drag me down. That I did not fall on more than one occasion was more a result of good luck than of agility on my part. I must have proceeded into the depths of the woods for at least a mile when suddenly the fearful cry came again, now in a direction more to my left and somewhat nearer. I shivered and grasped the lantern more tightly, meantime cursing the folly that had sent me on this wild quest unarmed. Then again the cry — fearsomely close!

At this juncture, grown careless of the terrain beneath my feet, I suddenly stumbled violently over a rotting log lying directly in my path. I remember taking a desperate grip on the lantern, which barely prevented it from flying from my hand, when—a most unearthly scream resounded in the bushes not ten feet away, and a huge body dashed against me, brushing me flat and extinguishing the lantern. Before it died the flame flared up into momentary brilliancy, giving me a passing glimpse of a great, wolflike creature with blood-slavering jaws and terrible glistening fangs!

I struck my head as I fell, and my senses reeled.

I HAVE no distinct recollection of my return to the house. I must have lain unconscious in the forest for some time, for it was nearly dawn when I finally got up and somehow made my way out. Once in bed I dropped again into oblivion, and did not awake until some hours later.

Since my father had had no hired man, and Mother had died long years before, there was no one to call me or prepare the meals. When I finally found the ambition to arise and dress, my first act was to get together a meal, for I intended to cover a lot of ground during the day and felt that my stomach should be well fortified. Had I known what lay ahead of me I doubt if I could have eaten anything!

I had about finished my bacon and coffee when I was aroused from a momentary abstraction by a sound from the outside. A quick glance around the premises revealing nothing, I was about to give up the search when I heard it again; but this time it was a low moan, and of a character which I recognized. Hurrying to the back shed I threw open the door. There, brilliantly limned in the shaft of sunlight that streamed in, lay the still form of a huge wolfhound!

I started back aghast. Could this gaunt creature be our good old Fang, the pet with whom Father and I had used to spend so many happy hours, and who had greeted me with such rough joy only yesterday? Yes, it was indeed he, for at my call the faithful fellow struggled feebly to his feet, and, swaying drunkenly, wagged a heroic tail.

But to what a terrible state the animal had been reduced! His whole form was wasted to a painful thinness. The skin, hairless in patches, was nearly white, colorless. The poor creature seemed to be suffering from what I could attribute to no other cause than such a weakness as is caused by a heavy loss of blood. And yet, minutely examining every inch of the slackened skin, I could find not a scratch, *no visible wound whatever!*

I lost no time in feeding the dog and did my poor best at doctoring him. My efforts, aided no doubt by the vitality of his ancient wild ancestry, were sufficiently successful to enable the animal after a while to recover enough strength to walk without difficulty, and even to run and fetch sticks. But I knew well that it would be many days before he could regain the robust sturdiness of the day before.

What, I kept wondering, could have been the agency that had brought Fang to this pitiful condition? What could have drained his veins so completely without leaving a single mark? Where had he been the night before, and what frightful thing could have reduced him to the state of abject fear that caused him to dash so madly through the forest uttering those agonized, strangled screams? For I was convinced that the creature I had encountered last night under such terrifying circumstances was none other than Fang, his really monstrous size enlarged in my

terror-stricken eyes to gigantic proportions.

But I could swear to the blood I had seen dripping from the beast's jaws. Whence had that come?

The horrible answer to all these questions was vouchsafed me that very day.

It being by now early afternoon, I realized that if I were to search for my father today I should have to start at once. As I locked up the house preparatory to setting out I tried to recall to mind the general topography of the region.

The farm, which has been in the possession of our family more than a century, is of considerable extent, and is made up mostly of timberland and swamp, there being only a few acres of open land. Directly to the rear of the house is a large forest tract, some parts of which have not been penetrated by men for years. Beyond this is an almost unexplored waste known as Marvin's Swamp.

Legend has it that Old Man Marvin, who owned the farm before it came into my family, died in this vicinity under mysterious circumstances, and it is thought that his bones found their last resting place at the bottom of the morass. The only clue to his fate was furnished by his ancient shotgun and a few bloodstains found near a stagnant pool in the depths of the marsh. I shudder as I recall the terrible solution I myself was enabled to furnish to this mystery of long ago!

In starting on the search my footsteps followed almost without deviation the course I had pursued the previous night, but this time I was not alone. The great wolfhound was now my guide, and I soon discovered he was following a scent. Indeed, I had considerable difficulty at times in keeping up with him, so great was his evident desire to lead me to a definite spot.

This forest tract is in itself extensive, and is pretty wild. My father had never allowed anyone to hunt here except members of the family, and as a result the place abounded with partridges, squirrels, rabbits and other small game. Occasionally even, I would get a glimpse of a deer or a fox as it leapt away at my approach. Everywhere was the odor of pine, hemlock and decaying vegetation. The silence of the place was so profound that the smallest sound was immediately noticeable, and even the snapping of twigs under foot and the breaking of dead branches as I made my way through the thickets served to keep my nerves continually on edge. At length we had penetrated to the other side of the forest, and I found myself at the edge of Marvin's Swamp. Somehow, call it premonition or what you will, a cold shiver passed up my spine as I gazed upon this dreary stretch, and I glanced around apprehensively.

Nothing appeared within my field of vision which could possibly be alarming, so after a brief hesitation I followed the big wolfhound on the trail. Within a few minutes I could see that we were heading toward the vilest part of the great morass, and again that strange presentiment of evil came over me. The ground was getting softer now, and small sinkholes became more and more numerous. For an hour we pushed on, the way becoming more difficult every minute. The vegetation grew here very rankly, and had become almost entirely aquatic. Cat-o'-nine-tails were now in evidence everywhere, especially about the spot where the dog now impatiently awaited me. This spot was at what marked the center of Marvin's Swamp—a small stream of almost stagnant water known as Dead River.

The name is rather a dignity, for Dead River is in reality little more than an arm of the main pool of the

swamp. Its course had once been traced back and found to extend through the worst part of the region for about a mile and thence into the hills, where its only source was found to be a series of small springs. At the bank of this repulsive waterway I stopped and began to examine the locality closely. Finally I found what I had been looking for, namely, a multitude of footprints in the soft mud. A glance at these was enough to convince me as to who had made the tracks, but such evidence was as nothing to that which now met my eye. For a little to the right of the trail, half hidden in a tuft of rank grass into which it had evidently been unwittingly dropped, lay father's familiar old hunting knife! I bowed my head; all hope had left me.

But I had little time to stand here sadly musing, for the strange behavior of the dog now claimed my attention. He stood a little way ahead of me along the bank, trembling from head to drooping tail; first whining beseechingly back at me, then snarling with a sort of frightened ferocity as he gazed ahead to where the trail led into a dark, evil-looking glade. Absently dropping the knife into a trousers pocket, I hastened to follow his fear-halted lead; and my quest came to an abrupt end!

THE glade—what a hideous spot it was! The river at this point was but a desolation of cat-o'-nine-tails, rank growths and green, slimy water. Little green lizards basked dreamily on rotting logs and swam lazily about in the stagnant pool. Brilliant-colored dragon-flies poised for a breathless instant over foul, exotic lilies, only to dart away into black, hot aisles of the swamp. Leeches were everywhere, and now and again a water snake came zigzagging among the lily pads in search of prey. More noisome still, the bottom of the pool and its filthy banks were littered with all kinds of dead creatures—all sizes of bodies, from those of tiny squirrels up to the carcasses of bob-cats and even deer. Not one of them bore a visible wound, and every one was almost colorless. Those soaking in the murky water were bloated into gross exaggerations of their proper sizes, but those on the banks were dry, shriveled, shrunken things! All this I noted as in a wondering dream, the while I gazed on the body of my father.

It lay on the bank with one leg dangling in the water, the limbs weirdly contorted, as though the man had succumbed only after a terrific struggle. Nearly demoralized, I flew frantically at the body, seizing it by the shoulders and yanking it clear of the horrible pool. A hasty examination sufficed to show that father had met the same mysterious fate that had taken toll of so many lives in this hateful place.

I had barely made the discovery when I was completely undone by a distant, long-drawn-out howl — the frightened bay of the wolfhound. His mission accomplished, he had promptly deserted, leaving me alone with my dead.

I was not long to wonder why!

WHAT was the terrible fate that could strike down a man in the sanguine glow of physical strength and activity and leave this shriveled, white, bloodless death? And that, too, without leaving a single mark on the husk of a body! To be sure, the clothing was covered with dried blood-stains, but whence had the blood come? Was there not some tiny wound which I in my first frantic pawing of the corpse had overlooked — perhaps the two little purple holes which I shudderingly remembered were supposed to be the mark of venomous snake bites? I stooped again, and, clenching my jaws to still my chattering teeth, began a careful search of

the drained thing that had been my father. And as the fruitless quest went on there came again that hush, that awed stilling of the myriad sounds of this rank nature about me.

I became conscious of each noise, as it were, when it had ceased to beat its note on my ears. The shrilling of the frogs first dropped out of nature's discordant symphony, to be followed by the chirp of the crickets, the various low bird-twitterings and rustlings, and other sounds, most of them to me fearsomely unidentified. Now all that remained was the droning of bees, punctuated at longish intervals by the mournful *sol do-do-do-lo do-o-o*— of a far-away swamp robin.

Now, after one dismally long-drawn-out call, the bird became silent, and the only sound left in the steamy, fetid swamp world was that bee-hum. This now seemed slowly to increase in volume until finally the very air became charged and volatile with its menace. At last I could endure the deafening sound no longer, and, eardrums bursting with the throbbing, zooming waves — smothered in them, overwhelmed — I toppled over in a black faint.

I was destined soon to bless that fainting fall, for I was to realize it had saved me from a fate worthy the ingenuity of a thousand fiends—the same ravaged death that had claimed my father.

OF COURSE I could not have lain unconscious more than a minute or two, but at the time it seemed ages before I opened my eyes — opened them to a sun-drenched, somehow less fearful world — to find myself sprawled on my back, evidently in a little depression. Of this hollow, the bottom seemed covered with some wet, sticky substance, which to my not over-critical bones made a rather pleasant couch.

Nature had resumed her normal note, and I became gratefully conscious that the horrible droning of bees was no longer in evidence. As I again closed my eyes in response to a certain feeling of lassitude that bound me, I wondered if it had been a sound from the outside world or if it had come from within me. Dreamily revolving the affair in my mind, I was inclined to believe the whole thing—the hush, the drumming in my ears and the fainting — had been caused by the gradual weakening of my faculties. But then how to account for that weakening?

The mystery was getting too deep for me, and I almost decided to give it all up and flee from this hellish swamp, sending someone in after Father's body. At any rate, I could not lie long dreaming in this soft bed. Lazily I opened my eyes; wearily I stretched out an arm; limply I let it fall at my side: and then, screeching with all my poor strength, I leapt to my feet. My outflung arm had dropped with a sirupy splash in what was revealed to my popping eyes as thickening, dark red blood!

And now began the horror—ugh! an experience so incredibly, grotesquely horrid that recollection of its lewd details now halts my pen and imbues me with stark nausea. If I had disliked and distrusted the woods and waste places before, my feeling was nothing compared to the seething, loathing hate that grips me now at the mention of that dread word, swamp.

Reeling giddily, my unmanning utterly completed by the sickening realization that I had been lolling so softly in a bed of blood, I had time only to clutch at a low-hanging vine for support before the things — oh, those fat, slime-sweating, crawling *things*—came on! There seemed to be hundreds of them — snail-shaped things as large as dogs—hemming me in on every side. With a slow, irresistible purpose they advanced in a horrible silence. As they closed in, their

silence became broken by a nasty greasy sound as of molasses being lazily lifted and stirred with a million sticks. Now they were upon me, and I ran amuck!

I leapt on the nearest and tried to scuff them into the earth; I beat them foolishly with my fists; I sought to hug them off my heaving chest; I rolled over and over them; I tore at their filthy bodies with my teeth; the while I uttered one tortured shriek after another. But in my unarmed state I was no match for the horde, and the things continued in their deadly purpose, bearing me down and beginning to fasten themselves on to every part of me. At last my frenzied yells were stilled by a clammy body laid across the whole lower half of my face; and now my eyes, rolling in dumb agony, encountered the foulest scene of all, and I understood.

The blood-filled hollow in which I had been lying! Crowding around all sides of it like pigs at a trough were a dozen of the monsters, greedily and with many blubbery swilling sounds absorbing the clotting gore!

Now I knew the fate that had befallen Father, had taken old Marvin years before, had claimed the deer and other animals, had dragged at Fang when he had searched out Father's body, and now bade fair to add me to those other letted cadavers. Yes, I could see it all now, could understand anything in this rank world of evil growths.

Bloodsuckers! That's what they were! Great, fat, overgrown leeches; spawned of the filth and grown here to this morbid size by centuries of breeding and interbreeding in the lushness. Oh, the horror that swept me!

It was when the obscene feast drew to a close that I thanked God for the fall I had taken a few minutes before when I had fainted, for there was now revealed in the bottom of the depression the empty sacklike body of one of the gigantic leeches. Evidently the scout of the main herd, it had stolen and fastened itself to my back as I stooped over the remains of my father. Its slow sapping of my life's blood had caused the humming in my ears and finally the deathly faint which had saved my life and been the thing's undoing. For in falling I had landed on my back on a jagged bit of stone which had pierced and emptied the creature, filling my resting place with blood.

The sharp tip of the rock now protruded through the flattened carcass and became my inspiration. What did it suggest to me? I was fast sinking into a soft, black oblivion and could not think—did not care to, particularly. Now another slimy body drew along my head and settled itself in such a way as to cover my eyes, shutting out the scene completely. Still the memory of that rock sliver persisted and disturbed me vaguely. What did it remind me of, anyway? Well, I didn't know—never mind. But yes, I *did* know! Now I had it—a knife! Father's knife, in my pocket!

Gone in a breath was that deathly languor. I became imbued with the strength of desperation. I heaved, I threshed—one hand came clear. Lifting the arm almost unmindful of the weight of a monster still clinging to it, I worked my hand between two foul bodies into my pocket. And now I drew it out, clutching that blessed knife!

Butchery! Blood!

My first kill was the bloated thing that lay across my scalp and eyes. But what a flood of gore now cascaded over me, filling hair, ears and eyes! Blinking an eye, I plunged the knife into the stinking monster that blocked my mouth—and was again

soaked in a green-streaked red deluge. My mouth free, I found strength once more to yell, but now a note of battle and triumph in the cry!

Slashing and hacking, I gained my feet. Now I seemed to swim in a sea of blood, as sinking the knife to the hilt again and again, I finally freed my legs. And even as I had used my mouth the instant I had cleared it, so now I used my legs. Stumbling, groping, crying, laughing, I ran.

Don't ask me how I found my way out of the trackless swamp, nor how I reached the farmhouse; nor how—praise be!—I got aboard the train. Don't ask me anything about the woods, the swamps, the awful, fearsome, evil country.

I am in the city now, and here I stay.

DEATH CAROL

BY WALT WHITMAN

Come, lovely and soothing Death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later, delicate Death.

Prais'd be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious;
And for love, sweet love—But praise! praise! praise!
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding Death.

Dark Mother, always gliding near, with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for thee—I glorify thee above all;
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come, come unfalteringly.

Approach, strong Deliveress!
When it is so—when thou hast taken them, I joyously sing the dead,
Lost in the loving, floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the flood of thy bliss, O Death.

From me to thee glad serenades,
Dances for thee I propose; saluting thee—adornments and feastings for thee;
And the sights of the open landscape, and the high-spread sky, are fitting,
And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.

The night, in silence, under many a star;
The ocean shore, and the husky whispering wave, whose voice I know;
And the soul turning to thee, O vast and well-veil'd Death,
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.

Over the tree-tops I float thee a song!
Over the rising and sinking waves—over the myriad fields, and the prairies wide;
Over the dense-pack'd cities all, and the teeming wharves and ways,
I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee, O Death!

THE CURSE

Egyptian Tale of Reincarnation

By CHARLES HILAN CRAIG

THE true beginning of the tale I have to tell lies in the almost impenetrable obscurity of ages past, long before civilization in the modern sense of the word had touched that vast uncertain thing which we have called Africa; long even before the vaunting ambition of Alexander the Great had led him to dream of establishing perpetual world empire, a dream which resulted in his hurling rank on rank of fighting men to death in the useless, vain struggle to attain the unattainable. For the tale begins with the very dawn of history—with the reign of the ruthless Pharaohs of Egypt. And though it is a far cry from that time to this and, too, a far cry from the pyramids of the Nile valley to the heart of the immutable Sahara, it seems not so far but that the spirit of the Little Princess might span the sneering centuries.

THERE is the old story of those who loved too well, of love that betrayed itself, and of love that palled.

Bennett had come to Africa, and the girl had died. But to Bennett she was alive. He saw her in the African night. He saw her in the African noon. There was about the phantom that haunted him something tangible and real, something living; and so, being of the Occident, he cursed the phantom and tried to put it aside as one would discard an old coat. But he could not, and ultimately his Arab comrade, Hadji, read his secret.

"Put her from thy thoughts, heart of my heart," he said in his execrable Arabic-French-English. "For what is one woman more, or one woman less? Does the sea sorrow that one of its fish is taken?"

"But I love her even yet," said Bennett; whereupon the Arab threw out his arms, hands extended, in a gesture at once suggestive of patience and impatience, of disdain and tolerance. In his strange fatalistic philosophy he could find no place for regret over that which was of the past, and he muttered something about "women being as plentiful as lice in a Jew's beard."

But throughout that terrible trek across the desert the ghost of the dead followed Bennett. After the hardest march he could not sleep for hours. The terrible heat from the equatorial sun in the daytime and the sudden bitter cold of the night began to wear down his nerves. The endless stretches of rock and sand and gravel reflecting the light from the heavens seared his eyes till they were red and swollen. And ever before him in the light of the sun, the moon, the stars, danced the apparition.

By the time the little caravan had covered half its journey Bennett had lost every sense of fairness and decency. Even to Hadji he was as ugly as he dared be: on Hadji depended in a large measure the success or failure of the expedition which had set out to find the lost tomb of the Little Princess. Hadji had told the Americans in Tripoli who were interested in such things that he was one of the few men who ever had approached the sacred place which was regarded with a superstis-

tious awe by the natives; and, as a result, Bennett, well versed in the lore of ancient Egypt, had set out with the Arab to open the tomb.

Sometimes in the evening, after they had watched the sun rush in a sea of purple-gold fire past the horizon and the stars leapt forth suddenly, startlingly, Hadji would speak of the object of their quest in low, slurring tones, would tell the story that had been whispered down through the ages: of the Little Princess who had loved and sinned and whose body, as a punishment, had been carried away on the back of a camel to the very heart of the Great Desert for burial.

"And there through the centuries she has slept, heart of my heart, and there she will continue to sleep unless, belike——"

He slurred, paused, did not go on. An inscrutable smile touched the thin lips for a moment, and in his eyes there burned all the knowledge of the ages.

"Unless what?" asked Bennett, sharply.

"You are well versed in the knowledge of the ancients, in the laws of Horus and Isis and Osiris; and tomorrow you will learn more. Tomorrow you will know!"

And the Arab lay back on the cooling ground.

"What do you mean?" growled Bennett.

"Tomorrow," smiled the Arab, and he muttered something under his breath about "people too impatient to wait till they were without teeth to buy false ones" and "crossing a river that was still miles away."

THE days and then the weeks passed by and they had pushed nearer and nearer to the center of that vast inconsistent desert of deserts. Came the day at last when they would make the final lap of their journey. Finally, when the progress became too slow, the blacks were left with the camels some five miles from the range of hills that jutted sharply out above the lower plateau land over which they were passing.

Bennett and the Arab rode deeper into the hills. The way became rockier and harder to traverse the farther they went. At last the animals could go no farther, and the adventurers halted for a few minutes. It lacked but little of the noon hour, and the Arab turned toward Mecca and prostrated himself in one of his frequent prayers.

"O Thou All-Powerful! O Holy of Holies! O Light that knows no blotting out! O——"

With a curse Bennett, already nearly a nervous wreck, walked away. Shortly, however, he returned and suggested that they go on.

"Follow this canyon, heart of my heart," said the Arab, casually. "Turn not to the right or to the left and there can be no mistake."

"Aren't you going too?" Bennett questioned in decided wonder, for in hiring the Arab at Tripoli the Americans had specifically stated that one of their number was to be accompanied to the tomb of the Little Princess. Though the scientists had never heard of her before, they knew from the Arab's sincerity in telling his story that he was speaking the truth.

"I stop here," said Hadji, and rather dreamily: "So it was written on the scroll of Fate by the archangel."

"Why?" growled Bennett.

"There is the curse," answered the Arab, enigmatically.

"What do you mean?"

"There is but one who may enter the tomb of the Little Princess."

"I'm going to enter it."

"That rests with Allah."

A curse rose to Bennett's lips, but he recognized at once the futility of trying to argue with the Arab. As

well reach for the farthest star, he thought. And so Bennett took his tools and pressed on and on.

As he traveled higher the way became still rockier. The sand had given way now to jagged rock and occasional patches of gravel. He pressed on.

After several hours he came to what he realized could be nothing else than the tomb of the Little Princess. For a long time Bennett sat at the base of the big marble structure, wondering. What infinite labor must have been involved in the building of this tomb far from the beaten paths of mankind! It was lost in the maze of rock and sand, forgotten in the rush of centuries.

Then with crowbar and chisel and ax Bennett set about to open the tomb about which a desert legend of horror had evidently been created. It had been sealed well by the dust of years, and it was not many minutes until the sweat was leaping in beads from his forehead and trickling down his face.

He worked on and finally cleared away the mortar from the cracks where the door fitted into the body of the structure. When he had done this he was amazed to find how easily the heavy door came away. He swung it clear with improvised block and tackle, and there swirled out to him the reek of dead centuries.

He found, after a time, the usual papyrus scroll covered with hieroglyphic writing. By the dim light that entered the tomb he could clearly make out the outline of the elaborately inlaid sarcophagus which very probably contained the mummy of the Little Princess. Bennett left the close room and went out to sit on the marble base, which even the centuries had failed to wear down. There he began to translate the paper he had found.

It was the story of the life of the girl of long ago. It was a tale all of tragedy—of hopes shattered and dreams destroyed and ideals fallen. Misery was apparent in every line, and Bennett found himself muttering under his breath, "Poor little girl, poor little girl!"

She was a Pharaoh's daughter, but she loved a soldier in her sire's army. Love had come upon her like a great overpowering flame, and she had gone to him. But finding them together, another—a man who desired her, a man high in the ruler's esteem—had hastened away to the monarch with his strange story. And the Pharaoh, being a just man, who observed the law, demanded that one of the two should die, that one should kill the other; and when by a hideously slow lottery he had discovered that the Little Princess should be the one to go beyond, he placed the blade in the hands of her lover and ordered him to strike.

"It is written thus, soul of ten thousand roses, but surely this cannot be the end of all. It must be that in another world we shall meet and, belike, love again."

But she had looked through the outer veil of his soul and read the mockery in his heart.

"*Ahee!* It may be that we shall meet again—I and thou; for, though the Book of the Going Forth does not teach that the soul shall return, it is incredible that this should be the end of all things. We shall meet again, and that time it will be thou who must pay."

And then, said the record written by the king's high priest, the steel had pierced to its poisoned hilt. So died the Little Princess of Egypt. Her body had been preserved and the rites performed.

"But," the great ruler had spoken decisively, finally, "she sinned. It is not fitting then that she should lie with her fathers."

So the Little Princess was taken away across the gigantic waste which had seldom been traversed. Piece by piece the marble for her tomb was

taken overland and at last the burial place had been built and sealed.

"Poor little girl," repeated Bennett. And then there came to him that thought which had recurred in his mind again and again: "For each man kills the thing he loves—"

The Egyptian soldier had killed what he loved best. Bennett, too, had killed the thing he loved.

"—and so he had to die!"

The thought came over him like a blight. It withered his soul. It crushed his heart. It blasted his hope for the future.

It was then that Bennett noticed something he not not seen before. It was a tiny piece of the papyrus, and the writing upon it differed from that of the tale of the Princess. Slowly Bennett deciphered the meaning of the rude markings.

"I swear to thee by the great Osiris that we shall meet again, I and thou; but it is thou who wilt come to me, not I to thee. In each incarnation thou wilt enter my hidden tomb, and as a penalty for desecrating the dead thou shalt die in shame, in degradation. This is my curse upon thee!"

"Poor little girl," said Bennett again. "I don't blame you. I'm glad I'm not your false lover."

For many minutes he pondered. The girl's message brought up a startling paradox. Contrary to common belief there has been found in the records of ancient Egypt no account of a belief in metempsychosis—the transmigration of the human soul. And yet, here——

BENNETT went into the tomb again, this time with a light, as the day was dying. He lifted the cover of the ancient casket. The heat was oppressive; the stench of the dead swirled about his head. The presence of the unseen became almost tangible. Terror dwelt in that tomb.

And by the dim light Bennett looked upon the swathed figure of the Little Princess. The walls of the sepulcher revolved about him. Lights flashed and gleamed across his vision. His brain seethed. The sickening horror in the heart of him increased till it was a monstrosity. The walls of the tomb stopped revolving, stood still a moment, then with a terrible crunching, moaning sound, with a flashing of lights, with the ruthless crush of pitiless death they closed in upon him. For the eyes that seemed to look upon him from the sarcophagus, the face that seemed to lie there, could belong to no other than the girl he had wronged.

The strength in his knees melted, but his body jerked spasomodically. The outstretched, clutching hands caught in the swathings of the mummy in such a manner that as he fell he flung it over him toward the entrance. At the same moment he swooned.

When Bennett came back to his senses he was lying on the floor of the tomb. There was in his head a terrible throbbing which seemed nearly to tear out his soul. But with the returning of consciousness came memory of what had been. And as he lay there Bennett began to think logically and quite sanely on what had happened. He had, he told himself, been the victim of an illusion. He had been thinking of the dead girl, and the first sight of the mummy had startled him into believing the illusion. The story of the princess and the dead air of the tomb had combined to make his senses reel and leave him. There could be nothing true about it; he had translated incorrectly—there was no reincarnation; surely it was preposterous even to dream that he had lived and died and lived again through a hundred centuries, each time killing the woman he loved, each time paying for it with his life. Ridiculous!

He rose to his feet rather shakily and turned to look at the mummy. Little resemblance there would be

now, he thought, between that shriveled thing and the girl he had loved. Little——

But the mummy was not in the casket as he had expected. It lay across the doorway, and sticking in the breast of it was a long, age-rusted knife!

Bennett felt terror rise once more within him. Sweat poured in ghastly beads from his forehead. With a cry he leapt from his position and toward the door, but one foot caught in the winding sheets of the mummy, and he stumbled and fell. A jagged rock tore an even more jagged gash in his head and blood streamed over his face. He rose to his feet. Out—out into the open! Away! Away!

When he was exhausted he fell, but ever he rose again and pushed on. Visions so hideous that they seared his soul crossed his fevered brain. Down through the centuries he had come, killing, only to be killed. Down through the centuries he would go, killing, but to be killed. Endless death in endless life: eternal horror! Through all the ages the curse of a dead woman had followed him. Always it would be there, for so it was written. He must die. He must die! Even the mummy, dead dozens of centuries, had moved in the tomb to prevent his escape when the walls had failed to crush him.

BENNETT did not stop to reason. There was no logic left within him. He only knew that he must leave the mountains behind. And he lost all conception of time and space and reality as he ran on and on down the canyon.

The silence of the desert was over him, about him, as he staggered through the starlit night. It weighed down upon him. It was oppressive, all-powerful, maddening. The stars were glittering now like the points of infinitely terrible daggers. The moon was the color of blood—her blood, he thought.

He was alone. In all the vast universe nothing moved except the man. Alone! A lost soul alone in a lost land. Lost forever.

And then suddenly Bennett began to laugh. He laughed at the stars, the moon, the desert, the mountains. And as he laughed he ran. He had gone quite mad.



There is a Real Thrill in These Final Chapters of

RED ETHER

A Tale of Destruction

By PETTERSEN MARZONI

The Story So Far

A STRONG voice over the radio broadcasts to the entire world the demand that war must be abolished, and orders the United States to demobilize, except for the necessary civil police, by May first. If demobilization is not accomplished by that date, the voice warns, the Capitol of the United States will be utterly destroyed by etheric vibrations when Congress is in session.

To prove his power, the speaker destroys, on successive nights, a brewery at Great Falls, Montana, the quadrangle at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, and The Breakers on the Isle of Palms near Charleston, South Carolina. At the announced time these buildings shimmer and glow, and inside of a second are turned into red dust.

The President advises Congress to stand firm, and offers to meet in session with it after May first until the danger is averted. Meantime all efforts of government are turned toward seeking the source of the etheric rays, and riots occur throughout the nation.

Douglas Blandon, a young engineer, stumbles upon the source of the menace in the wilds of Tennessee while exploring 3,000 acres of wild land that has been left to him. His dog is instantly wiped out, changed in a trice to cosmic dust, by collision with the wire mesh fence that surrounds the power house where Hilda Thorsby and her father are conducting their campaign against war. Blandon sprains his ankle, falls and strikes his head, and is rescued by the Thorsbys, but finds himself helpless to escape to warn the world, because of the meshed-wire fence that surrounds the place and that carries the death-dealing vibrations. Thorsby explains to Blandon than he can tune in to the vibrations of the electrons, halt their flow around the atom, and thus instantly destroy matter, at any distance, controlling the radius and directions at which his rays will strike.

6

THORSBY led the way from the laboratory back to the living room, where Hilda awaited them, a question in her eyes. Blandon did not seat himself. He stood leaning on his crutch watching them both. Thorsby's moment of rage was passed and he was contemplating his guest calmly.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Blandon?" he asked courteously. Blandon did not hear the question, for he was trying to frame his thoughts. His plan was changed. He could not hide his intentions any longer.

"Mr. Thorsby, you are wrong, all wrong," he suddenly spoke, and never in his life had he been so serious. "You can't realize how wrong you are, sir. Don't you see what you are doing? You are wrecking the country you say you want to save, and when she is gone there is nothing left."

Thorsby did not move or change expression. Blandon went on.

"You have only frightened the little minds you talk about. The big minds are unafraid. They see things as they are. They see that little minds have to be made big before force may be abolished. What are ships and forts and guns but larger clubs and stones and arrows than the primitive man once used? Man has fought since the beginning of time. He fought to be a man and then kept on fighting to grow into a better man. Civilization is founded on this uphill fight. Every time man has fought, something better has come out of it. I don't mean that wars start for better things—they are outbursts that somehow leave the world better off.

"You are not going to stop them because you take away the things that kill easily. They will fight each other with fists and stones and clubs and knives. You are not going to teach the little minds anything. Haven't the mobs, your little mind in mass,

turned and killed kings with nothing but their hands? The little minds are burning and tearing down this country today. Didn't you just hear it over your radio? They have burned churches. They will burn and destroy everything. You have run them into a panic, but you haven't shaken the big minds. Can't you see that, Mr. Thorsby?

"You are going to destroy Congress. All right, the little minds for a while will take charge until the big minds can herd them together again. And then you will be back at the beginning, except that this power of yours will be discovered and used for further destruction. Tell them you have reconsidered, Mr. Thorsby. Tell them now. The world is educating itself to the destruction of war, but it has not reached that point, and you are not going to drive it with force."

Blandon was breathless. He was not accustomed to the making of speeches. His great hulk had been more useful in physical emergencies, but he spoke with an inspiration beyond him. His inspiration was wasted. Thorsby still sat without moving, his expression as calm as when Blandon began. The girl stared at him, yet if she were impressed Blandon could not see it beyond that steady, serious gaze. He started to begin his plea again. Thorsby interrupted:

"Mr. Blandon, you are a warrior." He waved his hand to prevent Blandon from speaking. "You admitted that you fought in the last war. Yours is the viewpoint of the man who fights for what he thinks is right. You are willing to sacrifice by the millions to gain a temporary end. And I, sir, am going to sacrifice a few thousand, if it is necessary, which I trust it is not, to gain the greatest end in all the world. Let there be peace. There shall be peace."

Thorsby had risen as he began to speak, and he drew his striking frame up majestically as he thundered forth his final dictum. He turned when he spoke and left the room. Blandon heard the door to the laboratory thud shut behind him. He turned to the girl.

"It is no use, Mr. Blandon." Her tone was kindly. "Father is right. We have discussed this many times in the last six years. We have considered it calmly. We learned the curse of war nine years ago, and there shall be no more war." Her tone was as decisive as her father's.

"You can't stop it, Miss Thorsby," Blandon interrupted. "What you are doing now is worse than war. War is controlled, this is panic uncontrolled, it is the road to a world madness. War could never hurt the world so much nor you so much as what you are doing now."

"It could not hurt us so much?" Hilda's voice held a new note. "What do you know about what war could do to us? It was nothing to you but a big adventure. It didn't take anything away from you. It took Father's and my world away. Shall I tell you what war did to us?

"From the time I can remember, Father taught my brother and me that peace was beautiful. My brother lived that idea, and my mother was so peaceful, so much of love. We were pacifists before the Great War was dreamed of. When it first came, Father said that it meant all the world would fight. We talked of it night after night, and as it went along we hoped that this country would not have to fight. But it did, and the draft came. We discussed that, and my father and brother agreed there was nothing for them to do but follow the laws of the land. Mother began to weep that night—she knew what was coming. Brother was called, and he went away. He

went early, and each morning dawned to a new terror.

"The months went on, and we grew hopeful. But Mother wept. She knew what was coming. It came. The news reached us when all the world was celebrating the armistice. My brother was killed one hour before peace came. My mother died the next day. So we know what war means, Mr. Blandon. Father has not smiled since then. He has not been gay. That was the day he forgot to smoke. It was then he decided that there should be no more wars. He had been a successful inventor. He had investments, their value increased greatly by the war. He sold them all and we came to this place. He bought the materials. We built the dam and the plant. We have lived here for eight years. We expect to live here the remainder of our lives. But war shall not live, Mr. Blandon. It shall end."

The girl ceased. There were no tears. Her voice broke a little when she spoke of her mother's death, but otherwise she was almost calm. Blandon wanted her to weep, so that he might comfort her. He could feel the weight of sorrow that was crushing her. He wanted it lifted away, so that her seriousness would be wiped away in joyous beauty. Mute in his desire, he could only say, stammeringly and flatly:

"I am sorry, Miss Thorsby."

She seemed to understand that many things lay behind his words, because her look was grateful.

"Thank you, Mr. Blandon. I hope you will see that we are right. I wanted you to understand us. Good night." She gave him her hand, and he marveled at the velvety firmness of it, a hand that had helped to change the face of nature. He watched her grace as she left him, with a new light in his eyes.

THE days of inaction that followed left Blandon on the verge of frenzy at times. He did not see Thorsby again, except in the distance, moving between the power house and the block structure on the hill.

The morning following their conversation, Hilda had taken him on a tour of inspection, moving slowly in order that he might not injure his crippled foot. Yet the tour was limited by that protecting fence. She explained that it was constantly charged with the wave flow which destroyed matter. Its range was only a matter of inches, but it was effective. The entire property, which ran a quarter of a mile up the lake and a short distance below the power house, was so enclosed. It was an impassable barrier. Even within the bounds of the outer fence, there were others. The power house was completely circled about. So was the dam. The fence around the concrete structure on the hill, which she told him was the control station, equipped to swing the three transmitting towers, joined as a unit in any desired direction, had two sections of the wire about it, a screen five feet high. She did not admit him either to the power house or the control station. When she explained the action of the fence, Blandon knew definitely what had happened to his dog.

He realized, too, that he might not escape. Upon him rested the sole hope of preventing the calamity that threatened a world. What could he do? Overpower Thorsby? In his crippled condition he doubted it. He would have to wait. There was still time left; perhaps something would develop a way out of the situation.

As the days passed, Blandon's injured ankle grew stronger. On the twenty-fifth of April, mobilization day, he could bear his weight on it with very little pain. He determined then to get away. How, he did not know, but he realized that he must

have aid. He was powerless alone. Hilda in a gentle way had let him understand that he was their prisoner. She seemed to be growing more gentle, but she refused to discuss the ultimatum her father had delivered. He was right, and there was nothing to argue. She was glad of Blandon's aid in the tiny garden. She even taught him to milk the cow, laughing at his awkward attempts. This was the first time he had heard her laugh. She was embarrassed and blushed prettily when he told her how glad he was that she could laugh.

Blandon's attempts to meet Thorsby, to talk to him, were futile. At first he thought this was accidental, but he noticed that Hilda was always with him, when her father was out of doors. His attempts to reach him in his bedroom at night were without result. He would not even answer by voice when Blandon rapped on his door, which he found was locked when he turned the knob cautiously.

There were times when Blandon could almost forget the danger that was hanging over the world. These were the evenings when Hilda found time to walk with him along the edge of the lake. They strolled one afternoon to the upper limits of the property, where the fence stretched across the surface of the water. Supports, apparently placed before the lake was completely filled, held the netting an inch or two above the surface. Whether another section passed under the water, Blandon could not determine, because a wing fence stretched along the edge of the lake for a hundred feet.

Coming back in the dusk of April, Hilda held his arm to help him over the rough path. She was the one who needed assistance, because she slipped on a patch of pine needles. Blandon threw an arm around her shoulders, which steadied her until she regained her balance. She had turned toward him as she slipped, and her face was close to him. Thus they stood for a second or two, his arm still around her shoulders. Slowly he drew her toward him and their lips met. She clung to him for a moment, then drew away. No word passed between them, but she held on to his arm with a new tenderness. At dinner that night, she found occasion to pass behind him frequently so that she might rest her hand upon his head. He caught it once and kissed it, and he heard her laugh again—a soft, happy little chuckle of joy.

When dinner was over she left him. When she did not reappear he went out to the tiny porch to breathe the scented April night. He had forgotten the concrete house on the hill, the whirling turbines below the dam, storing up energy to shake the world. He was in love. He was dreaming of glorious days, when she came up behind him softly. She leaned over and kissed him, breathing "good night." She was gone before he could stop her.

THE next morning Blandon found a note on his door.

"There is coffee and toast ready for you," it read. "I am helping Father this morning. I will see you at lunch. You are dear."

Blandon forgot his crutch that morning. He roamed about aimlessly. He climbed the hill to the control station. Through the open door he saw Hilda and her father. She was standing before a tilted table, such as a draftsman uses. Its base was a solid block of concrete. He approached as close to the fence as he dared. He could see it was a map of the United States. There were four heavy red circles on it. Blandon guessed from their location what they were: Great Falls, San Antonio, Charleston, Washington. Hilda was measuring with a slide scale, Thorsby was busy with calculations at a desk. There was a couch in one corner. Mounted on the

wall was a switchboard similar to the one in the laboratory of the cottage.

An arm was mounted on the table where Hilda was at work. It was movable, one end set in a cunning pivotal joint at the top of the map. Terminals on the joint carried a pair of wires, which led to a distributing panel near the control board. From the panel several wires led up to the roof, which Blandon saw was of glass. A theodolite on a concrete base stood in the center of the room. Neither father nor daughter seemed aware of Blandon's presence. He did not speak, and after a while he moved away. It seemed impossible that from that tiny room the destiny of the world could be changed by a few wires and interlocking strips of copper.

He walked back down to the lake, and along its edge to the barrier stretched across its surface. A hundred yards up the lake, beyond the wire, a trout broke. Then another. Inside the fence, however, the surface of the lake was still. And here, close to the deadliest barricade ever conceived, Blandon noticed again that absence of sound, the disappearance of life. Could nothing living remain within the radius of the wire? As he pondered this, a realization of the day dawned on him. It was the twenty-ninth of April. Tomorrow was the last day of grace. There was time to stop this thing, and there was a way out. Hilda would provide it.

He knew she loved him, though they had not spoken about it. That had not been necessary. With this new love, he could persuade her how wrong she was, and together they could prevent her father from carrying out his threat. Time would help them convince him later what he was doing. Sure in the power of love, Blandon returned to the cottage. Another note confronted him.

"Can you take care of yourself for a little while? Father still needs me. You are my dear."

The afternoon passed, night came, but it did not bring Hilda. Hunger drove Blandon to prepare something to eat. Twice he climbed to the house on the hill. Hilda and her father were still hard at work, judging by the light streaming through the glass door. Behind a thin curtain he saw them busy, at what he could not determine. Unable to do anything, fuming at his impotence and harassed by dread of what the next day would bring forth that even his confidence in Hilda's love could not quite dismiss, he roamed about, trying to find an alternative solution to his problem should Hilda's love fail. Worn out with his aimless wanderings and his ankle aching from the strain, he returned to the porch to await her return. Within he heard a clock strike midnight. A mocking bird saluted the moonlight.

The sun streaming in his face awakened him the next morning, huddled uncomfortably in the chair where he had fallen asleep. Blandon leaped to his feet, and a slip of paper dropped to the floor.

"I will be with you shortly. You should take better care of yourself, dear," he read.

NOON came, and it brought Hilda. Frankly she came to Blandon as he stood awaiting her on the porch, and into his arms. With her cheek against his she listened happily to the things he spoke into her ear, and she answered him in kind. Blandon released her.

"Do you love me, Hilda?" he asked.

"More than I have dreamed I could love."

"Then you must help me."

"How?"

"We must stop your father. You can realize now what he is doing or wants to do. Some day he will realize it, and be glad for what we have done. Will you help me?"

She stared at him almost incredulously.

"Is that why you have tried to make me love you?"

"You know better than that. You are lovely, you are made to be loved, and I love you beyond whatever you have done or may do. But because I love you, dear, I know that you will help me, when you understand the terror you will bring into the world, the terror you have already brought. And since you love me, you must see that I am not all wrong. You are not saving the world, Hilda. You are destroying whatever has been accomplished by the thousands of years of sacrifice made by men and women who have died to advance the world. Can't you see it, dear?"

"Please let me pass." She removed her hands from him. He stood aside. He could see the struggle that was going on within her. Her years of concentration on one idea, battling with this new thing that had come into her life. She walked past him without saying anything, and he thought he saw tears in the loveliness of her eyes. He did not follow, but waited until she should return, confident of victory. He waited in vain, and when a search for her failed, he realized that she must have returned immediately to her father. He was not disturbed. She would come to him before night, and everything would be well. He went to his room to lie down. Even with her aid, he felt there would be need for his strength that night.

He slept longer than he intended. The house was dark and dreadfully still when he aroused himself. There was no note. The control station on the hill was ablaze with lights. Down below, the windows of the power house were aglow. Had he failed? In furious haste he climbed the hill, panting to its top. The door was closed, but through its glass he could see Thorsby working at his desk. Hilda was not there. He turned and dashed down the hill, sprawling in his haste.

Through a window of the power house, he saw the girl. In overalls, she was tending a generator, its moving parts gleaming in the light. He called to her, but either she did not hear or refused to answer. She did not look in his direction. Her face could be seen clearly, and its expression hurt him. All of the sadness that had lightened with his coming was there, and more was added. He called again and again, but without effect.

He had failed. He followed along the wire enclosing the power house, trying to find a break in it, a place so low he might leap it. If he could not persuade her, he would wreck the power plant, once inside. But the fence was a perfect barrier. Now almost in a panic he returned to the control station on the hill. He planned to get in somehow and overpower Thorsby. Here, too, his way was even more effectually barred by that woven wire barricade of matter-destroying force.

For a space Blandon returned to the house, crushed by his share of blame in what was to befall. He railed at love and his foolish trust in its power. After a while he grew calm. It was his happiness or the peace of the world. He was wrong, there was only one thing: the world must be saved, because there would be no happiness for anyone should Thorsby go through with this thing. He would go through with it, if he lived. If he lived?

That was the way out. Civilization trembled through one man's power. Should civilization be destroyed, or the man? Blandon knew the answer, realized what it would mean to him through the years to come. Slowly he entered the house, and began to search. Every room, every closet, every possible place where a gun might be kept he searched thoroughly.

There was nothing! There was a rifle at his camp.

Down to the lake he went, skirting along its shore until he reached the end of the wing fence, standing out clear in the moonlight. He could see also the woven wire stretching above the surface of the lake. Was it all above? He looked at the water, cold and black and dead-still in the breathless night. Why did no fish break its surface, as they were doing farther up beyond the barrier?

Blandon did not hesitate long. He removed his shoes and socks and wrapped them in his sweater. He fastened the bundle between his shoulders with the strings from his shoes. Slowly he eased himself down the bank and stood looking at the water. Then he dove out into its black depths.

7

AMERICAN history has recorded no equal of the night of April the thirtieth. From end to end the country was in a state that fails description but in Washington were enacted scenes that its famous streets had never witnessed, that the wildest dreams of the preachers of chaos had never approached. For five days now it had been an armed camp. The White House guards of the World War were multiplied by hundreds. A division was scattered throughout the city. Two regiments were encamped about the Capitol and adjacent buildings. Pennsylvania Avenue and other approaches to the Treasury Building were cut off by barricades and field artillery, and machine guns were mounted on its steps and protruded from its windows.

The money markets of the world were gone tumbling days since and this stronghold of gold was armed against whatever might eventuate. So were the mints and subtreasuries throughout the country guarded. In them were gathered the reserves of the banks afraid even to trust their impregnable vaults in such times of stress.

Congress was in session. There were eight absentees. One was a senator, whose life was a matter of hours. Seven were congressmen. One of the seven was on his way to Europe, the other six were skulking. When the roll was called at 10 o'clock for an extraordinary session, they failed to answer. When the President, accompanied by two troops of cavalry, with patrols of infantry and machine gunners in every side street, reached the Capitol, they still were absent. Beyond the lines of bristling bayonets that guarded the building and the stern-faced men sitting within was a milling mob. Out to them filtered, somehow, the fact that the six men were skulking, hiding from duty through fear.

A growl arose. Ominously it ran throughout the length of the gathering. As it reached the outermost edge, the growl rose to shouts. Groups detached themselves and started away from the Capitol. Constantly the groups grew in size, and under the watchful eyes of the armed guards they walked up the streets singing, but there was a threat behind the songs, stirring chants of the earlier days of the Union, when duty was more than a word and performance other than a vote.

Within the halls of Congress all was quiet, with an earnestness of purpose its walls had rarely witnessed. The men of the press had lost their cynical attitude, as they watched those whom they had derided and mocked of little purpose in quieter days, proving themselves worthy of their place in an hour of superhuman trial. The visitors in the gallery were subjected to the closest restrictions. They were mostly of Washington's official life: cabinet members; officers of the army and navy; ambassadors and envoys of foreign countries, look-

ing on intently to observe how the rulers of the nation of dollars would act in an hour that threatened the purse.

The President was greeted with a tribute of applause. The theatrics were gone now; there was no panoply of glory in this fight they were putting up. It was a combat with a force unknown and mysterious, yet all the more powerful through its very mystery. Passive resistance was once offered by some of them as a cure to the evil of war. Now they were forced into a passive resistance to something more terrible than war had ever produced. Not a man in the gathering but felt he was facing doom as he sat, staring furtively now and then at his neighbor. Heroes they were, but not the flamboyant heroes of fiction. They were men who wanted to live but who could not face life until they had dared death.

So the President characterized them. He did not indulge in heroic utterances, but spoke quietly and firmly of what they were facing. He told of the terror of the people, waiting for these men to act. Not act, he went on, but re-enact the resolution by which they would defy this threat from the air. The Congress of the United States would meet as its conscience directed.

"Our people, I believe, are ready to face this calmly," he went on. "At first there were disorders. Sporadic outbursts continue. It is not, however, the presence of the army which is keeping them from further outbreaks. It is the American soul rising to meet a crisis. Economically we are sound underneath this surface crash which has been met by a moratorium. When this has quieted, as it will quiet, as it must quiet, since God will not permit the wrecking of His world, we will take up where we left off.

"The work of rebuilding will be easier in the knowledge that you have shown the way. Your example of unflinching courage will mean the rebuilding of the nation to greater heights, a solidifying of its soul and strength beyond anything we have ever known. When you meet tomorrow, it will mean that the nation will be ready to face whatever may come, because in your assembly here is the nation, expressed in the few of you. I thank God that I have been given the privilege to be alive tonight and to be one of you tomorrow."

As the President sat down, Congress gave him a rising tribute. As they stood, one gray-haired senator addressed the chair.

"It is apparent, sir, that the President intends to meet with us tomorrow. While I know that the honor is a great one and while I pay homage to the bravery implied, I move that this Congress respectfully request the President of the United States that he remain in the White House May the first for the safety of the nation."

There was no need to ask for a vote. In a thunderous "aye" the motion was carried before the Speaker of the House could put it to a vote. The President smiled seriously and he showed his emotion in a slight break in his voice, as he rose to reply:

"Gentlemen, I appreciate your action, but I must decline to accede to your request. If this Capitol is to be wiped out tomorrow, what is a President? If this threat is not carried out, what would a nation want with a leader who hid himself? Your meeting tomorrow is an expression of the will of America. I am a part of that will."

Silently the assemblage stood as he descended from the rostrum and walked slowly from the chamber. There was nothing to be said. They seated themselves, each trying to picture the morrow. The senator who had voiced the motion for the protection of the President, again addressed the chair.

"There being no further business before this Congress, Mr. Speaker, I move we adjourn until 9 a. m. May the first."

By acclamation the motion carried, and the men who faced what seemed a certain doom on the next day, filed out to seek what rest they might before they faced a peril new to an age-weary world. The news of the action taken had preceded them, and the throngs, pressed close against the thousand-bayoneted ring about the building, cheered them to the echo as they made their way down the long steps.

Throughout the country other cheers were being raised; in theaters, in churches, wherever groups could gather to listen over radio to the proceedings of that session. Those who cheered remained to pray and to wait for the morning and what it might bring. They knew that the air had carried to the maker of the threat against the safety of the world the news of what Congress had done. He knew when it would convene again. What would he do? When would he act?

THE crowd around the Capitol thinned but little. The lights were going out now. Its halls were empty. It would be hours before those men would meet again to put the terrible threat to a test. Yet the mob stayed on. Something might happen, and they wanted to be on hand. Part of them lingered through curiosity, and part because they feared the loneliness of their households and wanted human contact, but the larger part wanted to add its courage to the men who would return in the morning.

Of the early crowd some thousands were missing. They were not running away from danger nor were they free from curiosity. They had gone singing up the street, when it was announced that six congressmen were hiding from their duty, cowards running from a threat of danger. They were no longer singing. They were beyond the armed guards, hurrying to addresses learned from directories and telephone books in convenient drug stores.

What happened in the hour that followed is not a pleasant page in the record of that stirring night. As a group reached an apartment house in which one of the absent members lived, a closed automobile started up and darted at full speed down the street. It might have got away but for a timid hand which reached up to pull down the curtain at the back window. Someone drew a revolver and fired, then another and another, until there was a fusillade.

The car skidded wildly and came to a stop, slewed across the street. A frightened negro chauffeur crawled out from the driver's seat as the mob reached the car. There was no movement from within. A man opened the door, and called, "Come out of that."

There was no response. He switched on the lights and peered in, others crowding about to look over his shoulder. He switched off the light and closed the door. He turned to the quaking driver.

"Get in and drive to the nearest undertaker's."

As dawn approached, the throng gathered about the Capitol grew larger. As the sun rose, blood-red, several thousand men, singing again, came marching down the street. There was no song in their eyes, and they strode along with a definite objective. They were eight abreast, and in the center of the marching line were five other men.

These five were not singing, but they were marching, though their feet stumbled as the cadenced step of hundreds behind kept them in place in the column. On each side of the stumbling members of this small band marched men who did not falter. They pressed close against the indi-

viduals they attended. The lilting strains of the songs of this voluntary regiment drowned out what escorting pairs were saying to their convoys. The soldiers standing guard could not see the hunted looks, the cringing fear of the five as they listened. Hard objects pressed into their sides drove home with added force the instructions they received.

As the column reached the outer fringes of the mob at the Capitol, the leaders ceased their song. A tall man, with flaming red hair, called to the troops beyond the milling thousands.

"Make way for these gentlemen of the Congress! They want to be on hand for the roll call."

An officer detailed a squad to clear a path. It was easy, because the mob opened out as rapidly as its crushing thousands would permit to make way for these national heroes. There was nothing heroic about the five shuffling figures that followed after the squad of soldiers, crowding over each other's heels to escape the crowd, a crowd which was cheering them. Once within the ring of bayonets, the red-haired man climbed a lamp post, pulling down two who were there before him. The commotion gained the attention of those near at hand.

"We are going to have a full roll call this morning," his voice roared out. "Look at those heroes up there. They forgot there was a session last night. We went around and reminded them about today. Speaking for them, they want me to tell you they are mighty glad to be here. They decided it would be more comfortable to die with company. One of 'em isn't going to be able to make it. An accident came along and happened to him last night, just when he was about to take a ride. Seeing it was a ride he wanted, we gave him one—straight on through."

As the red-haired man spoke, the crowd realized what the five were doing here so early. They had been cheered as they made their way to the Capitol steps. The cheer gave way to a hum, a growl that broke out into a roar. One of the hysterical men huddled on the steps shrieked. The mob surged forward, almost throwing itself on the bayonets. The soldiers reversed their rifles and gave them the butt, beating them back.

"That's all right, boys, let 'em alone," yelled the red-haired man. "They are going to be heroes, too. They learned how to die last night. We explained it to 'em."

The man who had shrieked, suddenly jumped to his feet and darted up the steps. He ran to the huge bronze doors and beat upon them with his fists. He hurled himself against them, and as he stumbled and fell, those nearest could see a thin red trickle from his temple, where some projecting knob had struck him. The others, some spark aroused in the depths of their debasement, climbed the steps to pick up the one who had fallen. They withdrew behind a column as far from sight as possible, but they could not hide from the terrible jeers of that mob. They quieted after a little, and the red-haired man, the genius of the mob now, began to sing. They followed him. It was not a hymn, but a ribald chant of the days before the Great War. Only a few knew the words, but these were simple and the air was lilting, so they sang themselves quiet, as the sun rose higher and a perfect May day came into being.

A NEW battalion came at 8 o'clock and formed a lane, down which Congress might pass into its threatened tomb. The members came singly and in little groups of two and three. Those with families were accompanied by them, women heavily veiled. Shortly before 9 o'clock the President arrived, and cheer on cheer crashed out, such as Washington had never heard. The red-haired man from his place

of vantage on the lamp post tried to lead them.

Somehow, in the light of day, the solemnity that had marked the night session was missing on the surface. Now that the actual day was here some of the tension was lifted. Within the chamber of the House, little groups chatted as they awaited the arrival of the President, who had gone to the cloak room to meet with the leaders of the House and Senate. There was no conversation in the gallery. The newspaper men were busy trying to catch and imprison the color of that picture in words that telegraphers were sending to waiting presses. The news of the world must go on. The visitors strained forward to watch for the coming of the President. The personnel of the crowd was changed. The foreign guests of yesterday were absent on orders from their governments. Women had taken their places to be with husbands and fathers in the hour of doom.

Up on the rostrum, experts were testing out the radio instruments. A world was waiting to hear how these men demeaned themselves in this tragic hour, and everything must be in readiness. A messenger approached the Speaker. He called the Congress to order. The Vice-President, as presiding officer of the Senate, sat at his side. As they settled in their seats, he rose, and announced very quietly:

"The President of the United States."

As quietly the President entered. His face was careworn, seamed with the terrific strain of the last two weeks, as was the face of everyone present. But he was not haggard. Stern purpose overrode any evidence of supreme fatigue, as he bowed gravely to the Congress standing to receive him. They stood while the chaplain prayed for the safety of the nation. It might have been a prayer for any session, so quietly did he implore divine guidance. Only at the end did he touch upon the thing they all faced, asking that their motives be understood.

When he had finished, the senator who had fathered the resolution the night before asking that the President remain in safety, rose in his seat:

"Mr. Speaker, I move that this Congress in joint session assembled act immediately on the resolution which I herewith propose." Without waiting for his resolution to be passed to the reading clerk, he read on. "Be it resolved by the Congress of the United States that the President be empowered to call immediately for two million volunteers for the safety of the nation."

This was Congress' answer to the demand that it disarm. Before the senator could speak to his motion, a very avalanche of "Question! Question!" drowned him out. The Speaker threw aside parliamentary convention. "You have heard the question——"

"Aye," came the mighty chorus. There was no need to inform the President. Precedents were gone crashing in this hour. He was already writing an executive proclamation calling for two million men to preserve the country. The ink was not yet dry on that historic document when word reached the mob without. For a moment it was silent as the import of the message passed from man to man, woman to woman. Then that mob raised one great voice in an overwhelming shout, the voice of the nation molded into one great chord of confidence.

As the chorus died down for an instant, the red-haired man started to slide down from his lamp post. In the sudden hush his bull-like roar carried far:

"Come on, boys, where's a recruiting office?"

8

BLANDON came to the surface spluttering and almost numb with the shock of the icy water. Cold and apprehension lent strength to his strokes as he drove hurriedly up the lake in the direction of the wire barrier. He found swimming difficult, dragged down by the weight of his clothing and the bundle which had slipped under his neck. Within a few feet of the barrier he was laboring heavily and breathing was difficult. The moonlight showed the fence plainly, but it did not lighten up the water. Whether anything lay below the surface, Blandon could not tell. There was only one way to find out. Paddling slowly on his back until he could pump his lungs full, he turned over suddenly and dove.

Down he went as deep as he dared to trust his failing strength, then he swam straight ahead under the surface. Wet garments pulling him back, the bundle under his neck like a lead weight, he drove on until his lungs seemed on the point of bursting, tight-shut lids seemed swimming in blood. How far he had gone, he did not know, but he had to reach the surface. Fighting his way madly, he shot out into the open air. Too exhausted to do anything else, he floated on his back, moving his hands just enough to keep nose and mouth above water, while he lay gasping. Breathing freely once more, he rolled over.

The barrier was twenty feet behind, the shore not twenty yards away. He dragged himself up a sloping rock a few minutes later, thankful of its nearness, because the benumbing chill of the water and effort of the dive had left him all but exhausted. After a while he sat up, and removed the bundle from about his neck. He squeezed the water from his sweater and socks. He pulled them on, damp as they were, because the night was chill, though May was at hand. Climbing up the steep slope warmed him somewhat, and, once at the top, he set off in a brisk trot back up the lake.

He remembered where he had first discovered it, and from that point the camp lay about ten miles due east. The moon would hold until dawn, but he expected to reach it long before that. He slowed down to a brisk walk, warmed now, and realizing that though the time was short his strength was limited. It must have been 10 o'clock when he started; he estimated that an hour had passed. He would be at his camp by midnight, unless he strayed too far from the way. Objects were unfamiliar in the moonlight, and no landmarks from the trip of two weeks ago were recognizable. He regretted now he had not paid more attention to the way along which he had come then. It was fortunate that his land stretched along a narrow valley, so that he could not go far wrong.

When he reached the belt of timber, which had sent him on the trip to the creek, he knew the tent was not far away. As he quickened his stride through the bark-strewn aisles under the tall trees, a new fear assailed him. Suppose his rifle was not there! Hilda said that she had covered everything with a tarpaulin, but she did not mention the rifle. Did she see it? Had she left it there or destroyed it? That message of her father's had ordered that all lethal weapons except for the necessary police force be destroyed. Would she follow his directions, and destroy his rifle?

He was running now, out from under the trees, stumbling over the underbrush, limbs on the scrub oaks sweeping back and lashing him in the face. He tripped over a root and fell headlong. The shock of the tumble brought him out of his sudden attack of hysteria. Nothing could be gained by this waste of strength. If the rifle was not where he left it, he would have to keep on to the village, fifteen

miles away. He could find aid there, and they might be in time. He sobbed as he slowed his pace and drove steadily on, thinking of Hilda and her father. What would she say, what would she do when Blandon——? He hesitated over the thought of it. How would she act toward her father's slayer? Torn with the horror of it, Blandon could not envision the result of what he was going to do, what he must do. There was no escape. He stood between the world and the man who would destroy it. His own affairs meant nothing.

The country was growing more familiar now. Clumps of trees that he remembered stood out. His camp was near by. He realized suddenly that during his preoccupation he must have been sheering off to the right and climbing. He cut back down the hill and emerged on the far side of the glade, where the tent stood in the moonlight. He had almost passed it. He ran and tore the thongs loose from the stiff canvas in an effort to untie them. Across the back of the tent were his belongings, a black mass under a covering of canvas. He pulled at this, only to find that Hilda had lashed it. With a knife he slashed the line that held it. At last it was off, and on top of his bags and boxes lay his rifle.

In its case was a box of cartridges. He put these in his pocket and drew out the rifle. Hurriedly he tried its mechanism. It worked smoothly. He filled the magazine with cartridges and threw one into the firing chamber. He took careful aim at a tree across the glade, its gray bark shining white in the moonlight, and fired. A fleck of black showed on the patch of gray. Without stopping to retie the thongs, he set off at a run, back to the lake.

After a mile of struggling through the dense growth, Blandon was forced to rest. For almost four hours he had driven himself at top speed, and nature refused to go any farther without pause. He tried to concentrate on getting back, to blot out the thought of what he must do, when he was once more at the concrete house on the hill where the destiny of the world was being shaped. How would he get back there? Until now his one purpose had been to get the rifle. He was outside that barrier which no thing might touch and live. How get inside of it again?

Would he be able to swim through the icy water with the added weight of a rifle? He could leave his clothes behind him. Once inside he would have to make sure of landing below the borders of that fence stretching along the edge of the lake. Would his strength last that long? Was there no other way?

Then he remembered that on the hill above the control station, the barrier ran along the edge of a growth of spreading oaks. Perhaps their branches reached across so that he might drop over. Why had he not examined this more closely before so that he might be sure? He had not thought it necessary, he had counted too much on his being able to convince Hilda. He would have to try that way. If the branches were not long enough, he would come back and try to swim the lake again.

A little refreshed, he set off, trying to find a clearer way through the second growth oaks and pines that fought with the underbrush on the cut-over land. The moon was dropping to the west, and an early morning breeze was setting the leaves to whispering. He was thankful for this grove of timber and its smoother going. His pace was decidedly slower now. Legs ached from the constant travel. Feet were blistered from the wet shoes and socks, and his face was scratched and bleeding. His clothes were wet again, but not with the waters of the lake. They clung to his

body, drenched with the effort of his toil.

THE sky was graying in the east, and the moon was drawing near the horizon, when he neared the edge of the lake. He veered off to the south, because he intended to strike across below the barrier at the power house. He wanted to make it before day dawned and Hilda or Thorsby discovered him and guessed his intention. He was climbing now, approaching the bluffs that ran along above the dam. Afraid to go too far south, he cut straight to the west to reach the top of the bluffs. In the pines again his feet slipped on the smooth carpet of needles. Straight ahead came a break in the trees, and the lake was near at hand. He kept on to the edge of the bluff to get his position accurately, so that he might avoid the wire as he made his way down below the dam. He reached the rim of the canyon and looked south.

There was no dam!

In the moonlight a black gap showed at the end of the narrow cut through the rocky hillside. Beyond the gap was a gray, misshapen mass. A twisted cluster of steel rods, like some giant wastebasket that had been stepped on, was wrapped around one corner of the ruins. Alongside of them a peaceful stream was gliding smoothly and Blandon heard a tiny roar as the water slipped out of sight over a lip of rock and cascaded to its bed again, fifteen feet below.

His mind reeling with what he saw, Blandon grasped the trunk of tree leaning out over the black depths of the canyon, its sides now streaked with black silt that the years had deposited. On the rocky floor a stream was picking its way over and around boulders and blackened tree trunks. It gurgled peacefully to itself at this new freedom, which let a stream do what it was intended to do. He feared that he was dreaming. Had he fallen asleep back there in the woods and dreamed that this had happened? He drew himself up and looked again.

He was not asleep. Down below, that black gap showed in the moonlight. It was wider than he remembered it. Perhaps the water had cut it away. But what had made the dam give way—give way so completely that the lake had drained itself? What had happened to Hilda? Was she in the power house when that avalanche of water came pouring down through the gap, tearing down everything in its way? It must have come with a force beyond all reckoning. Was she buried beneath that pile of concrete with the twisted wreckage of the towers holding it down?

Forgotten now was the barrier, as Blandon half slid, half fell, down the slope to that rocky floor that was once the bed of the lake. The slime on the rocks slid out from under his fingers and his feet slipped as they struck. Bruised and battered, he was at last at the bottom. Forgetful of his injuries, he began to work his way across to the other side. He crawled on his hands and knees, trying to keep from sliding down with the creek.

In a nightmare he reached the other side, but its gleaming walls offered no way up. Tortuously he made his way down toward the gap where the dam had once stood. A cleft in the rock led to the bank above. With elbows and knees braced against the sides of the narrow rift he struggled until he was beyond the former surface of the lake. Then he pulled himself up by inches until he lay panting on dry ground once more. Beside him was an end of that deadly wire barrier, its potency gone now. The other end was mashed flat where it was wrapped around a tree trunk.

As he lay, regaining his breath, Blandon listened for some sound. He could hear nothing except the churning voice of the cascade and the chirp

of insects in the grass. Laboriously he arose and started to walk to the house, standing out clearly now in the first flush of dawn. He went on a forlorn hope, because he feared what he sought lay down below in a sudden tomb that the ages would not uncover. As he stumbled on, head downcast with his burden of sorrow, he was incapable of coherent thought. Hilda, the dam, Washington—what had happened to all of them? What would he do? Where was Thorsby?

HE THOUGHT he heard a cry. He halted. Then it came clear.

"Doug! Doug!" There was a sob in it, but it sang a world of joy. It was Hilda. She was calling to him. He looked up. A huddled mass on the tiny porch was rising now, holding out her arms. Blandon broke into a run.

"Hilda! Hilda!" His voice failed, but now she was in his arms, and there was no need for words. At last she drew away from him, to look at his battered face. She drew out a handkerchief and wiped away the mud and the blood where it had caked. Then she caught his head in her arms and crooned over him.

"I thought I had lost you—I thought I had lost you," she said over and over again. "I thought everything was gone. I wanted to kill myself. Now you have come back to me. You are safe." Her tears dropped on his hair, as she held him close, murmuring the incoherent delights of the mother woman.

"When I saw that wreck I thought you were caught in the power house. How did you escape? What happened?" Blandon sat up now, his arms about her, as they watched the dawn glow across the tree tops.

"I did it," she said very quietly.

"You? How? Where is your father?"

"He is asleep. He has forgotten everything, Doug," her voice broke again. "When he heard the first rush of the water, he went mad for a moment. Then it was over, and he wanted to go to sleep. He doesn't know why we are here. He doesn't care. He is happy that I am here to take care of him. It is pathetic, dear, but I am glad. So glad! He was wrong. I was wrong. We were so wrong! But you were right, my love, and kept us from doing a dreadful thing."

"But what did you do?"

"Something I had not intended to do when I went to the power house last night." She shuddered a little. "It was arranged that I tend the generator, preparing for this morning. Everything was ready at the control station. Father and I had determined the wave length and its radius. We had set the towers by our control board you saw that day when we refused to notice you. He was afraid to leave for fear you might try to stop him. He knew you would, and I went to the power house, because I feared that you might persuade me. Even then I knew we were wrong, but I would not admit it.

"At midnight I grew afraid, afraid for you, dear." She stopped and looked at him. He kissed her. "I knew my generators were safe for an hour, so I set out to look for you. I thought I would find you on the porch. It was deserted. I went to your room, and when I saw your bed untouched I was sick with fright. You were not in the house. Father was asleep in the control station. I remembered then our walk along the lake and how you had stood staring at the barrier, as though you were speculating on a way of escape. I ran down the slope, and when I found your hat"—she stopped again to check a sob and to cling closer—"I was positive that you had gone overboard and were—were dead. Father believed that the action of the barrier

would extend under the water. When I thought that — that I had helped produce this thing to kill you—I must have gone mad for the time, because I suddenly found myself, breathless, fumbling at the door to the control station. Father was still sleeping peacefully. I understood then I must move quietly and quickly. I forgot that I would have to guess at the radius of the wave. Our control board was for long range. I could only hope to hit the dam. If I thought that I might get the whole hillside, I did not stop to care, because you were gone then, dear, and nothing else mattered, except that Father should not do the terrible thing he planned. You were dead, I had killed you, and there would be no more killing if I could prevent it.

"I set the towers, and closed the switch. As I opened it again, the whole hill trembled, and a roar that seemed to tear my eardrums open followed the trembling. Father awoke and saw me. I think he struck me as he rushed to the door. I crept after him and watched a great wall of water sweeping down. I hid my eyes, and Father raved above me. I did not care. I must have fainted. When I came to, Father was sprawled on the floor—asleep. I was afraid at first, but I awakened him and he was so gentle. He will always be gentle now. We must take care of him, Doug. Then I came down here, and I had been dying inside, until I saw you returning to me, like some god, up the hill."

She lay quietly in his arms, stroking his cheeks. The sun was up now. The chickens were clucking behind the house. A pig squealed for its breakfast. The little waterfall was singing a peaceful song to the rising sun. Blandon stroked the sun-shot hair and bathed himself in the blue of her eyes.

"If ever I go away from you again, dear, it will be only that I may return."

[THE END]

ASTARTE

***By* E. HOFFMANN PRICE**

Your lips half part in a painted smile,
Hiding your thoughts, revealing but your guile;
Your dark-veiled, dusky, Saracenic eyes
Look down, and look but to despise
The fools who bend to kiss your dainty feet;
Your scornful, mocking lips are poison-sweet
As hasheesh mingled with Shirazi wine. . . .
And yet your lovers gather at your shrine,
Pale simulacrum wreathed in mystery;
Infatuated by your sorcery,
Lured by flame and shadow alternate,
They worship you who neither love nor hate.



WEREWOLF stories are among the most popular tales that WEIRD TALES has ever printed. *The Phantom Farmhouse, The Ghost-Eater, Invaders From the Dark, The Werewolf of Ponkert*—to name the werewolf stories that have appeared in this magazine would be listing the readers' favorites, for only the pseudo-scientific stories have called forth a more hearty chorus of enthusiasm.

Now comes H. Warner Munn, author of the best-liked werewolf tale we have ever published *(The Werewolf of Ponkert)*, and puts his finger on what seems to be a serious flaw in most werewolf and vampire stories.

"I have always thought it was strange," he writes, "that almost every tale of werewolves that I have ever read depends upon charms, spells and incantations in which the cross figured prominently to combat the demons. But should we suppose that the belief of lycanthropy is comparatively recent? That it was unknown before the Christian Era began? Hardly. The belief is as old as man. In Dudley Wright's book, *Vampires and Vampirism*, there are many references to this belief as early as 6000 B.C., taken from Persian hymns to the sun, Babylonian records, etc. Then why should the mere brandishing of a cross hold such power? Did the werewolf delusion rage unchecked until the birth of Christ?"

Mr. Munn has incorporated some of this doubt into his startling new story, *The Return of the Master*, which will be published soon in WEIRD TALES. In this story, the cross proves valueless against the wiles of the Master (the same evil demon who appeared as a black wolf in *The Werewolf of Ponkert)*, and more ancient religious symbols must be used, for this creature has been working his evil wiles (according to the story) since long before Christianity came to bless the world, and to him the cross has no occult power. We will tell you little about the story itself, except to say that it is fully up to the level of *The Werewolf of Ponkert*, and that the revolt of the Master's slaves (ancient Persians, Roman gladiators, British redcoats, and others) to overturn the power of the werewolf, is one of the most thrilling incidents we have ever read.

Greye La Spina, another favorite writer of weird tales, seems to have been struck with the same thought that perplexed Mr. Munn; and in a thrilling occult serial which she has written for this magazine she explains the power of the cross as a talisman against occult evil which is older than Christianity: "It is not the thing in itself. It is what hundreds of years of reverence and adoration from human souls have made of it. It is the visible

emblem of that which has been the redemption of mankind from Evil, and as such, Evil flees it today because of its powerful occult influence gathered through the ages from the loving worship of so many human hearts."

Greye La Spina's serial, *Fettered,* is the most thrilling, startling and gripping story she has yet written, and it is another of the good things in store for the readers of WEIRD TALES.

"Best wishes for the success of WEIRD TALES," writes Spencer Gooding, of Los Angeles. "With such writers as Greye La Spina, Seabury Quinn, Frank Belknap Long, Arthur J. Burks and Lieutenant Stamper, all of whom write nearly perfect tales of this kind, I can not see how you can fail."

Writes William L. Miles, of Shelbina, Missouri: "Have just finished reading the January installment of *The Waning of a World.* The publishers should have to spend the rest of their lives in solitary confinement for not finishing the story. I am temporarily confined to an 'uneasy couch' because of a Ford truck which fell on me, and now must wait another month for the concluding installment. Must compliment the author for his attention to details."

"I find WEIRD TALES a real treat in the shape of something different," writes John H. Bunny, of San Diego, California. "Especially do I always look forward to the stories written by Lieutenant Arthur J. Burks, as they seem to be not only so exceedingly thrilling, but have such unexpected and unusual endings. This is especially true of his latest, *When the Graves Were Opened,* which is without doubt the best story I ever read."

"I have been stranded in Atlantic City during a four-day northeast storm," writes E. V. Gallagher to The Eyrie, "and I happened on your January number. It has enlivened the dreary days considerably. I especially enjoyed the unique tale of *The Gong Ringers* and would like to see more stories of other lands."

Fred W. Fischer, Jr., of Knoxville, Tennessee, writes: "Please change WEIRD TALES from a monthly magazine to a semi-monthly. A month is entirely too long to wait for the next installment of the terribly weird and exciting serials you place on the lists, and it is awful to know that these unusual stories come only once a month, so please publish it at least twice a month. I am sure that hundreds of readers will second my motion, if they see this epistle."

"That awful story of the little chattering heads growing out of a man's flesh *(Lukundoo,* by Edward Lucas White) was one of the best and most fascinating which I have ever read, notwithstanding its ridiculous impossibility," writes Mrs. Lilla Price Savino, of Portsmouth, Virginia.

Writes August Derleth, Jr., of Sauk City, Wisconsin: "As to the January issue, my first vote goes unreservedly to *The Tomb,* by H. P. Lovecraft. The sheer beauty of words, without considering the excellent theme, is enough to merit the tale first place. Mr. Lovecraft, in my estimation, is a second Poe. In the December issue Lieutenant Burks' *When the Graves Were Opened* received my first vote, and *The Valley of Spiders,* by H. G. Wells, my second. Both tales were superbly told, although Mr. Wells' story necessitated a bit of thought."

Armand Le Cleve Goulette, of Milwaukee, writes: "The new serial, *On the Dead Man's Chest,* gets one hearty vote from me for January's blue ribbon. The club to which the characters belong reminds me of a similar organization which was, for a time, considered quite the thing by a few of us at a certain

school. I am anxiously waiting to find out whether or not this club meets the same sort of fate which befell ours."

Edward Murphy, of Elizabeth, New Jersey, found *The Tenants of Broussac*, in the December issue, utterly irresistible. He writes to The Eyrie: "That is great, wonderful! The part that has me yet is where the huge snake curls himself around the body of the girl. Oh, boy!"

A letter from Washington, D. C., signed "A Constant Reader," asks us to keep the magazine unchanged. "I want to thank you," says the writer. "for the many thrilling, breath-taking and horrified moments your most wonderful magazine has given me. Please continue to publish in WEIRD TALES the most hair-raising stories you can find. I am tired of the everyday things of life, and I know when I pick up WEIRD TALES I will be carried far away from the humdrum things around me. One story I shall never forget is *The Statement of Randolph Carter*. Please publish more like it."

Writes Ray Greenan, of Gastonia, North Carolina: "I have read every issue of WEIRD TALES from the first to the current. Let me say here that it takes only one story like Frank Owen's *The Wind That Tramps the World* to make one eagerly await the magazine that prints such literature."

Wilmot Hunt, of Joseph, Oregon, writes: "In the January issue I liked *Stealer of Souls*, by Charles Hilan Craig, best. I thought that in *The Waning of a World*, by W. Elwyn Backus, it was cruel to let poor 'Tag' die the way he did; nevertheless, it takes all points, joyful and sorrowful, to make a truly successful story. I think the suggestion concerning a popularity contest of WEIRD TALES authors, made by D. C. Knight, is about the best ever, and may we soon have one, but my vote is for Nictzin Dyalhis."

Readers, your favorite stories in the January issue, as shown by the letters you have written to The Eyrie, are *Stealer of Souls*, by Charles Hilan Craig, and *The Dead Soul*, by Raoul Lenoir. What is your favorite story in the present issue?

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THIS MONTH'S WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)_____	_____
(2)_____	_____
(3)_____	_____

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Lochinvar Lodge

(Continued from page 306)

I don't know quite how it happened, but she was wrapt in my arms quite as if she had belonged there always. And I was stroking that glorious hair of hers, and whispering "darling" over and over again. The castle, Nielson and all the rest faded silently into the limbo of things that didn't matter. She loved me—my own wonderful Doris loved me!

"Of course I do, Perry, you silly old dear," she whispered caressingly. "How could I help it? Oh, Perry, I couldn't stand it, if something should ever take me away from you."

"Darling," I breathed, and it was almost a prayer, "if you love me nothing ever can."

For the first, and God help me, the last time in my life, my lips thrilled to the velvet sweetness of hers. And then we sprang apart like two guilty children caught tasting a forbidden pleasure. For the door to the north tower was slowly opening! And a dark figure was crawling out!

I could have shouted for pure joy as the moonlight illumined it sufficiently to see. For there before me was Nielson! He rose unsteadily to his feet and made as if to draw the door shut.

"Look out!" I screamed; "there's a spring lock on the thing."

But my warning fell on unheeding ears. Only when the door was securely fastened did he speak.

"Unless I am very much mistaken, it will open soon," he said very, very slowly. And not until then did I notice the change in his appearance.

His smooth-fitting tuxedo was completely gone. His white silk shirt was torn vertically in three places, and seemed barely to be hanging on him. Nor did silk gleam more white in the moonlight than the skin showing beneath the rents. Blood was trickling from his face, from a scratch made there as if by voracious claws. That huge yellow mass of hair clustered defiantly around his forehead in a tawny mop. But in those steel-gray eyes of his there was no fear—only a fierce, silent wrath. It was the deathless courage of the old viking who dies fighting to the last.

"Harvey!" gasped Doris. "What is it, Harvey? Tell me, Harvey, what is it?"

"It is nothing human," he said with that same careful deliberation of his words. "It is a troll." And then I could see that at last superstition had conquered. "It caught me as I was coming out this door. It caught me around the waist and drew me to the floor. We wrestled there in the dark for a minute, an hour, I don't know how long. At last I broke away from the demon and came out here. But it will follow. It will follow," he repeated with a certain inborn conviction. "It has marked me for its victim, and I must kill it or perish. Must kill it or perish."

My eyes had leaped beyond him and were taking in the door at his back. I gave a little cry of horror. For once again that door was opening, and I seemed to see *something* beyond — some black creature that seemed to be trying to force an entrance.

"So, Perry," said Nielson gently, "you love her? And she loves you," he went on without waiting for an answer. "Then I want your solemn promise on one thing"—that broad back of his was strained against the door, making every effort to hold it back—"don't touch the thing you see. It has marked me for its own, and if I kill it, all right, but if I don't, it

will be satisfied. You and Doris can escape."

In spite of his great strength the door was moving a little. I wrapt one arm around Doris protectingly. No matter what I saw, I must not let fear overpower reason. I repeated to myself that it must be natural in some way, even if it were something man had never seen before. Poor Nielson had already yielded, a victim to superstitious fears, and I must not follow.

"Will you promise?" demanded Nielson again, and once again I saw that door move threateningly just a little more. I promised, a promise which, alas, I had no intention of keeping. But in his present state of mind it would be dangerous to excite him further.

"Then good-bye, and God bless you both," he said huskily.

And almost as he spoke the door gave way, forcing him to leap to one side. A black shadow crept into the moonlight and for the first time I saw *it*.

WORDS are but futile inadequate things at best. How, then, can I express to you the paralyzing horror of what I saw? In shape it was not unlike a man, if such a twisted, misshapen creature could be said to have any resemblance to a man. It was short, not over four feet in height, but this was more than counterbalanced by a pair of enormous shoulders. A coarse black beard almost completely obscured what would have been the face. That is, save the eyes: little piglike things sunk deep in the cadaverous head. But the nauseating repulsiveness, the instinctive loathing it engendered, are beyond description.

As I watched, the thing leaped upon Nielson and was striving to draw him down with a pair of long skinny arms. And Nielson, standing as firm as the mighty Thor himself,

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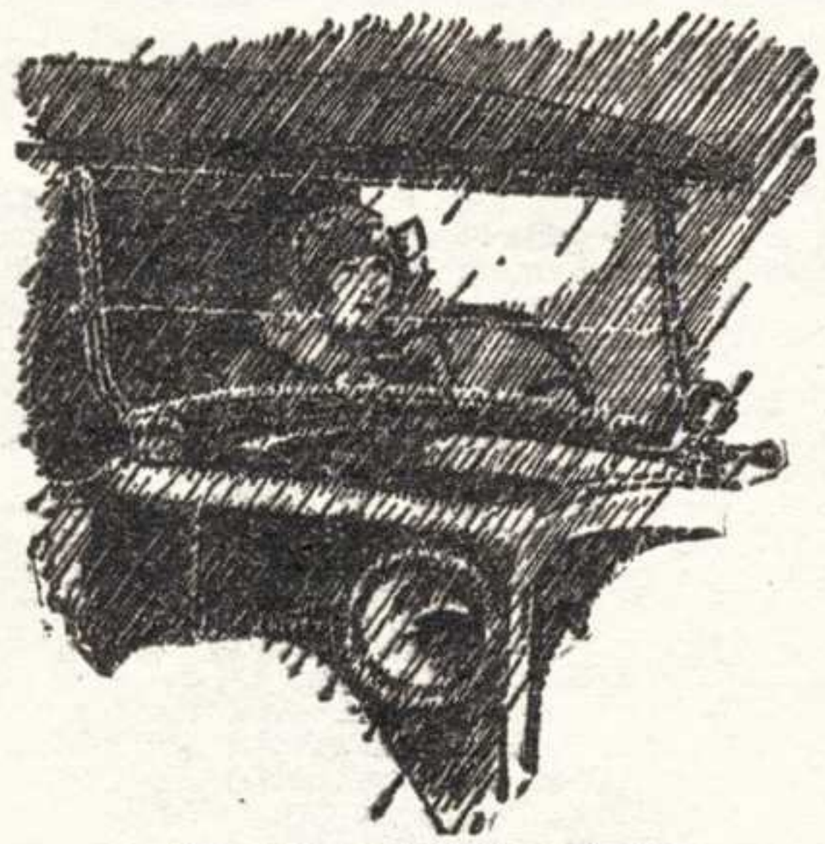
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was looking, with the wariness of the trained wrestler, for some suitable hold. I thought of Grettir the Strong, who wrestled with a troll from midnight to dawn until at last with face buried deep in the dank beard of the ghoulish thing he broke its back. Could this loathsome thing be real? Or was it but the wild fantasm of a disordered brain?

With an incredibly quick movement the thing had wrapt both arms about Nielson's waist. It lifted him at arm's length above the ground. A terrifying scream broke from Doris as it strode toward the parapet. I followed, hoping against hope to be in time.

Ah, I was of no use now! Nielson had swerved ever so slightly, but that light movement was enough to overbalance the horror. With all the sinuous litheness of a tiger Nielson squirmed from its grasp. He seized its wrist with both hands as we watched, bewildered. One quick bend of the body, and he threw it completely over his shoulder. It crashed to the roof not two feet from the now open door. One wriggle and it had disappeared within. Man against Demon, and so far Man had conquered!

Nielson followed, with Doris and me not far behind. I had never known so fierce a desire before as to see this loathsome creature killed; the same instinctive desire one would feel to crush a noxious serpent. For the first time I became aware of the iron bar in my hand. I gave Doris the searchlight and followed Nielson, fearing to see her come, too, but strangely fearing to see her left behind. And the tower was empty as we came within.

Down the stairs then we went. There could be no way out but down. Nielson could not be far ahead, for I fancied I heard his labored breathing. Down through the maze of bedrooms on the third floor. Down to the second floor through the ballroom, and

still farther down. Out in the open courtyard again. And there a disappearing figure led us still farther down, into the basement.

The stairs ended abruptly in a narrow corridor. This in turn ended still more abruptly in a large room. Doris, brave girl that she was, did not allow the flashlight to tremble, although had I been holding it, I should undoubtedly have dropped it to the floor in utter astonishment as we came into that room.

For there before us lay a pit, about five feet in diameter, stone-walled and circular, seemingly extending into the bowels of the earth. A rough iron ladder surmounted it. And as surely as I ever knew anything, I knew that from the bottom of this had come the *thing*.

Nielson had caught it now, and they stood wrestling on the very verge of the pit. As Doris directed the flashlight upon him, I saw he was trying for a strangle-hold. Already his left arm lay across the monster's chest, his supple wrist pressed against its throat. So after all Man would conquer Demon. A little pressure on its neck from that massive right arm of Nielson's, and then—— I had seen that hold too often not to know the end. Then I gave a scream of sheer horror. For Nielson had gone back just one step too far. I saw him release his hold in a vain effort to save himself as he disappeared. Heart-sick, I awaited that sickening thud. It came almost before I realized. Then silence—a terrible, deathly silence.

Forgetting all about that half-promise I had made Nielson, I rushed upon the *thing*. Nielson was gone, but I would avenge him. I whirled the iron bar as I struck, struck just a fraction of a second too late. For with incalculable rapidity the *thing* had leaped to one side as my weapon plunged down upon empty air. Another instant, and the bar was twisted

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from my hands, and I faced the monster bare-handed.

I felt my face buried in that damp beard. I felt those long, snakelike arms wrapt about me, squeezing the very life-blood away. Then I was thrown half fainting to one side, as Doris, my own wonderful Doris, hurled herself upon it in a vain effort to save me. The flashlight which she had dropped still flickered faintly at us. I could see the *thing* hold her lightly with one arm, and with the other brandish the iron bar which I had dropped. A fierce, overpowering hatred overruled all reason, as once again I rushed at it. Then a myriad of scintillating constellations as the bar descended. And I do not remember more.

WHEN I awoke I was quite alone. A faint glimmer of light from a grating high above my head indicated it was now broad daylight. At first it all seemed but the vague recollection of some horrible nightmare, but the sight of the pit assured me that this part, at least, was real. With unsteady footsteps I staggered toward it. It was empty! Then as vividly as if a voice were speaking, the thought came to me: if you, too, should perish down there, all chance of rescuing Doris would be hopelessly lost.

And so I returned to the outer world, returned to tell a story for which I shall undoubtedly be branded a lunatic. But all I ask is that you investigate before you condemn; that you aid me in searching the pit to the very bottom, and what lies beyond. What the creature may be I have no idea. But I do know it is no disembodied spirit, no hallucination of a disordered brain. It is real, real even as you and I. And troll or demon, beast or devil, it is not invulnerable.

The Jungle Monsters

(Continued from page 312)

which must be Nuga's herbs. So I started downward.

Then I realized where I was. The volcano was nothing more nor less than a gigantic ant hill! From the hole at the top an ant was racing toward me, and I had no time to escape. It was only about the size of a small dog, but you probably have an idea of how strong and fierce ants are. Well, it had me before I could get started, for the footing was dangerous and I could make only poor time. As I said, it had me. It was a red ant, with a covering like armor-plate, for although I kicked it, it leaped at my legs and bore me down. Maybe you don't know what a terrible thing an ant is, Doc. If you don't, go and look at one through your microscope some time. It had pinchers for legs, and as we rolled over together, it tore my leg to ribbons. I guess you could *see* that, for you sawed it the rest of the way off a few minutes ago, Doc. It was mangled, wasn't it?

I tried to fight the thing, but you don't know how strong an ant is. It picked me up bodily and rasped me again with those hellish pinchers before I could mash its head in with a stone. I killed it, but by this time the ants were swarming over the edge of the hill, and there I was with a mashed leg. My only chance was to make for the pool I had seen on the other side of the mound. I barely made it, and when I did reach it I was nearly snapped up by something —God only knows what it was—that surged up out of the mud.

I thought I had given the ants the slip, and after waiting in the slime for some minutes I stole out again and made for the breadfruit tree. I made it just in time, for I was at the point of fainting from pain and



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loss of blood. There was the packet of herbs, just as Nuga had left it. I didn't lose a second in getting some of the stuff down, either, but before I had time to tell whether or not it was an antidote for the powder I had eaten before, I was attacked by another ant. It had followed me from the pool, and I was too sick to fight. I was feeling queer again, and terribly dizzy. I remember of keeping it off with stones, and it kept circling, circling—then I think it must have sprayed acid on me, those tropical ants can do that, you know. Anyhow, I felt that I was being burned, and the last I remember, things were spinning about me. Then all grew black again.

How I got here I'm not sure—crawled, I think, for miles and miles. It was slow crawling, too, Doc, for I had to step on every spider and ant I saw along the way. There's a spider now, Doc, above the bed. Kill it! Kill it!

Now I suppose you think I've been lying, or have the D.T.'s, or the horrors, but if you do, you know what you can do. . . . . Nuga will show you—Nuga, the devil-doctor, who believes in black man's magic.

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A Message from Space

(Continued from page 324)

to where the box lay full length on the floor.

He reached it and sank down upon it. The box had been fastened with straps. He undid them one by one. He pushed the lid half off. Fumes from some powerful drug welled up from the interior of that box. A smile began to play around the corners of Tog Blaata's mouth as his eyes made out what lay there inside.

So those who still remained loyal to the Chosen Prince, those to whom he had outlined his plan when he realized what was in store for him, had carried out his last desperate plan. They had not failed him.

The smile that played around Tog Blaata's lips widened, it spread over his whole face. He could stand it no longer. He threw back his head and laughed. He roared. But no sign of a smile touched the unconscious face of Prince Zeneth, who lay in the box that had been the last to be brought aboard.

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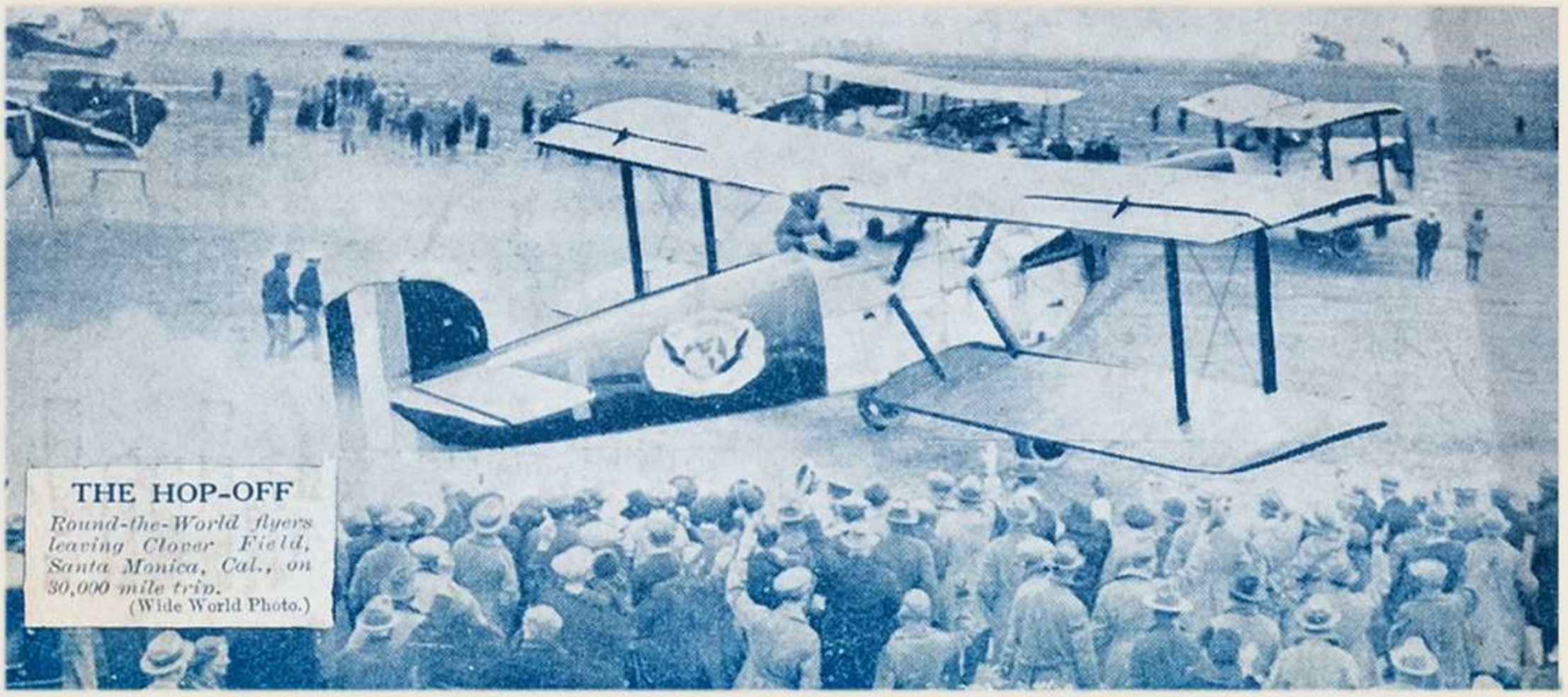
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