Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

Don't Miss This Startling Thrill-Tale

THE GHOSTS of STEAMBOAT COULEE

By Arthur J. Burks

May 1926

25¢

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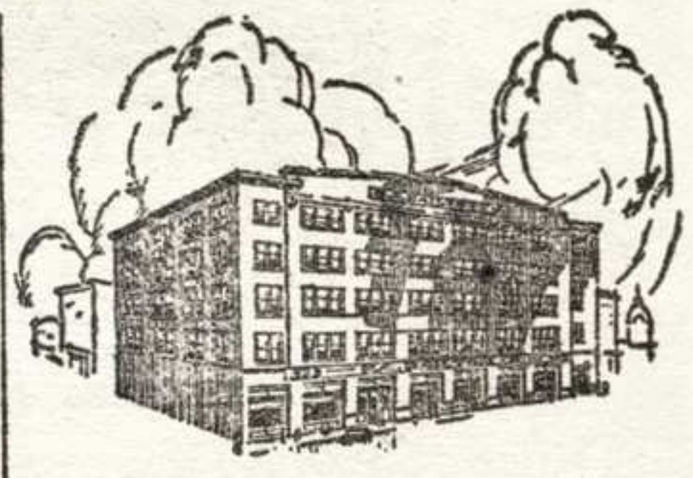
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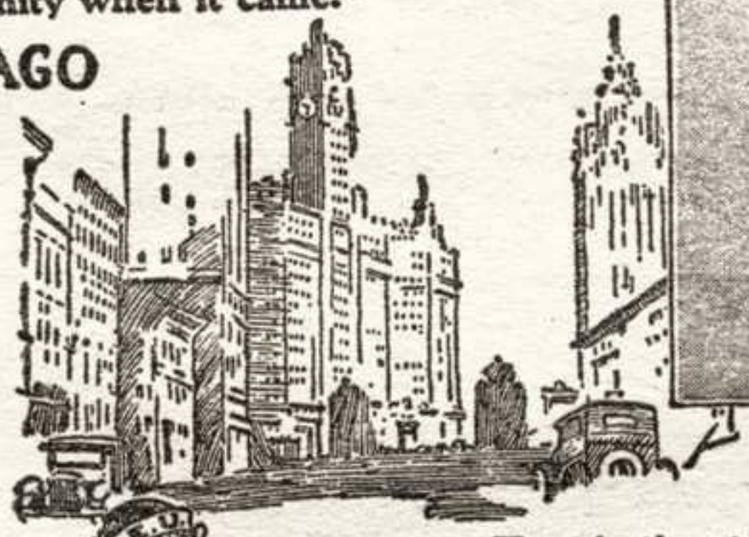
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VOLUME VII NUMBER 5

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 408 Holliday Building, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the postoffice at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, $2.50 a year in the United States; $3.00 a year in Canada. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. English office: G. M. Jeffries Agency, Hopefield House, Hanwell, London, W. 7. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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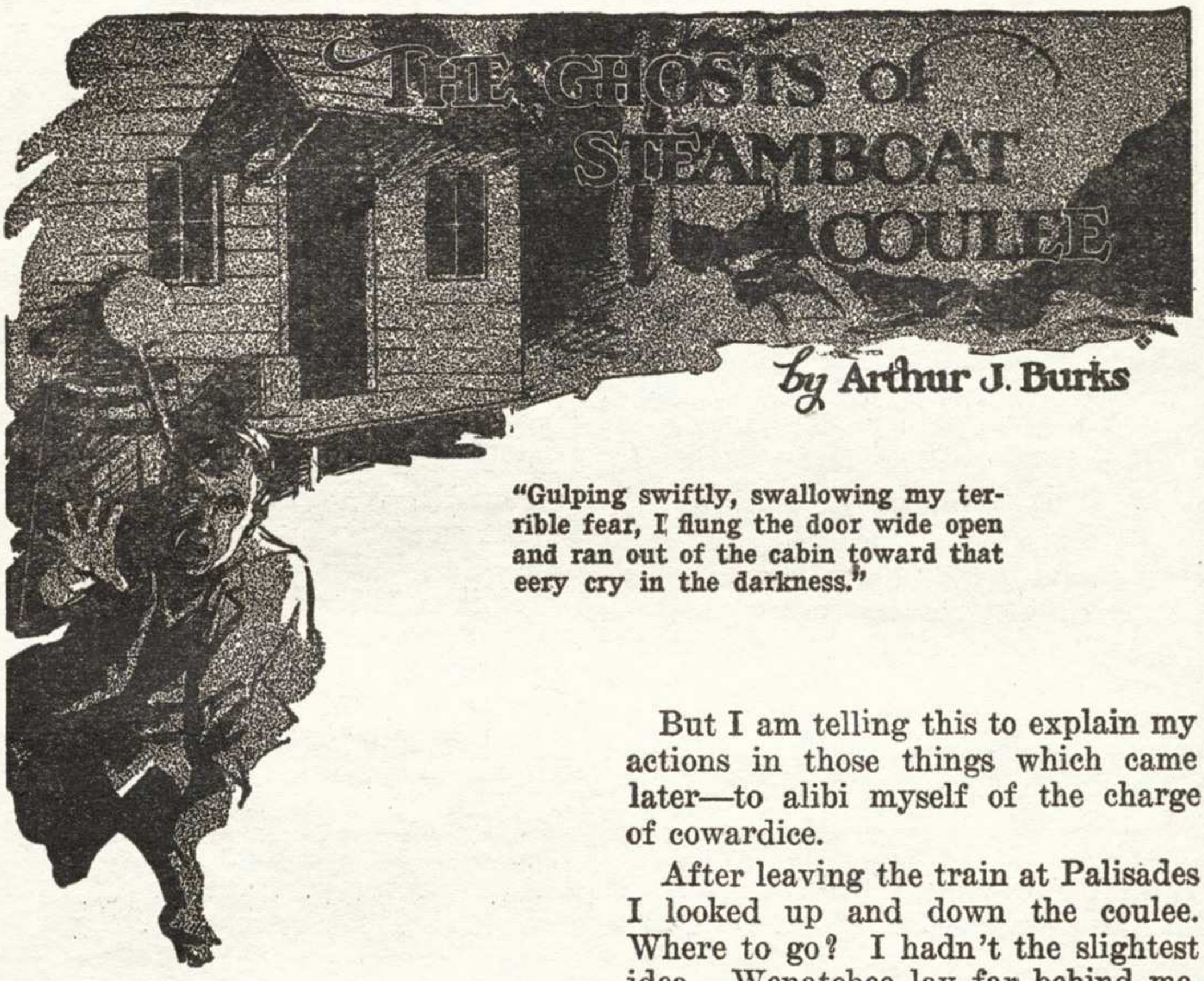
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by Arthur J. Burks

"Gulping swiftly, swallowing my terrible fear, I flung the door wide open and ran out of the cabin toward that eery cry in the darkness."

A HEARTLESS brakeman discovered me and kicked me off the train at Palisades. I didn't care greatly. As well be dropped here in Moses Coulee like a bag of spoiled meal as farther up the line. When a man knows he has but a short time to live, what matters it? Had I not been endowed with a large modicum of my beloved father's stubbornness I believe I should, long ere this, have crawled away into some hole, like a mongrel cur, to die. There was no chance to cheat the Grim Reaper. That had been settled long ago, when, without a gas mask, I had gone through a certain little town in Flanders.

My lungs were just about done. Don't think I am making a bid for sympathy. I know a sick man seldom arouses in the breast of strangers any other emotion than disgust.

But I am telling this to explain my actions in those things which came later—to alibi myself of the charge of cowardice.

After leaving the train at Palisades I looked up and down the coulee. Where to go? I hadn't the slightest idea. Wenatchee lay far behind me, at the edge of the mighty Columbia River. I had found this thriving little city unsympathetic and not particularly hospitable. I couldn't, therefore, retrace my steps. Besides, I never have liked to go back over lost ground. I saw the train which had dropped me crawl like a snake up the steep incline which led out of the coulee. I hadn't the strength to follow. I knew that I could never make the climb.

So, wearily, I trudged out to the road and headed farther into the coulee, to come, some hours later, to another cul-de-sac. It was another (to me impossible) incline, this time a wagon road. I have since learned that this road leads, via a series of three huge terraces bridged by steep inclines, out of Moses Coulee. It is called The Three Devils—don't ask me why, for it was named by the Siwash Indians.

At the foot of this road, and some half-mile from where it began to climb, I saw a small farmhouse, from the chimney of which a spiral of blue smoke arose lazily into the air. Here were folks, country folks, upon whose hospitality I had long ago learned to rely. Grimy with the dust of the trail, damp with perspiration, red spots dancing in the air before my eyes because of the unaccustomed exertion to which I had compelled myself, I turned aside and presently knocked at the door of the farmhouse.

A kindly housewife answered my knock and bade me enter. I was shortly told to seat myself at the table to partake of the tasty viands brought forth by this taciturn woman of the coulee. When I had finished eating I arose from my place and was about to ask her what I might do in payment for the meal, when I was seized with a fit of coughing which left me faint and trembling; and I had barely composed myself when the woman's husband and a half-grown boy entered the house silently and looked at me.

"How come a man as sick as you is out on the road afoot like this?" demanded the man.

I studied the three carefully before replying. Nothing squeamish about them. Knew something of the rough spots of life, all of them. I knew this at once. So I told them my story, and that I had neither friends nor family, nor abode. While I talked they exchanged glances with one another, and when I had finished the husband looked at me steadily for a long moment.

"Is there a chance for you to get well?" he asked finally.

"I am afraid not." I tried to make my voice sound cheerful.

"Would you like to find a place where nobody'd bother you? A place where you could loaf along about as you wished until your time came?"

I didn't exactly like the way he put it; but that was just about all there was left for me, and, to date, even that had been denied me.

I nodded in answer to the question. The man strode to the door and pointed.

"See there?" he asked. "That's the road you came here on, against that two hundred-foot cliff. Opposite that cliff, back of my house, is another cliff, thirteen hundred feet high. Matter of fact, my place is almost surrounded by cliffs, don't need to build fences, except where the coulee opens away toward Columbia River, which is some lot of miles away from here. Cliffs both sides of it, all the way down. No other exit, except there!"

As he spoke he swung his extended forearm straight toward the cliff to the north.

"See what looks like a great black shadow against the face of the cliff, right where she turns to form the curve of the coulee?"

"Yes, I see it."

"Well, that ain't a shadow. That's the entrance to another and smaller coulee which opens into this one. It is called Steamboat Coulee, and if you look sharp you can see why."

I studied that black shadow as he pointed, carefully, running my eyes over the face of the cliff. Then I exclaimed suddenly, so unexpectedly did I discover the reason for the name given the coulee. Right at the base of that black shadow was a great pile of stone, its color all but blending with the mother cliff unless one looked closely; and this mass of solid rock, from where we stood in the doorway of the farmhouse, looked like a great steamboat slowly emerging from the cleft in the giant walls!

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed; "if I didn't know better I would swear that was a boat under steam!"

"It's fooled lots of folks," returned the farmer dryly. "Well, that

coulee entrance is on my land, so I guess I have a right to make this proposition to you. Back inside that coulee about two miles is a log cabin that could easy be made livable. Just the place for you, and I could send in what little food you would need. It's kind of cool at night, but in the daytime the sun makes the coulee as hot as an oven, and you could loaf all day in the heat. There are plenty of big rocks there to flop on and—who knows?—maybe you'd even get well!"

"And nobody owns the house?" I inquired.

"Yes, I own it. I used to live in it myself."

"Why did you move?" I felt as a fellow must feel when he looks a gift horse in the face, but to save me I could not forbear asking the question.

The man hesitated for a good minute before answering.

"Well," he said finally, "all my land lies out here in Moses Coulee, and when I lived in there I could not keep my eye on it. I have large melon patches down toward Steamboat, and if there isn't someone here when the Siwashes drift through to their potlatch on Badger Mountain, outside, the damn Indians would steal all the melons. So we moved out here."

THE explanation sounded reasonable enough; but it left me unsatisfied. I had been moodily gazing at that black shadow on the cliff which was the entrance to Steamboat Coulee, and while I stared it had come to me that the huge maw looked oddly like a great open mouth that might take one in and leave no trace. There was something menacing about it, distant though it was. I felt that this unexplainable aura would become more depressing as one approached the coulee. I had begun to distrust these people, too. The woman and the son talked too little, even for people who lived much alone.

The sun was westering, deepening the shadow at the mouth of Steamboat. At the two irregular edges of the shadow there hung a weirdly shimmering blue haze.

I blamed morbid fancies to my sickness. I began to reason with myself. Here was I, a grown man, looking a gift horse in the mouth, questioning the motives of kindly people who were but giving me a chance to die under cover like a human being—near to, if not among, friends.

I swallowed my forebodings and turned to the man. Beyond him, over his shoulder, I looked into the eyes of the woman, who, arms akimbo, was standing in the half-shadow beyond the door, gravely awaiting my answer. Confound it! Why couldn't she say something? Beside her stood the boy, also noting me gravely. As my eyes went to the boy his tongue crept forth from his mouth slowly and described a circle, moistening his lips. My morbid fancy saw something sinister even in this, for I was minded of a cat that looks expectantly at a saucer of cream. I jerked my head around to meet the eyes of the man, and he, too, was regarding me gravely.

"I thank you, sir," I said, as politely as I could; "you are very kind. I accept your offer with great pleasure. May I know to whom I am indebted for this unusually benevolent service?"

Again that queer hesitation before the answer. When it came the tones were strangely harsh, almost a rebuke.

"What difference does a name make? We don't go much on last names here. That there is Reuben, my boy, and this is my wife, Hildreth. My own name is Plone. You can tell us what to call you, if you wish; but it don't make much difference if you don't care to."

"My name is Harold Skidmore, late of the U. S. Army. Once more allow me to thank you, then I shall go

into my new home before it gets so dark I can't find it."

"That's all right. Reuben will go along and show you the place. Hillie, put up a sack of grub for Skidmore. Enough to last him a couple of days. He'll probably be too sore from his walk to come out for more before that —and we may be too busy to take any in to him."

The woman dropped her arms to her side and moved into the kitchen to do the bidding of Plone. Plone! What an odd name for a man! I studied him as, apparently having forgotten me, he stared moodily down the haze-filled coulee. I tried to see what his eyes were seeking, but all I could tell was that he watched the road by which I had come to this place—watched it carefully and in silence, as though he expected other visitors to come around the bend which leads to the Three Devils. He did not turn back to me again; and when, ten minutes or so later, Reuben touched my arm and started off in the direction of Steamboat, Plone was still staring down the road.

I looked back after we had left the house well behind, and he was watching me now, while his taciturn wife stood motionless beside him, with her arms akimbo. Looking at the two made me feel strangely uncomfortable again, so I turned back and tried to engage Reuben in conversation. As soon as I spoke he quickened his stride so that it took all of my breath to keep pace with him.

But I had a chance to study the territory over which we traveled. Back in my mind I remembered Plone's remark about his melon patches, and looked about for sight of them. We were half way to the Steamboat Coulee entrance, yet I hadn't seen a melon patch or anything that remotely resembled one. Though I knew absolutely nothing about farming, I would have sworn that this ground hadn't been cultivated for many years. It had been plowed once upon a time, but the plowing had been almost obliterated by scattered growths of green sagebrush which had pushed through and begun to thrive, while in the open we struggled through regular matted growths of wild hollyhocks, heavy with their fiery blooms. Plone's farm was nothing but a desert on the coulee floor.

But we were approaching Steamboat Coulee entrance, and the nearer we strode the less I liked the bargain I had made, for the entrance looked more like a huge mouth than ever. But those red spots were dancing before my eyes again and may have helped me to imagine things.

When we reached the entrance its mouthlike appearance was not so pronounced, and the rock which had looked like a steamboat did not resemble a steamboat at all. The floor of this coulee was a dry stream-bed which, when the spring freshets came, must have been a roaring torrent.

BEFORE entering the coulee behind Reuben I looked back at the house of Plone, and shouted in amazement.

"Reuben! Where is the house? I can see all of that end of the coulee, and your house is not in sight!"

"We come over a rise, a high one, that's all," he replied carelessly; "if we go back a piece we can see the house. Only we ain't got time. I want to show you the cabin and get back before dark. This coulee ain't nice to get caught in after dark."

"It isn't?" I questioned. "Why not?"

But Reuben had begun the entrance to Steamboat Coulee and did not answer. I was very hesitant about following him now, for I knew that he had lied to me. We hadn't come over any rise, and I should have been able to see that farmhouse! What had happened to my eyes? Were they,

like my lungs, failing me? I stopped dead-still, there in the bottom of that dry stream-bed. Reuben stopped, ahead of me, and looked silently back. He smiled at me insolently, a sort of challenging smile. Just stood there smiling. What else could I do? I strode on after Reuben.

I liked this coulee less and less as we went deeper into it. Walls rose straight on either hand, and they were so close that they seemed to be pressing over upon me. The stream-bed narrowed and deepened. On its banks grew thickets of wild willow, interspersed with clumps of squaw-berry bushes laden with pink fruit. Behind these thickets arose the talus slope of shell-rock.

I studied the slopes for signs of pathways which might lead out of this coulee in case a heavy rain should fill the stream-bed and cut off my retreat by the usual way, but saw none. I saw instead something that filled me with a sudden feeling of dread, causing a sharp constriction of my throat. It was just a mottled mass on a large rock; but as I looked at it the mass moved, untwisted itself, and a huge snake glided out of sight in the rocks.

"Reuben," I called, "are there many snakes in this coulee?"

"Thousands!" he replied without looking back. "Rattlers, blue racers and bull whips—but mostly rattlers. Keep your shanty closed at night and stay in the stream-bed in the daytime and they won't be any danger to you!"

Well, I was terribly tired, else I would have turned around and quitted this coulee—yes, though I fell dead from exhaustion ten minutes later. As it was I followed Reuben, who turned aside finally and climbed out of the dry stream. I followed him and stood upon a trail which led down a gloomy aisle into a thicket of willows. Heavy shadows hung in this woody aisle, but through these I could make out the outline of a squatty log cabin.

Ten minutes later I had a fire going in the cracked stove which the house boasted, and its light was driving away the shadows in the corners. There was one chair in the house, and a rough bed against the wall. The board floor was well laid—no cracks through which venturesome rattlers might smell me out. I made sure of this before I would let Reuben get away, and that the door could be closed and bolted.

"Well," said Reuben, who had stood by while I put the place rapidly to rights, "you'll be all right now. Snug as a bug in a rug—if you ain't afraid of ghosts!"

His hand had dropped to the door-knob as he began to talk, and when he had uttered this last sinister sentence he opened the door and slipped out before I could stop him. Those last six words had sent a chill through my whole body. In a frenzy of fear which I could not explain, I rushed to the door and looked out, intending to call Reuben back.

I swear he hadn't had time to reach that stream-bed and drop into it out of sight; but when I looked out he was nowhere to be seen, and when I shouted his name until the echoes rang to right and left through the coulee, there was no answer! He must have fairly flown out of that thicket!

I closed the door and barred it, placed the chair-back under the door-knob, and sat down upon the edge of the bed, gazing into the fire.

What sort of place had I wandered into?

For a time the rustling of wind through the willows outside the log cabin was my only answer. Then a gritty grating sound beneath the floor, slow and intermittent, told me that a huge snake, sluggish with the coolness of the evening, was crawling there and was at that moment scrap-

ing alongside one of the timbers which supported the floor.

I was safe from these, thank God!

The feeling of security which now descended upon me, together with the cheery roaring of the fire in the stove, almost lulled me to sleep as I sat. My eyes were closing wearily and my head was sinking upon my breast. . . .

A cry that the wildest imagination would never have expected to hear in this place, came suddenly from somewhere in the darkness outside.

It was a cry as of a little baby that awakes in the night and begs plaintively to be fed. And it came from somewhere out there in the shell-rock of the talus slopes.

2

MERCIFUL heaven! How did it happen that a wee small child such as I guessed this to be had wandered out into the darkness of the coulee? Whence had it come? Were there other inhabitants in Steamboat? But Plone had told me that there were not. Then how explain that eery cry outside? A possible explanation, inspired by frayed nerves, came to me, and froze the marrow in my bones before I could reason myself out of it.

"If you ain't afraid of ghosts!"

What had Reuben of the unknown surname meant by this remark? And by what means had he so swiftly disappeared after he had quitted my new home?

Just as I asked myself the question, that wailing cry came again, from about the same place, as near as I could judge, on the talus slope in rear of my cabin. Unmistakably the cry of a lost baby, demanding by every means of expression in its power, the attention of its mother. Out there alone and frightened in the darkness, in the heart of Steamboat Coulee, which Reuben had told me was infested by great numbers of snakes, at least one kind of which was venomous enough to slay.

Dread tugged at my throat. My tongue became dry in my mouth, cleaving to the palate. I knew before I opened the door that the coulee was now as dark as Erebus, and that moving about would be like groping in some gigantic pocket. But there was a feeble child out there on the talus slope, lost in the darkness, wailing for its mother. And I prided myself upon being at least the semblance of a man.

Mentally girding myself, I strode to the door and flung it open. A miasmatic mist came in immediately, cold as the breath from a sunless marsh, chilling me anew. Instinctively I closed the door as though to shut out some loathsome presence—I knew not what. The heat of the fire absorbed the wisps of vapor that had entered. I leaned against the door, panting with a nameless terror, when, from the talus slope outside, plain through the darkness came again that eery wailing.

Gulping swiftly, swallowing my terrible fear, I closed my eyes and flung the door wide open. Nor did I close it until I stood outside and opened my eyes against an opaque blanket of darkness. When Plone had told me the coulee was cold after nightfall, he had not exaggerated. It was as cold as the inside of a tomb.

The crying of the babe came again, from directly behind my cabin. The cliff bulked large there, while above its rim, high up, I made out the soft twinkling of a pale star or two.

Before my courage should fail me and send me back into the cheery cabin, thrice cheery now that I was outside it, I ran swiftly around the cabin, nor stopped until I had begun to clamber up the talus slope, guided by my memory of whence that wailing cry had come. The shell-rock shifted beneath me, and I could hear the shale go clattering down among the brush

about the bases of the willows below. I kept on climbing.

Once I almost fell when I stepped upon something round, which writhed beneath my foot, causing me to jump straight into the air with a half-suppressed cry of fear. I was glad now that the coulee was cold after nightfall, else the snake, were it by chance a rattler, could have struck me a death-blow. The cold, however, made the vile creature sluggish.

When I thought I had climbed far enough I bent over and tried to pierce the heavy gloom, searching the talus intently for a glimpse of white —white which should discover to me the clothing of the baby which I sought. Failing in this, I remained quiet, waiting for the cry to come again. I waited amid a silence that could almost be felt, a silence lasting so long that I began to dread a repetition of that cry. What if there were no baby—flesh and blood, that is? Reuben had spoken of ghosts. Utter nonsense! No grown man believes in ghosts! And if I didn't find the child before long the little tot might die of the cold. Where had the child gone? Why this eery silence? Why didn't the child cry again? It was almost as though it had found that which it sought, there in the darkness. That cry had spoken eloquently of a desire for sustenance.

If the child did not cry, what was I to believe? Who, or what, was suckling the baby out on the cold talus slope?

I became as a man turned to stone when the eery cry came again. It was not a baby's whimper, starting low and increasing in volume; it was a full-grown wail as it issued from the unseen mouth. And it came from at least a hundred feet higher up on the talus! I, a grown man, had stumbled heavily in the scramble to reach this height; yet a baby so small that it wailed for its milk had crept a hundred feet farther up the slope! It was beyond all reason; weird beyond the wildest imagination. But undoubtedly the wailing of a babe.

I did not believe in ghosts. I studied the spot whence the wail issued, but could see no blotch of white. Only two lambent dots, set close together, glowing like resting fireflies among the shale. I saw them for but a second only. Undoubtedly mating fireflies, and they had flown.

I began to climb once more, moving steadily toward the spot where I had heard the cry.

I stopped again when the shell-rock above me began to flow downward as though something, or somebody, had started it moving. What, in God's name, was up there at the base of the cliff? Slowly, my heart in my mouth, I climbed on.

There was a rush, as of an unseen body, along the face of the talus. I could hear the contact of light feet on the shale; but the points of contact were unbelievably far apart. No baby in the world could have stepped so far—or jumped. Of course the cry might have come from a half-witted grown person; but I did not believe it.

The cry again, sharp and clear; but at least two hundred yards up the coulee from where I stood, and on about a level with me. Should I follow or not? Did some nocturnal animal carry the babe in its teeth? It might be; I had heard of such things, and had read the myth of Romulus and Remus. Distorted fantasies? Perhaps; but show me a man who can think coolly while standing on the talus slopes of Steamboat after dark, and I will show you a man without nerves—and without a soul.

Once more I took up the chase. I had almost reached the spot whence the cry had come last, when I saw again those twin balls of lambent flame. They seemed to blink at me—off and on, off and on.

I bent over to pick up a bit of shale to hurl at the dots, when, almost in my ears, that cry came once more; but this time the cry ended in a spitting snarl as of a tom-cat when possession of food is disputed!

With all my might I hurled the bit of shale I had lifted, straight at those dots of flame. At the same time I gave utterance to a yell that set the echoes rolling the length and breadth of the coulee. The echoes had not died away when the coulee was filled until it rang with that eery wailing—as though a hundred babies cried for mothers who did not come!

Then—great God!—I knew!

Bobcats! The coulee was alive with them! I was alone on the talus, two hundred yards from the safe haven of my cabin, and though I knew that one alone would not attack a man in the open, I had never heard whether they hunted in groups. For all I knew they might. At imminent risk of breaking my neck, I hurled myself down the slope and into the thicket of willows at the base. Through these and into the dry stream-bed I blundered, still running. I kept this mad pace until I had reached the approximate point where the trail led to my cabin, climbed the bank of the dry stream and sought for the aisle through the willows.

Though I searched carefully for a hundred yards on each hand I could not find the path. And I feared to enter the willow thicket and beat about. The ominous wailing had stopped suddenly, as though at a signal, and I believed that the bobcats had taken to the trees at the foot of the talus. I studied the dark shadows for dots of flame in pairs, but could see none. I knew from reading about them that bobcats have been known to drop on solitary travelers from the limbs of trees. Their sudden silence was weighted with ponderous menace.

I was afraid—afraid! Scared as I had never been in my life before—and I had gone through a certain town in Flanders without a gas mask.

Why the sudden, eery silence? I would have welcomed that vast chorus of wailing, had it begun again. But it did not.

When I crept back to the bank of the stream-bed a pale moon had come up, partly dispelling the shadows in Steamboat Coulee. The sand in the stream-bed glistened frostily in the moonlight, making me think of the blinking eyes of a multitude of toads.

Where, in Steamboat, was the cabin with its cheery fire? I had closed the door to keep my courage from failing me, and now there was no light to guide me.

It is hell to be alone in such a place, miles from the nearest other human being.

I SAT down on the high bank, half sidewise so that I could watch the shadows among the willows, and tried mentally to retrace my steps, hoping that I could reason out the exact location of the cabin in the thicket.

Sitting as I was, I could see for a hundred yards or so down the stream-bed. I studied its almost straight course for a moment or two, for no reason that I can assign. I saw a black shadow dart across the open space, swift as a breath of wind, and disappear in the thicket on the opposite side. It was larger than a cat, smaller than the average dog. A bobcat had changed his base hurriedly, and in silence.

Silence! That was the thing that was now weighing upon me, more even than thought of my failure to locate the little cabin. Why had the cats stopped their wailing so suddenly, as though they waited for something? This thought deepened the feeling of dread that was upon me. If the cats were waiting, for what were they waiting?

Then I breathed a sigh of relief. For, coming around a bend in the

stream-bed, there strode swiftly toward me the figure of a man. He was a big man who looked straight before him. He walked as a country man walks when he hurries home to a late supper. Then there were other people in this coulee, after all! Plone, like Reuben, had lied.

But what puzzled me about this newcomer was his style of dress. He was garbed after the manner of the first pioneers who had come into this country from the East. From his high-topped boots, into which his trousers were tucked loosely, to his broad-brimmed hat, he was dressed after the manner of those people who had vanished from this country more than a decade before my time. An old prospector evidently, who had clung to the habiliments of his younger days. But he did not walk like an old man; rather he strode, straight-limbed and erect, like a man in his early thirties. There was a homely touch about him, though, picturesque as he was; for he smoked a corn-cob pipe, from the bowl of which a spiral of blue smoke eddied forth into the chill night air. I knew from this that, did I call to him, his greeting in return would be bluffly friendly.

I waited for him to come closer, hoping that he would notice me first. As he approached I noticed with a start that two huge revolvers, the holsters tied back, swung low upon his hips. People nowadays did not carry firearms openly. In an instant I had decided to let this stranger pass, even though I spent the remainder of the night on the bank of the dry stream. Sight of those savage weapons had filled me with a new and different kind of dread.

Then I started as another figure, also of a man, came around the selfsame bend of the watercourse, for there was something oddly familiar about that other figure. He moved swiftly, his body almost bent double as he hurried forward. As he came around the bend and saw the first man who had come into my range of vision, he bent lower still.

As he did so the moonlight glowed dully on something that he carried in the crook of his arm. I knew instantly that what he carried was a rifle. Once more that chill along my spine, for there was no mistaking his attitude.

He was stalking the first man, furtively, and there was murder in his heart!

It did not take his next action to prove this to me. I knew it, even as the second man knelt swiftly in the sand of the watercourse and flung the rifle to his shoulder, its muzzle pointing at the man approaching me.

As the kneeling man aimed the deadly weapon, his head was drawn back and the moonlight shone for a moment on his face. I cried out, loudly and in terrible fear, as much to warn the unconscious man as in surprize at my discovery. For the man with the rifle was my Moses Coulee benefactor—Plone.

Again I cried out, this time with all the power of my shattered lungs. And the man ahead, all unconscious of the impending death at his heels, paid me absolutely no attention. He was no more than twenty yards from me when I shouted, yet he did not turn his head. For all the attention he paid me I might as well have remained silent. It was as though he were stone-deaf.

As this thought came to me the first man raised his head and looked directly into my eyes, and through and beyond me as though I had not been there. I saw his eyes plainly, and in them was no sign that he noted my presence.

I shouted again, waving my arms wildly. Perhaps he could not see me because of the shadows at my back. Still he did not see me. I whirled to the kneeling man, just as a sheet of

yellow flame leaped from the muzzle of his rifle. The first man was right in front of me when the bullet struck him. He stopped, dead in his tracks. I guessed that the bullet had struck him at the base of the skull. Even so, he whirled swiftly, and both his guns were out. But he could not raise them to fire. He slumped forward limply, and sprawled in the sand.

I had not heard the report of the rifle, for simultaneously with that spurt of flame the bobcats had begun their wailing once more, drowning out the sound.

I, unable to prevent it or give a warning, had seen a cold-blooded murder enacted. There before me in the sand was the proof of it. I half arose, intending to run to the fallen man to see if he still lived. But when I saw Plone arise leisurely from his knees and come forward I drew back in the shadow again. Plone was a killer, and I had seen him make his kill. If he knew that his evil deed had been witnessed he would have no compunction about another killing, and even to me, whose life was destined to be short, life was still sweet.

I drew back and waited.

Plone stopped above the fallen man and looked down. Then he opened the breech of his rifle and coolly blew the smoke from the bore. He kicked the fallen man with the toe of his boot, and I saw his lips move as though he whispered something. He took the two pistols, shrugged his shoulders and turned away, walking swiftly back the way he had come, carrying his rifle in the crook of his arm. The murdered men he left to the creatures of the night.

Well, the man was dead, no doubt about that. But the sand was deep and I could bury him. I watched until Plone reached the turn in the watercourse, where he seemed to vanish as though the earth had opened and swallowed him.

Then I dropped into the stream-bed and strode to the fallen man, stooped over him to see that he no longer breathed—and drew back with a cry of horror. For what looked up at me was not the face of a man newly slain; but the sightless eyes of a grinning, aged skull.

As I stared in unbelief, the perspiration starting from every pore, the skull seemed to fade slowly away before my eyes, and in a matter of seconds there was nothing before me but the shifting sand, upon which there was not even a depression where a body had fallen!

Add to this uncanny happening the myriad-tongued caterwauling of the bobcats on the talus—crying as of babies lost in the night — and you can faintly guess at the state of my nerves. But I could not believe my eyes. Something was wrong, said reason. So I stooped again and ran my hand hurriedly over the sand where I had seen the body. Surely I could not have been mistaken!

Frantically, unable to believe it all hallucination, I ran my fingers deep into the sand. At once they brought up against something solid which, for many minutes, I found myself without the courage to uncover. I conquered this fear, finally, and began to dig.

Soon there lay before me, in a shallow grave, a fleshless skeleton. This in itself did not bother me, for I have seen many such, and in Flanders fields I have slept peacefully with dead buddies all around me. But, while digging near the skull of my find, I had unearthed something else which had been fairly well preserved in the dry sand.

It was a rotting corn-cob pipe, with black, corroded bowl!

With a great cry, whose echoes could be heard in the coulee even through the wailing of the bobcats, I sprang to my feet and ran, stagger-

ing, down the watercourse, in the direction I had come before darkness with Reuben.

Long before I had reached it my poor body failed me and I fell to the sandy floor, coughing my lungs away, while scarlet stains wetted the sand near my mouth.

Then blackness descended.

3

When I awoke in the sand the sun was shining. Some sixth sense told me to remain motionless, warning me that all was not well. Without moving my head I rolled my eyes until I could see ahead in the direction I had fallen. In falling my right hand had been flung out full length, fingers extended.

Imagine my fear and horror when I saw, coiled up within six inches of my hand, a huge rattlesnake! His head was poised above the coil, while just behind it, against the other arc of the vicious circle, the tip of the creature's tail, adorned with an inch or more of rattles, hummed its fearful warning.

With all my power I sprang back and upward. At the same time the bullet h e a d, unbelievably swift, flashed toward my hand and—thank God!—safely beneath it! Stretched helplessly now to its full length, the creature's mouth, with its forked tongue, had stopped within a scant two inches of where my face had been.

Before the rattler could return and coil again I had stepped upon the bullet head, grinding it deep into the sand, and when the tail whipped frantically against my leg I seized it and hurled the reptile with all my might, out of the stream-bed into the shell-rock. Even as I did it I wondered where I had found the courage; and what had kept me from moving while unconscious. Had I moved I might never again have awakened.

The sun was directly overhead. I had lost my sense of direction during last night's rambles among the shale, and could not figure out which way I should go to win free of this coulee. Then I remembered the direction Plone had taken, and set out to trace his footsteps, but there were none! I could not understand it, for I had seen Plone quite plainly in the moonlight.

I passed around the bend where he had disappeared and continued on. When, ten minutes later, I came to the shallow grave, with its aged skeleton, which had so taken away my nerve last night, I did not know where I was. I had been sure that this grave was in the opposite direction. But Plone must have known the way out—I knew that he lived on the floor of Moses Coulee, into which Steamboat debouched.

I kept on moving. If, as I now believed, I had been in error in the location of the grave, then my log cabin lay ahead of me. I climbed the bank of the dry stream and continued my hike thereon, keeping well away from the thickets for fear of snakes. With the sun high in the heavens, turning the coulee into a furnace, the snakes came out by hundreds to bask upon the shale, and as I passed, they coiled and warned me away with myriad warnings. I did not trespass upon their holdings.

After I had plodded along for fully an hour I knew that I must be quite close to the rock which gives Steamboat its name; but still I had not found the pathway leading to the log cabin. Evidently I had already passed it.

Even as I had this thought I came upon a path leading into the shadows of the willow thicket—a path that seemed familiar, even though, from the stream-bed, I could not see the cabin. With a sigh, and much surprized that I had, last night, traveled so far, I turned into this path and increased my pace.

I came shortly to pause, chilled even though the sun was shining. For at the end of the mossy trail there was no cabin; but a cleared plot of ground adorned with aged mounds and rough-hewn crosses! Rocks were scattered profusely over the mounds and, I guessed, had been placed to foil the creatures which otherwise would have despoiled the bodies resting there. There was a great overhang of the cliff wall, bulging out over the little graveyard, and from the overhang came a steady drip of moisture. Slimy water lay motionless in a pool in the center of the plot. Mossy green were the stones. Mud-puppies scurried into the deeps as I stopped and stared, turning the water to a pool of slime.

How uneasy I felt in this place! Why had such a remote location been chosen as a cemetery, hidden away here from the brightness of God's sunshine? Nothing but shadow-filled silence, except for the dripping of the water from the overhang.

I hurried back to the stream-bed and continued on my way.

ANOTHER hour passed, during which, my body racked with continual coughing, I suffered the torments of the damned. Those red dots were dancing before my eyes again, and nothing looked natural to me. The sunning snakes in the shale seemed to waver grotesquely—twisting, writhing, coiling. Here, on the cliff, was a row of ponderous palisades; but they seemed to be ever buckling and bending, as though shaken by an earthquake.

Then, far ahead, I saw the rock at the entrance. With a sob of joy I began to run—only to stop when I reached the pile, with a cry of hopelessness and despair. For the rock, unscalable even to one who possessed the strength to climb, now filled the coulee from lip to lip, while on my side of the pile there nestled a little lake, clear and pellucid, into which I could look, straight down, for what I guessed must have been all of twenty feet!

Some great shifting of the walls, during the night, had blocked the entrance, entombing me in Steamboat Coulee with all its nameless horrors!

There was no one to see me, so I flung myself down at the edge of the pool and wept weakly, bemoaning my terrible fate.

After a time I regained control of my frayed nerves, arose to my knees and bathed my throbbing temples. Sometime, somehow, I reasoned, Plone would find a way to reach me. There was nothing to do now but return and search again for my cabin. Plone had hinted that he would be in after a day or two with supplies for me if I did not come out for them—and I felt that he would know how to get in by some other way. He had lived in the coulee and should know his way about.

Wearily I began the return march. It never occurred to me to note that the sun went ahead of me on its journey into the west. I can only blame my physical condition for not noting this. Had I done so I would have realized at once that I had gone in the wrong direction in the first place, and that straight ahead of me lay freedom. I had gone to the head of the coulee, straight in from Steamboat Rock, and when I had found the coulee blocked at the end had thought the entrance closed against me.

But I did not note the sun.

I STRODE wearily on, and found the cabin with ridiculous ease.

Inside, calmly awaiting my coming, sat Hildreth, the wife of Plone! She said nothing when I opened the door, just sat on the only chair in the house and looked at me. I spoke to her, thanking her for the sack of provisions which I saw on the rickety shelf on the wall beyond the door. Still she

said nothing. Just stared at me, unblinking.

I asked her about leaving this place and she shook her head, as though she did not catch my meaning.

"For God's sake, Hildreth!" I cried; "can't you speak?"

For it had come to me that I had never heard her speak. When I had first entered the farmhouse she had placed a meal for me, and had bidden me eat of it. But I remembered now that she had done so by gestures with her hands.

In answer now to my question she opened her mouth and pointed into it with her forefinger. Hildreth, the wife of Plone, had no tongue!

Did you ever hear a tongueless person try to speak? It is terrible. For after this all-meaning gesture there came a raucous croak from the mouth of Hildreth—wordless, gurgling, altogether meaningless.

I understood no word; but the eyes of the woman, strangely glowing now, were eloquent. She was trying to warn me of something, and stamped her foot impatiently when I did not understand. I saw her foot move as she stamped it—but failed to notice at the time that the contact of her foot with the board floor made no noise! Later I remembered it.

When I shook my head she arose from her chair and strode to the door, flinging it wide. Then she pointed up the coulee in the direction I had just come. Again that raucous croak, still meaningless. Once more I shook my head.

What was there, up that coulee, that menaced me?

I was filled with dread of the unknown, wished with all my soul that I could understand what this woman was trying to say to me. What was there up the coulee, about which she strove to tell me?

All I could think of was a hidden graveyard, dotted with rotting crosses and, in the center of the plot, a pool in which slimy mud-puppies played, hidden forever from the light of the sun.

I shivered as the picture came back to me.

Then I stepped back, to search about the place for paper, so that, with the aid of a pencil which I possessed, she might write what she had to tell me. I found it and turned back to the woman, who had watched me gravely while I searched. Noting the paper she shook her head, telling me mutely that she could not write.

Then Plone, his face as dark as a thundercloud, stood in the doorway! To me he paid no attention. His eyes, glowering below heavy brows, burned as he stared at the woman. In her eyes I could read fright unutterable. She gave one frightened croak and turned to flee. But she could not go far, for she fled toward the bare wall opposite the open door. Plone leaped after her, while I jumped forward to fling him aside ere he could lay hands upon the woman.

Imagine my horror when Hildreth touched the wall—and vanished through it as though there had been no wall! I caught a glimpse of the wall, not a breach in it, before Plone, too, plunged through and was gone!

To me now came an inkling of what it all meant. Now I understood, or thought I did, the mystery of the disappearing farmhouse. Was this land into which I had stumbled a land of wraiths and shadows? A land of restless dead people? Why?

Trembling in every fiber of my being I strode to the wall where Plone and his wife had gone through, and ran my hand over the rough walls. They were as solid, almost, as the day the cabin had been built. To me this was a great relief. I should not have been surprized had the walls also proved to be things of shadow-substance, letting me through to stand amazed upon the shell-rock behind the cabin.

Here was one place in the coulee of shadows that was real.

I went to the door, locked and barred it. Then I returned and lighted the stove to disperse the unnatural chill that hovered in the room. After this I searched out my food and wolfed some of it ravenously. Another thought came to me: if Reuben, Plone and Hildreth were nothing but shadows, where had I procured this food, which was real enough and well cooked? Somewhere in my adventures since being kicked off the train at Palisades there was a great gap, bridged only by fantasies and hallucinations. What had happened, really, in that blank space?

Having eaten, I stepped to the door and looked out. If I again went forth into the stream-bed in an attempt to get out of the coulee, I should never reach it before dark. What would it mean to my tired reason to be caught in the open, in the midst of this coulee, for another terrible night? I could not do it.

Again I secured the door. Nothing *real* could get in to bother me—and even now I reasoned myself out of positive belief in ghosts. The hallucinations which had so terrified me had undoubtedly been born of my sickness.

Convinced of this at last I lay down on the rough cot and went to sleep.

WHEN I awoke suddenly in the night, the fire had burned very low and a heavy chill possessed the cabin. I had a feeling that I was not the only occupant of my abode; but, striving to pierce the gloom in the cabin's corners, I could see nothing.

But stay! What was that?

In the farthest corner I saw the pale, ghostly lineaments of a woman! Just the face, shimmering there in the gloom, oddly, but neither body nor substance. The face of Hildreth, wife of Plone! Then her hands, no arms visible, came up before her face and began to gesture. Her mouth opened and I imagined I again heard that raucous croak of the tongueless. Again her eyes were eloquent, mutely giving a warning which I could not understand.

Fear seizing me in its terrible grip, I leaped from my bed and threw wood on the fire, hoping to dispel this silent shadow. When the light flared up the head shimmered swiftly and began to fade away; but not before I saw a pair of hands come forth from nowhere and fasten themselves below that head, about where the neck should have been. Hands that were gnarled and calloused from toil on an unproductive farm — the work-torn hands of the killer, Plone!

Then the weird picture vanished and I was alone with my fantasies.

I had scarcely returned to my seat on the bed, sitting well back against the wall so that my back was against something solid, when the wailing of lost babies broke out again on the talus slopes outside. I had expected this to happen after nightfall; but the reality left me weak and shivering, even though I knew that the animals that uttered the mournful wails were flesh and blood. The wailing of bobcats, no matter how often it is heard, always brings a chill that is hard to reason away. Nature certainly prepared weird natural protections for some of her creatures!

Then the wailing stopped suddenly —short off. And the silence was more nerve-devastating than the eery wailing.

Nothing for many minutes. Then the rattle of sliding talus, as the shale glided into the underbrush.

This stopped, and a terrible silence pressed down upon me.

Then my cabin shook with the force of the wind that suddenly swooped through the coulee. It rattled through the eaves, shook the door on its hinges, while the patter-patter on the roof told me of showers of sand which the

wind had scooped up from the bed of the dry stream. The wind was terrific, I thought; but ever it increased in power and violence.

The patter on the roof and the rattle in the eaves began to take on a new significance; for the patter sounded like the scamper of baby feet above my head, while the wailing about the eaves sounded like the screaming of people who are tongueless. The door bellied inward against the chair-back as though many hands were pressed against it from outside, seeking entrance. Yet I knew that there was no one outside.

Then, faint and feeble through the roaring of the wind, I caught that eery cry in the night. It was the despairing voice of a woman, and she was calling aloud, hopelessly, for help! I shivered and tried not to hear. But the cry came again, nearer now, as though the woman moved toward me on leaden feet.

In God's name! what woman could be abroad in such a night?

The cry again. No man, fear the shadows as he might, could ignore that pitiful plea and call himself a man again.

I gritted my teeth and ran to the door, flinging it open. A veritable sea of flying sand swept past me; but through the increased roar came plainly that cry for help. I left the door open this time, so that the light would stream out and guide my return.

On the bank of the dry stream I stopped.

I heard the slamming of a door behind me. I turned back. The door opened a bit and a face looked out—the leering, now malevolent, face of Reuben, the son of Plone! As I saw him he jerked back, closing the door again, shutting out the light.

Even as the wailing of the bobcats had stopped, so, now, stopped the wind. And before and below me I saw Hildreth, wife of Plone, fighting for her very life with her brutal husband! She was groveling on her knees at his feet—his hands were about her throat. As she begged for mercy I could understand her words. She had a tongue, after all! Then Plone, holding Hildreth with his left hand, raised his right and, crooking it like a fearful talon, poised it above the face of Hildreth.

He did a ghastly, unbelievable thing. I can not tell it. But when his hand came away her words were meaningless, gurgling — the raucous croaking of a person who has no tongue.

Forgetting what I had before experienced, frenzied with horror at what Plone had done, I leaped into the dry stream and ran forward—to bring up short in the middle of the sandy open space, staring aghast.

For I was all alone—no Hildreth, the tongueless—no Plone with the calloused hands! Once more a hallucination had betrayed me.

Screaming in fear I sprang out of the stream-bed and rushed to the cabin, crashing against the door in my frenzy, with all my weight.

The door did not open. Rather it bellied inward, slightly, as though someone held against my efforts inside!

Who, or what, was inside?

Too late, now, I guessed what the wraith of Hildreth had tried to tell me. Going back in my memory I watched her lips move again. And as they moved I read the words she would have uttered. As plain as though she had spoken I now understood the warning:

"As you value the reason God has given you—*do not leave this cabin tonight!*"

I understood now, as, panting with my exertions, I pressed my weight against the door that would not give —except slightly.

For from inside the log cabin, faint as the sighing of a spring zephyr,

came the faintest sound as of someone breathing!

4

WHAT was coming to me out of the night? That against which the wraith of Hildreth had tried to warn me?

My eyes must have been very wide, had there been anyone to see. My body chilled with fear — afraid to force in the door and see what it was inside that breathed expectantly—afraid to face about and keep my eyes upon the stream-bed where I had seen Hildreth battle for her life against her spouse.

Choosing between the two fears as a desperate person chooses between two evils, I turned with my back against the jamb of the door and stared toward the dry stream.

At once there came to me the odor of burning tobacco! Someone was near me, someone who smoked; but who it was there was no way for me to learn. The door behind me shook slightly, so I darted to the corner of the cabin where I could see both the dry stream and the door.

Expectant silence for many minutes, during which I would have welcomed the eery wailing of the bobcats on the shell-rock.

Then the door of my cabin opened and out walked a stranger! He was dressed very much as had been the man whom I had seen fall before the murderous rifle of Plone last night. But he was older, stooped slightly under the weight of years. I heard him sigh softly, as a man sighs whose stomach is comfortably filled with food.

He walked toward the stream-bed, following the path through the thicket.

He had almost reached the lip of the dry stream when another figure followed him from the cabin—and that figure was Reuben, the malevolent son of Plone! Reuben, as his father had stalked that other unfortunate, stalked the aged man who preceded him. More pungent now the odor of burning tobacco, though the stooped stranger was not smoking. The latter passed a clump of service berry bushes and paused on the lip of the dry stream. He had scarcely halted when, out of the clump of service berries, stepped Plone himself, moving stealthily, like a cat that stalks a helpless, unsuspecting bird!

The older man half turned as though he heard some slight sound, when Plone, with the silent fury of the bobcat making a kill, leaped bodily upon his back and bore him to the ground, where the two of them, fighting and clawing, rolled into the sand below.

Plone was smoking an evil-smelling pipe.

Reuben began to run when his father closed with the stranger, and I was right at his heels when he leaped over the edge to stop beside the silent combatants. Then he bent to assist his father.

The end was speedy. For what chance has an aged man, taken by surprize, against two determined killers? They slew him there in the sand, while I, my limbs inert because of my fright, looked on, horror holding me mute when I would have screamed aloud.

Their bloody purpose accomplished, Reuben and Plone methodically began to turn the pockets of the dead man inside out. The contents of these they divided between themselves. This finished, in silence, the murderers, taking each an arm of the dead man, began to drag the body up the sandy stretch toward the end of the coulee—the closed end.

Still I stood, as one transfixed.

Then I became conscious of a low, heart-breaking sobbing at my side. Turning, I saw the figure of Hildreth standing there, tragedy easily readable in her eyes, wringing her hands

as her eyes followed the figures of her husband and her son. Then she extended her hands in a pleading gesture, calling to the two who dragged the body.

Then she began to follow them along the stream-bed, dodging from thicket to thicket on the bank as though she screened her movements from Plone and Reuben. I watched her until her wraithlike form blended with the shadows in the thickets and disappeared from view.

As I watched her go, and saw the figures of Plone and Reuben passing around a sharp bend in the dry stream, there came back to my memory a mental picture of a graveyard located in perpetual shadow, adorned with rotting crosses upon which no names were written. Slimy stones at the edge of a muddy pool populated by serpentine mud-puppies.

Turning then, I hurried back to the cabin, whose door now stood open—to pause aghast at the threshold, staring into the interior.

AT A table in the center of the room —a table loaded with things to eat, fresh and steaming from the stove — sat another stranger, this time a man dressed after the manner of city folk. His clothing bespoke wealth and refinement, while his manner of eating told that he was accustomed to choicer food than that of which necessity now compelled him to partake. Daintily he picked over the viands, sorting judiciously, while near the stove stood Hildreth, her eyes wide with fright and wordless entreaty.

Reuben stood in a darkened corner and his eyes never left the figure of the stranger at the table. As he stared at this one I saw his tongue come forth from his mouth and describe a circle, moistening his lips, anticipatory, like a cat that watches a saucer of cream.

Plone, too, was silently watching, standing just inside the door, with his back toward me. As I watched him he moved slightly, edging toward the table.

Then Plone was upon the stranger, a carving knife, snatched from the table, in his hand.

But why continue? I had seen this same scene, slightly varied, but a few minutes before, in the sand of the dry stream.

I watched them rifle the clothes of the dead man, stepped aside as they dragged the body forth and away, up the coulee. For where is the hand that can halt the passing of shadows?

For hours I watched, there beside the cabin, while Reuben and Plone carried forward their ghastly work. Many times during those hours did I see them make their kill. Ever it was Plone who commanded, ever it was Reuben who stood at his father's side to assist. Ever it was Hildreth who raised her hand or her voice in protest.

Then, suddenly, she was back in the cabin with Reuben and Plone. She told the latter something, gesturing vehemently as she spoke. These gestures were simple, easy to understand. For she pointed back down the coulee, in the direction of Steamboat Rock. Somehow I knew that what she tried to tell him was that she had gone forth and told the authorities what he and Reuben had done. Plone's face became black with wrath. Reuben's turned to the pasty gray of fear which is unbounded. Both sprang to the door and stared down the coulee. Then Plone leaped back to Hildreth, striking her in the face with his fist. She fell to the floor, groveling on her knees at his feet. He dragged her forth into the trail, along it to the dry stream-bed.

There, while I watched, was repeated that terrible scene I had witnessed once before. The pleading of Hildreth, the motion before her face of

Plone's hand, crooked like a great talon. Then her gurgling scream which told that her mouth was empty of the tongue!

REUBEN advanced to the lip of the dry stream as Plone fought with Reuben's mother. He paid them no heed, however, but shaded his eyes with his hand as he gazed into the west in the direction of Steamboat Rock. Then he gestured excitedly to Plone, pointing down the coulee.

But Plone was all activity at once. With Reuben at his heels and Hildreth stumbling farther in the rear, they rushed to the cabin and began to throw rough packs together, one each for Reuben and Plone.

But in the midst of their activities they paused and stared at the doorway where I stood. Then, slowly, though no one stood there except myself, they raised their hands above their heads, while Hildreth crouched in a corner, wild-eyed, whimpering.

Plone and Reuben suddenly lurched toward me, haltingly, as though propelled by invisible hands. Their hands were at their sides now as though bound there securely by ropes. Outside they came, walking oddly with their hands still at their sides.

They stopped beneath a tree which had one bare limb, high up from the ground—a strong limb, white as a ghost in the moonlight. Reuben and Plone looked upward at this limb, and both their faces were gray. Hildreth came out and stood near by, also looking up, wringing her hands, grief marring her face that might once have been beautiful.

Reuben and Plone looked at each other and nodded. Then they looked mutely at Hildreth, as though asking her forgiveness. After this they turned and nodded toward no one that I could see, as though they gestured to unseen hangmen.

I cried aloud, even though I had foreseen what was to come, as both Plone and Reuben sprang straight into the air to an unbelievable height, to pause midway to that bare limb, their necks twisted at odd angles, their bodies writhing grotesquely.

I watched until the writhing stopped. Until the bodies merely swayed, as though played upon by vagrant breezes sweeping in from the sandy dry stream.

Then, for the last time, I heard the piercing, wordless shriek of a tongueless woman. I swerved to look for Hildreth, and saw a misty, wraithlike shadow disappear among the willows, flashing swiftly out of sight up the coulee.

Hildreth had gone, and I was alone, swaying weakly, nauseated, staring crazily up to two bodies which oscillated to and fro as though played upon by vagrant breezes.

Then the bodies faded slowly away as my knees began to buckle under me. I sank to the ground before the cabin, and darkness descended once more.

WHEN I regained consciousness I opened my eyes, expecting to see those swaying bodies in the air above me. There were no bodies. Then I noted that my wrists were close together, held in place by manacles of shining steel.

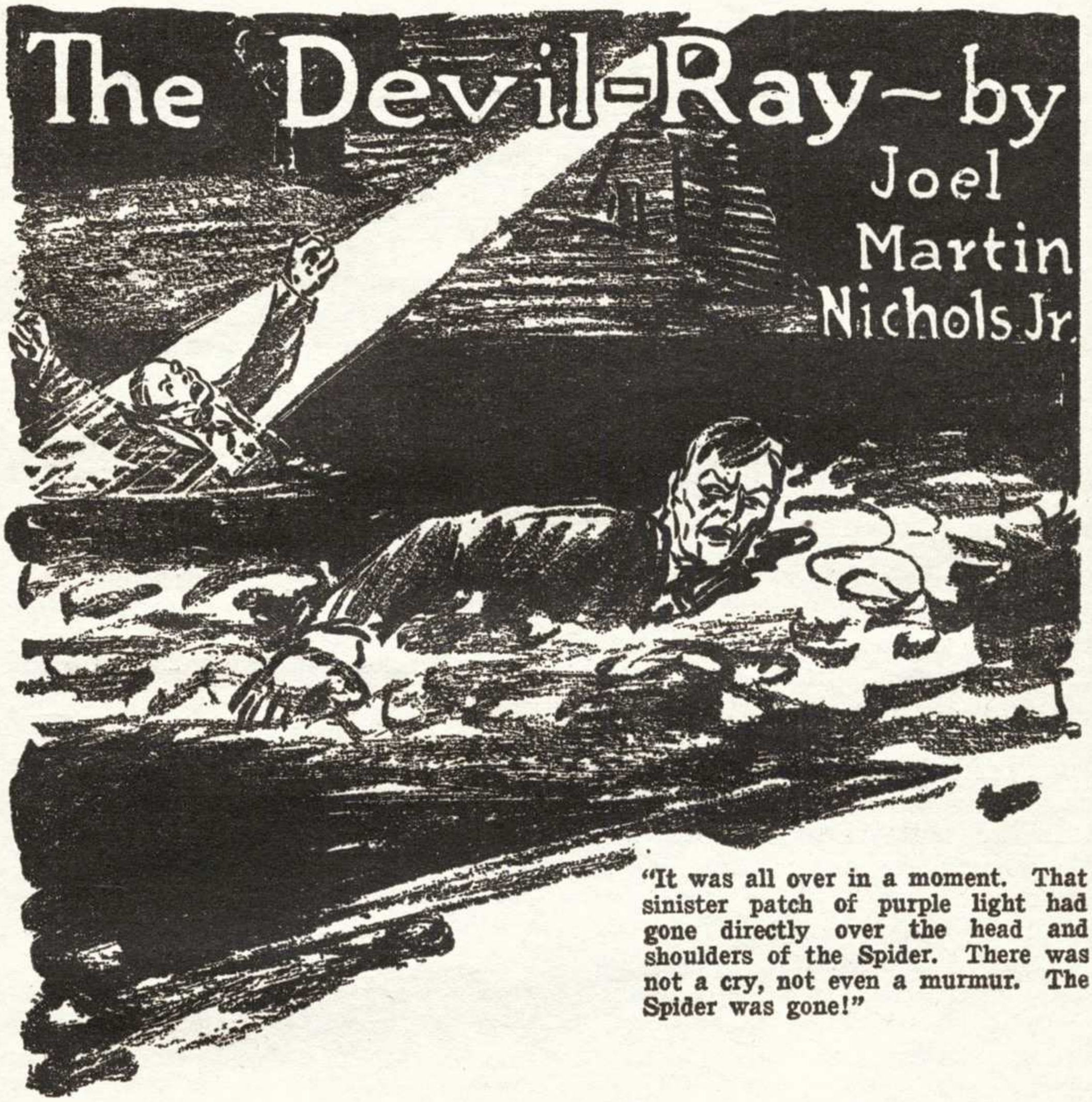
From the cabin behind me came the sound of voices—voices of men who talked as they ate—noisily. Behind the cabin I could hear the impatient stamping of horses.

I lay there dully, trying to understand it all.

Then two men came out of the cabin toward me. One of them chewed busily upon a bit of wood in lieu of a toothpick. Upon the mottled vest of this one glistened a star, emblem of the sheriff. The second man I knew to be his deputy.

"He's awake, I see, Al," said the first man as he looked at me.

(Continued on page 718)



"It was all over in a moment. That sinister patch of purple light had gone directly over the head and shoulders of the Spider. There was not a cry, not even a murmur. The Spider was gone!"

CHAPTER 1.

THE FLYING DEVIL OF BLENNERHOF.

IT WAS a lane of dead grass perhaps ten feet wide—a straight, even strip of sere yellow extending for nearly half a mile across the green hillside. Up near the crest of the slope it terminated as abruptly and as evenly as it had begun down in the valley. Had it not been a lonesome spot in an obscure Austrian countryside one might have believed that some huge carpet had lain out there in the sun until the grass beneath it had perished.

Half-way down the slope a dead cow lay athwart the yellow lane, and around the carcass a group of four men were gathered. Only one of them, he who talked and gesticulated so excitedly, was dressed in the native costume of the countryside. The other three, a rather motley trio of physiques and faces, might have passed for tourists, and yet this was a territory remote from the beaten paths of travel. In other ways—in cut of clothes, in speech, in faces half concealed by low-pulled cloth caps, they did not seem to fit in with the general scene either as interested strangers or cursory wayfarers. One

of them, a tall, wiry individual, whose cap visor did not wholly conceal a wide scar across his forehead, spoke impatiently, indicating the muttering peasant. "What is he saying, Lefty?"

When Lefty spoke it was in the curiously clipped phrases of an American who had lived for many years in lower New York. "He says that a devil done this; a flyin' devil that goes over the country at night. He says he's seen him once or twice and now he finds his cow here dead."

The third man, a short, thick-set individual, stirred uneasily and began digging nervously with the toe of his shoe in the turf near the edge of the yellow lane, his efforts sending up a small cloud of dry dust. The scarred man, who was obviously the leader of the other two, snorted derisively: "Nonsense! It's just heart-disease, that's all. Cows are subject to it the same as human beings. There isn't a mark or a wound on her that I can find." His speech was clipped, terse. Nothing of Manhattan here.

"It's funny, Mr. Ferris"—the "Mister", coming from Lefty, was curiously deferential to the younger man—"that she should happen to fall right here in this dead grass, ain't it? I don't suppose the grass died of heart-disease, too, did it?"

"Looky here," said the third man, who had been digging in the turf. "Here's something else that's had heart-trouble." He stooped and pulled out of the turf an object which appeared to be a rough ball of grayish lint. Looking into the ball the others saw that it was a nest of field mice. They were all quite dead.

"Just the same, I'm glad I wasn't hangin' around these parts last night, ain't you, Lefty?" said the short man to the digger.

"You said it, Spider," returned the other.

Ferris stirred impatiently. "Come on, let's get out of this," he snapped. "We didn't come up here to fiddle around with dead cows. We've been here a week and nothing done. We're going to spend another night watching the castle, and tomorrow we'll get busy making our plans to get at that villa. If we hang around here much longer people will begin to ask questions."

His comment was made well out of earshot of the peasant as they walked slowly up the hill. They did not speak again until they reached the crest, when Lefty, looking back, muttered in an undertone, "All the same I don't like this place. I'll be glad when we've pulled this job and get out. There's something queer about this air. It ain't healthy."

The short man said nothing, but glanced nervously behind him as he followed the others over the brow of the hill.

CHAPTER 2.

CASTLE BLENNERHOF.

The smoky, purplish gloom of an autumn twilight had settled over the Blennersee. The faint breath of an autumnal breeze left a parting ripple on the dull surface of the lake and rustled its way onward through the first frost-nipped leaves of the season—leaves deep blood-red and somber black with none of the brilliant yellows and golden browns with which nature is wont to brighten the last hours of a dying summer.

In a thick copse of scrubby mountain pine growing on a small promontory overlooking the lake the three men had halted, and now they stood looking over the darkening surface of the water, their gaze absorbed not in the purple and saffron glories of the sunset on the heights above the water, but rather in the age-blackened turrets of the great castle which reared itself on a ledgelike island near the farther shore.

The last rays of the sun on the summits above them flickered and died.

Simultaneously from a point three miles down the lake there came a sudden warming glow.

"That's the villa," said the Spider, pointing with stubby forefinger toward the light. "I bet they're gettin' ready to sit down to chow right now. Bet that wummun is wearin' 'bout half a ton of dem jools ready for the pickin's."

Lefty stirred uneasily, but said nothing. Ferris either did not hear the remark or chose to ignore it. He had taken from his pocket a pair of binoculars, which he directed toward the turrets rearing into the gloom of the fast-gathering night.

"I think I see those lights in the castle again," he said suddenly. "You try the glass, Spider, and tell me what you see. My eyes may be deceiving me."

The Spider had barely brought the glasses to a focus when he started and shrank back into the thicket. "The lights again," he muttered. "I see them there in the middle tower window."

"All right," said Ferris; "stand watch there for a time while we get something to eat. Keep your eye on that opening in the wall under the drawbridge and call me if you see anything."

With the other man he went back into the thicket, where they built a small fire. They were not cold, but the village inn where they had been staying was far down in one of the valleys and they felt the lack of its cheery fireside. Perhaps an hour or two passed in desultory conversation when a voice from the edge of the lake called them back to the promontory.

"It's that plane again, Mr. Ferris," said the Spider. "They're bringin' her out again tonight." Without seeming reason his voice had grown strangely hoarse. He shuddered slightly and his hand trembled as he held out the binoculars.

"All right," said Ferris, when he had taken a look; "they won't try any flying, probably, until after midnight, same as before. We can stay here and watch them until then."

By this time Lefty was standing beside them. "It's that plane again," said the Spider, pointing a shaky forefinger toward the castle.

Lefty shivered. It might have been the wind, which seemed to be growing rapidly chill with the advancing evening.

"Get's cold here early," he said, half apologetically.

There was a snort from Ferris. "You're both getting scared," he snapped, impatiently. "Both getting frightened over this fool story from a half-baked peasant. You're both in a blue funk and ready to quit when we've come half-way around the world to get this stuff and we've nothing but a few old men and a girl between us and nearly half a million. I can't pull this job unless I get a little co-operation from you spineless creatures. Why, damn it, men, both of you have police records in New York—you've both been in gun fights and tight places, and here you are, all scared pie-eyed because you see a little dead grass and a dead cow. Evil spirits—flying devils!"

The pair opposite him stirred uneasily. It was the Spider who finally broke the silence. "Evil spirits it was or evil spirits it wasn't. I dunno as it makes any difference. Anyways we seen the cow and you can't get away from that. It was that plane that flew over that field, and those guys there in that castle got something which ain't healthy for you nor me to deal with."

In his own mind Ferris had to admit that there appeared to be something in what the Spider had said. It was two nights ago, when they had been lying in the copse watching the castle, he had discovered a faint gleam from one of its towers. Soon after-

ward he had seen an airplane glide out from under the drawbridge and spin silently away into the night—silently because the usual roar of the exhaust had been muffled in some uncanny way.

Thereafter the castle had become an absorption with him. Their mission in this remote part of Europe was not an honest one, and the prize which they were seeking might lie either in the castle which they, until now, had supposed uninhabited, or in the villa up the lake. Yet it was the castle which fascinated him, and it was this fascination that was reflected in his less hardy companions (they admitted it to themselves) by cold, stark fear.

It may be that Ferris feared he was losing his grip on them, or perhaps it was his overweening curiosity that got the better of him; at any rate he suddenly began to peel off his coat and then bent over and began to unlace his shoes. The others eyed him in dumb wonderment.

"What you goin' to do now, Mr. Ferris?" ventured the Spider.

"Swim to the castle," said Ferris, shortly.

There was a tense silence.

"What for?"

Ferris said nothing for several seconds, and then, finally: "Just to show you panicky old women what a lot of fools you've been."

The silence became somewhat painful to the two in the shadow of the thicket. There was no sound save the sharp click of Ferris's shoelaces as he whipped them through the eyelets.

The Spider's voice finally broke the silence. "There ain't nobody ever goin' to say that Spider Lang ever was scared of any man, alive or dead," he muttered. He too began removing his clothing.

Ten minutes later, shivering with the chill of night, they slid down into the water with their shirts, trousers, their automatics and Ferris's flashlight strapped to their shoulders. Fortunately the water proved to be warmer than the air, and they struck out slowly, their white bodies scarcely perceptible in the murky waters of the Blennersee.

As FERRIS swam with easy strokes he pondered on the significance of the dead cow in the open field and the airplane in the supposedly deserted castle. Had the two any connection? Was the airplane from the castle the "flying devil" the peasant had told of seeing over his fields, spraying death to plants and animals alike? If not, why was there all this secrecy with the plane at the castle? Why this midnight flying? Why the guarded glimmer from these supposedly deserted towers?

The whole question had a strange fascination for Ferris, a fascination for which even he was at a loss to account. He already had formed a theory, a theory which startled and perplexed him because its details came to him with such startling clearness. He was a strange combination: intelligent, apparently highly educated, bearing all the earmarks of at least an outward culture; and yet there was a sinister twist in his nature which during the past four years had made him one of the cleverest operatives in the history of American crime.

Four years before he had awakened one February morning in a Chicago hospital with a gash across his forehead and a split in his skull. They had to tell him what had happened. He had been standing in a Chicago hotel two nights before when a pickpocket, sliding deft fingers into his pocket, had removed his wallet. Ferris became aware of the theft almost as soon as it was consummated and started after the thief in hot pursuit. The latter, however, had laid out his course for just such an emergency,

for he slipped through a side door. This door, in keeping with the corridor wall wherein it was set, bore a heavy glass mirror, and the thief swung the door viciously back, catching Ferris across the forehead and knocking him unconscious. Escape after that was easy.

Despite the fact that his papers were gone with the wallet, a cardcase in the victim's pocket established his identity as George Ferris. This was fortunate because, on his awakening two days later, Ferris had lost all memory of who he was or where he had come from. This, in itself, was no extraordinary thing, but the case did present one novel aspect to the surgeons. Ferris had been convalescing rapidly, regaining everything except memory, and the case was considered for the most part normal, when one day they brought him a mirror in order that he might shave himself. Scarcely had he glanced into the thing, however, when he suddenly hurled it from him with a scream of agony that startled the whole ward. Never after that could they induce him to glance into any mirror. The surgeons, discussing the matter, concluded that a pathological fear of his image had developed in some quirk of his brain. Color was lent to this theory when it was remembered that the moment before Ferris had been hurled into his abnormal state by the impact of the swinging door he must have seen his own image in the mirror before him, and that his mind had connected this image in the nerve cells of his brain with the pain and shock of the impact.

There was a second strange angle to the case, of which the surgeons were quite unaware. When Ferris was discharged from the hospital he found tightly rolled up at the bottom of his cardcase, where it had apparently escaped notice, an envelope with canceled postage addressed to Captain Lindley Fenshaw of Berkeley, California. On its back were some meaningless penciled figures. Ordinarily Ferris would have concluded he had picked the thing up somewhere to make use of as a memorandum. At that time, however, the name of Fenshaw was being blazoned from one end of the country to the other, for Frank Fenshaw, X-ray expert and electrical scientist at the University of California, had disappeared from his home nine months before under circumstances which indicated a well-planned and well-executed kidnaping. Fenshaw had not only made many discoveries and improvements with the X-ray in connection with electro-therapeutics, but had also been employed by the War Department during the World War, perfecting various electrical apparatus of a lethal nature. Hence, the government as well as the police was anxious to find the man, but a search of months had failed to reveal a single clue to his whereabouts. Eventually the search, virtually abandoned by the authorities, had been taken up by Lindley Fenshaw, American flying ace in the World War and formerly captain of the football and fencing teams at the University of California, where his father had occupied the chair of electrical science. The younger Fenshaw, it was reported, had set out incognito, alone and unaided, in the hope of running down some trace of the missing man. Just why, a few months later, George Ferris should have found in his possession an old envelope addressed to Lindley Fenshaw was as much a mystery to Ferris as it would have been to the authorities themselves.

That Ferris did not turn the clue over to the police but kept it to himself would be best understood in light of the fact that Ferris, when he discovered the letter, had no desire to meet the police for any reason whatsoever. Soon after he left the hospital, quite penniless, he discov-

ered in himself an easy propensity for helping himself to other people's chattels. In time he drifted to New York, where he hit upon a very profitable though somewhat precarious career. It was soon discovered that he had a pair of marvelously sensitive fingers and a very delicate ear, all of which could be put to lucrative use in twirling a steel dial and listening to the gentle click of tumblers supposedly muffled behind many thicknesses of soft felt and chrome steel. Mostly he had worked alone, but of late he had been "hired" by less gifted personages for "jobs" which contained something out of the ordinary. It was in this connection that Lefty Fritz and Spider Lang had prevailed upon him to go to Austria.

It was the old story of the Hapsburg crown jewels. The bulk of them had disappeared when the old Hapsburg monarchy had been overthrown, and it was rumored that some of the old die-hard nobility had been entrusted with their care until such time as they might be more profitably employed in putting the hapless Charles or his heir back upon the throne. Lefty, who long years ago had been a Viennese gambler, had learned through underworld channels that they had been entrusted to old Baron Von Blennerhof. The baron, according to the best subterranean information available, had carted them up to his country estates far away from the clutching hands of the new régime. This rumor was colored a bit by the fact that the baron had some time before purchased a sizable Stivers-Leemy wall safe, a somewhat rare article to be brought into that part of the country. One or two attempts had been made by the Viennese underworld gentry to test the baron's hospitality, but as the inevitable outcome seemed to be broken heads and no jewels, the project was finally abandoned. Now it was that the American trio had determined to try its hand. So far they had done but little, merely observing the castle and the villa from a distance and trying so far as possible to learn the habits of the inmates. Thus they had concluded that aside from the dozen or so servants and guards about the place the principals were only three —the old baron himself, a fiercely bemustached Junker by the name of Von Schaang, and a young woman who appeared to be the baron's ward. It was only the insistence of Ferris in demanding an exhaustive survey of the estate which resulted in their discovering that the castle was something more than the moss-grown pile of stones it had seemed to be.

As Ferris swam he pondered whether the jewels might not be at the castle rather than at the villa. He had planned skirting the rock on which the castle stood, thereby approaching it from the side opposite where the airplane was now visible, its black wings a dark blot against the gloomy background of the farther shore. He had purposed lying there in the water, listening to the crew's conversation, but he was barely halfway across the lake when he began to hear their voices and the clang of an iron wrench. A moment later, while he trod water, there came a spluttering roar from the darkness. Immediately it settled down to a barely perceptible hum. Presently the plane glided out from her berth under the drawbridge, and like some huge bird of ill omen mounted gradually into the night and disappeared into the east. Scarcely a sound, save that deep-throated, muffled hum of her engines.

With the plane out of the way Ferris shifted his course and struck out for the drawbridge. A few minutes later they found themselves in a small chamber beneath the structure. At one end was a tiny dock, and by grop-

ing about they found an iron ladder leading upward into the castle.

It had been a long swim, hampered as they were with the loads on their shoulders, and for a time they clung to the slippery edge of the rock before venturing into the chill air. As they rested there, Ferris's hand, groping about for a better purchase on the masonry, came into contact with a row of smooth, cylindrical objects, each about two feet long. By further groping he knew that they must be carefully wired to the rocks. One by one he traced their smooth, steel bellies down until he came to the conclusion there must be at least a dozen there within reach of his hand.

After they had drawn themselves out of the water and put on their clothing he took his flashlight and sent its narrow beam down into the water. It was a small, quick flash and it did not penetrate far but it showed him enough to make him whistle softly between his teeth.

The drawbridge, and perhaps the whole castle, had been carefully mined with cylindrical bombs, painstakingly wired to the ledges around its base!

CHAPTER 3

THE FACE AT THE BARRED WINDOW

THEY followed the iron ladder and crawled up through a narrow passageway into what Ferris believed to be the ancient courtyard of the castle. Here in the Stygian gloom they waited breathlessly, hoping, and yet dreading, to hear some sound that would indicate to them the whereabouts of those they knew would be their enemies. High above them towered the great battlements, their topmost turrets lost in the upper blackness of the night. The lights which they had observed from the farther shore had now disappeared. They had lost all sense of direction.

They had started groping their way about, step by step, when Ferris suddenly halted, laying a restraining hand on the arm of the trembling Spider. "Listen," he whispered. The admonition was scarcely necessary.

They listened intently. At first there came no sound save the pounding of their own hearts. And yet Ferris's uncanny faculties had not deceived him. Gradually they became aware that the air about them was filled, not by any perceptible sound, but by a delicate throbbing, a disturbance of the ether which they sensed rather than heard.

A moment's hesitation, and Ferris pressed on. He had taken the flashlight once more from his pocket and was carrying it in his left hand, leaving his right free for the butt of his automatic.

Suddenly in their groping they came upon a blank wall. By the smoothness of the structure under their fingers they knew it must be different from the rough-hewn stone of the castle. A moment's further hesitation and then a small beam of light shot out from Ferris's left hand.

Confronting them was a wall of modern brick!

Guardedly the narrow shaft of light crept down the wall. At a distance of perhaps thirty feet from where they stood they saw that this brick barrier had been mortised to one of the castle buttresses. Foot by foot the beam went back the other way. Fifteen paces beyond the point where they were standing it showed them that the wall ended. Still farther beyond that, revealed for a brief second in a kaleidoscopic gleam, was the ancient portcullis of Blennerhof with the drawbridge drawn up behind it. Ferris snapped off the light. Apparently, then, this modern structure was a sizable brick building built in the center of the courtyard.

They crept along to their left, came to the corner, rounded it cautiously. They listened. Not a sound save that peculiar faint throbbing still persisting in their consciousness.

Ferris tried the flash again and they saw themselves facing a set of sliding doors made of steel or galvanized iron. Above their heads two narrow, slitlike windows looked out into the court. The Spider had begun to recover his lost nerve, and so with a nudge on Ferris's elbow he held out his locked hands, stirrup-wise for the latter to mount. It was an old business with them. Ferris swung up and peered through the slit. Finally he tried his flash—cautiously.

The beam found its way into the murky interior, lighting up the gleaming reflectors, the polished brass and burnished steel of what appeared to be a gigantic motor car. This modern structure, then, was nothing more nor less than a garage for this huge, steel beetle. Ferris breathed easier and whistled softly through his teeth. Small wonder visitors were not welcome to Castle Blennerhof!

Slowly, as best he could, he shot his narrow beam of light through that narrow aperture. Foot by foot his eyes wandered over the car, noting the huge, beaklike hood, the slitlike openings for the eyes of the driver, the heavily armored sides and wheels and, most of all, the heavy steel cupola on the roof. Plainly it was an armored car, but what puzzled him most of all was that the cupola contained neither rifle nor machine-gun but a high, bulging dome of heavy greenish glass approximately two feet in diameter. It might be a gigantic third headlight whose rays could be directed not only to right and left, to the front and behind, but also into the heavens.

Ferris slipped to the ground and held a whispered consultation with the Spider. Could the jewels, then, be in the castle instead of at the villa, and had this motor car been brought up into the mountains for their protection? They remembered the assertions of others that the safe must be at the villa. What use could they have had for such a huge affair as a Stivers-Leemy at the villa? Why had they not brought it to the castle if the jewels were really in the baron's custody? Very well, he would find out.

Ferris had grown bolder with his flashlight now. By aid of its narrow shaft he found an open, iron-studded door at the foot of one of the towers. Within was an ancient stone staircase which they began to ascend. It was a circuitous climb, leading far up into the turret. In their ears still rang that subdued humming, growing slightly louder as they went up. Presently they stepped through a narrow arched doorway out upon the open battlements. Even as they did so the pale arc of the moon, rolling out for the first time beyond its clouds, threw a fitful gleam over the ancient pile. Together they peered over the parapet into the gloom below. Together they saw there something that made them both crouch hastily back within the shadow of the wall. It was several minutes before they ventured it a second time.

They saw then that the castle was in reality only a shell. Within the encircling battlements was a large interior courtyard, stone-flagged. To one side they made out a huge pile of black, lumpish material at the foot of which the dim outlines of two men were visible. From below, their ears caught the subdued clang of iron.

"Coal—or I'm a liar!" whispered the Spider. It was indeed a huge pile of anthracite.

They were aware now that the humming had become louder. Over in one corner of the courtyard a white, waving plume of steam floated out into the night, only to be lost long before it reached the upper battlements. Voices from the two men below them

came up in low gutturals. One of them trundled a wheelbarrow-load of coal toward the corner, where he disappeared through a doorway. Presently they heard the clang of an iron door and the metallic rattle of a slice bar.

Ferris grunted. "Dynamos," he whispered, half to himself. It was not until then that the Spider recognized the now familiar whining hum.

For a time they watched the men at work on the coal pile, wonderingly. Ferris knew that the villa was an up-to-date affair, equipped with electric lights and other modern improvements, but he was virtually certain that the power for these was generated by a small gas engine in one of the outbuildings near the servants' quarters. Furthermore, he knew that the humming in his ears indicated the presence of dynamos far more powerful than would be required for the needs of a mountain villa, no matter how extensive. Then, too, why was it necessary for these men to work by night? Musing thus, he crept on about the battlements until at a point ahead of him he saw a reflection of light from one of the small embrasures. They peered into it cautiously. What they saw brought another of those low whistles from Ferris.

THE chamber within had apparently been built over the engine room. To one side was a short iron ladder leading up to a row of rheostats and other electrical paraphernalia with dials and many wheels, attached to a solid rubber slab on the wall. At the other side, jutting through the floor, were the glistening backs of two small dynamos. Between them stood the strangest apparatus of all. It was of thick, greenish glass, shaped not unlike a huge hour-glass with the upper end touching the ceiling and the lower part countersunk in the stone floor. Out of the ceiling with the upper half of the hour-glass there jutted a U-shaped bar of a black substance, apparently carbon. A similar bar was seen under the glass in the lower half. Between the two bars there oscillated a strange, purplish light. As they watched they saw it flicker and flare, now forking like a serpent's tongue, now a solid ray of purple.

Even as they stood there watching, the head and shoulders of a man arose through an opening in the floor at the farther corner. Step by step he mounted until, crouching there as they were, with their eyes just visible over the window ledge, they could see him plainly—his upstanding crop of thick gray hair, his thin gangling figure, his curiously round and impassive face with deep-set eyes veiled behind thick-lensed glasses. He turned as he stepped out upon the floor and stooped to help a second man out of the hole.

The last comer proved to be a smooth-shaven person with haggard features and emaciated frame. Even as his face came into full view beneath the glare of the lamp overhead, the Spider felt Ferris stiffen beside him, heard him gasp as though struggling for breath. The tightening clutch of Ferris's hand on the Spider's sleeve sent cold shivers racing up and down the latter's already trembling spine.

" 'S'matter?" he growled in alarm.

Ferris said nothing, but continued to peer in fascination through the window, raising his head until he must have been fully visible to those within had they chosen to look up. At times he paused, stepped back into the darkness and passed his hand over his eyes. When he pressed his face again to the window the Spider saw that there were great globules of perspiration on his forehead, though the night was increasing in coolness.

The little man fidgeted nervously. It was not his custom to question the actions of his chief, but he knew they

were losing valuable time. Finally he laid his hand on Ferris's arm only to have it flung roughly aside. Here again it was strange, for Ferris turned to the Spider and peered long and intently into his face, lit up as it was by the dim glow from the window. The Spider was no student of psychology, but there was in Ferris's eyes something which made him panicky with fear—a certain vagueness which was alarming.

How long this went on (it seemed hours) the Spider scarcely knew. Once he thought all was lost when the second of the two men, the emaciated one, suddenly glanced up at the window. The Spider could have sworn that he had seen Ferris, and the little man's hand flew to his automatic, his ears attuned for the cry of alarm. Instead (and the Spider could have sworn it) the man in the tower seemed to stand there for the fraction of a second, staring in fascination at the window. Was it a look of recognition? Then the man within took a step across the floor and the Spider raised his weapon. One more step—but the man had stopped. He turned away. Ah, the other had spoken to him.

From out of the east came the faint hum of airplane motors, only a subtle throb of the ether. The plane was coming back! They must be gone! As roughly as he dared, the Spider pulled Ferris from the window, and pinning him with all his strength against the wall, signaled for him to listen.

Zoom, zoom, zoom. Apparently they had cut out the silencer. And they were coming nearer. Had Ferris lost his senses? Would the fool understand? Ferris shuddered once or twice and rubbed his forehead in a vague, perplexed way.

"It's the plane," hissed the Spider. "Are you drunk or crazy? We gotta get outta here and mighty quick!"

Ferris stiffened. His very expression seemed to change as he turned his ear to the night wind. "Gad, you're right," he mumbled. "Why didn't you say so before?" The Spider swore under his breath.

THEY retraced their steps as quietly as possible and made their way down through the tower to the courtyard. More groping—for they dared not use the light now—and they found the iron ladder leading down under the bridge to the little stone dock. There was no time to remove their clothing now, so they plunged in as they were. By this time the faint zooming from the east had grown to a deep-throated hum. The plane would be upon them before they were half-way across the lake. Yet, once out there in the water, they were reasonably safe. There was small likelihood of the midnight fliers glancing down into the waters where they were.

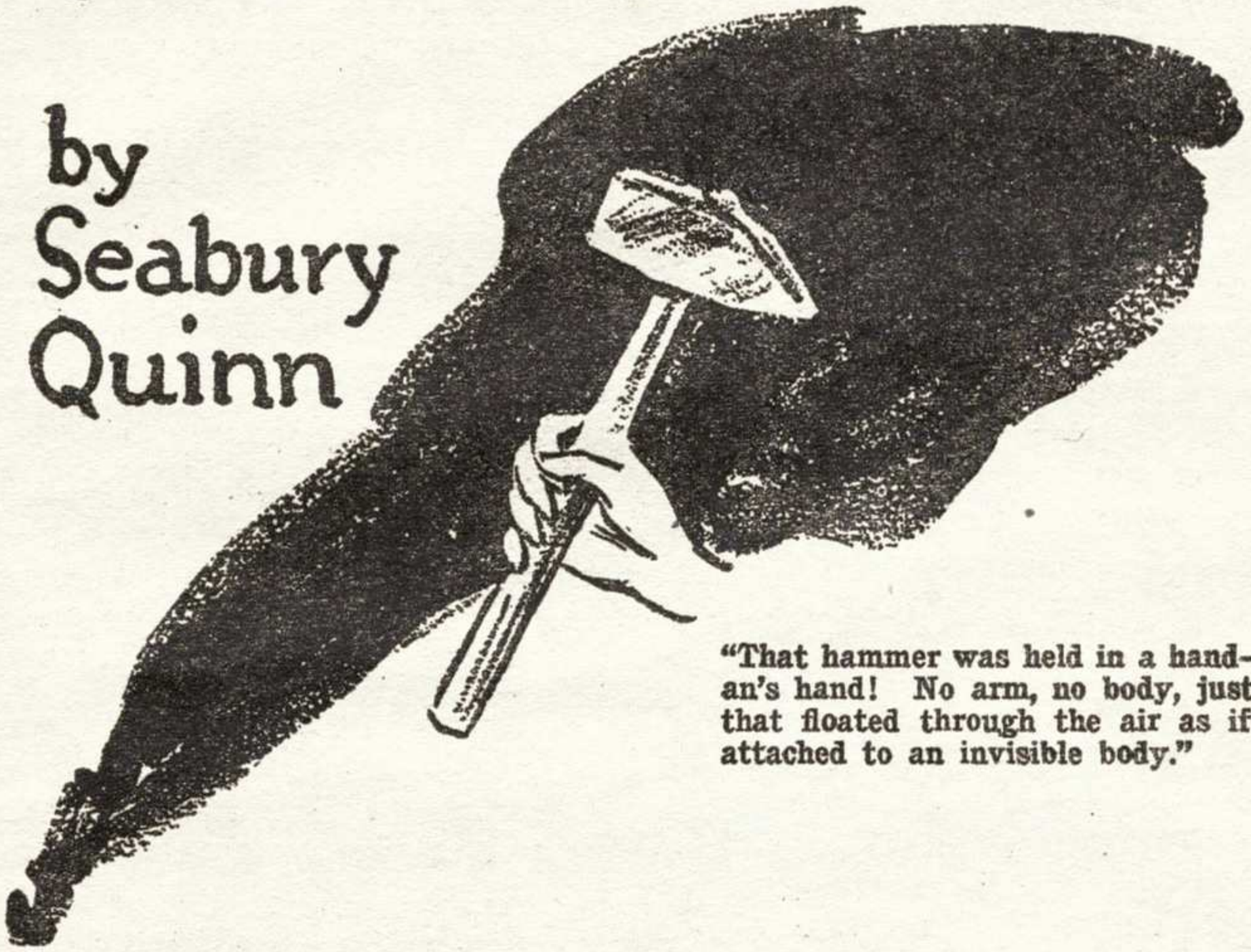
But what was this? Out of the murk to the east came a sudden purplish gleam! Only a faint glow at first, it grew brighter with the increasing drone of the engines. In a manner that he had never known before, Ferris felt the fingers of panic clawing at his vitals. Around him the water grew icily cold. He heard the Spider call out something from behind him. There was panic in the little man's voice and it seemed to chain his own limbs. That had been a cry of fear—fear of the unknown. Turning his head he gazed into the east. There it was, its somber wings outlined against the scudding clouds. But now, streaming vertically down from the fuselage to the surface of the water, was a solid ray of purple light.

The plane roared on, drew nearer. Somehow, Ferris knew not why, the fear that froze his limbs now struck through to his heart. Instinctively he felt he must avoid at all costs that

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The Dead Hand

by Seabury Quinn



"That hammer was held in a hand—a woman's hand! No arm, no body, just a hand, that floated through the air as if it were attached to an invisible body."

"*MORBLEU,*" exclaimed Jules de Grandin, passing his coffee cup across the breakfast table for its third replenishment, "but it seems, almost, Friend Trowbridge, as if I exercise some sinister influence on your patients! Here I have been your guest but one little week, and you all but lose that Mademoiselle Drigo, while, *hélas,* the so excellent Madame Richards is dead altogether entirely."

"I hardly think you can be blamed for Mrs. Richards' death," I replied as I handed back his refilled cup. "The poor lady suffered from mitral stenosis for the past two years, and the last time I examined her I was able to detect a diastolic murmur without the aid of a stethoscope. No, her trouble dated back some time before your coming, de Grandin."

"You relieve me," he asserted with a serio-comic expression on his alert face. "And now you go to offer your condolences to her sorrowing husband, yes? May I accompany you? Always, Friend Trowbridge, there is an opportunity for those who will to learn something."

"*NOM d'un nom,* but it is the good Sergeant Costello!" de Grandin cried delightedly as a heavy-set man closed the door of the Richards mansion behind him and strode across the wide veranda toward the steps. "*Eh bien,* my friend, do you not remember me?" He stretched both his slender, carefully groomed hands toward the huge Irishman. "Surely, you have not forgotten——"

"I'll say I haven't," the big detective denied with a welcoming grin, shaking hands cordially. "You sure showed me some tricks I didn't know was in th' book, Dr. de Grandin, when we was in that Kalmar case. Maybe

you can give me a lift in this one, too. Sure, it's like a bughouse in there." He jerked an indicative thumb over his shoulder toward the Richards residence.

"Eh, what is it you say?" de Grandin demanded, his little blue eyes dancing with sudden excitement. "A mystery? *Cordieu,* my friend, you interest me!"

"Will you help?" the big plain-clothes man asked with almost pathetic eagerness, half turning in his tracks.

"But most certainly," my companion assented. "A mystery to me is what the love of woman is to weaker men, my friend. *Pardieu,* how far I should have traveled in the profession of medicine if I had but been able to leave the solving of matters which did not concern me alone! Come, let us go in; we will shake the facts from this mystery of yours as a mother shakes stolen cookies from her *enfant's* blouse, *cher sergent.*"

WILLIS RICHARDS, power in Wall Street and nabob in our little sub-metropolitan community, stood on the hearth-rug before his library fire, a living testimonial to the truth of the axiom that death renders all mankind equals. For all his mop of white hair, his authoritative voice and his imposing embonpoint, the great banker was only a bereft and bewildered old man, borne down by his new sorrow and unable to realize that at last he confronted a condition not to be remedied by his signature on a five-figured check.

"Well, Sergeant," he asked, with a pitiful attempt at his usual brusk manner, as he recognized Costello at de Grandin's elbow, "have you found out anything?"

"No, sir," the policeman confessed, "but here's Dr. de Grandin, from Paris, France, and he can help you out if anyone can. He's done some wonderful work for us before, and ——"

"A French detective!" Richards scoffed. "You don't need to get one of those foreigners to help you find a few stolen jewels, do you? Why ——"

"*Monsieur!*" de Grandin's angry protest brought the irate financier's expostulation to an abrupt halt; "you do forget yourself. I am Jules de Grandin, occasionally connected with the *Service de Sûreté,* but more interested in the solution of my cases than in material reward."

"Oh, an amateur, eh?" Richards replied with even greater disgust. "This is a case for real detective work, Costello. I'm surprized that you'd bring a dabbler into my private affairs. By George, I'll telephone a New York agency and take the entire case out of your hands!"

"One moment, Mr. Richards," I interposed, relying on my position as family medical adviser to strengthen my argument. "This is Dr. Jules de Grandin, of the Sorbonne, one of Europe's foremost criminologists and one of the world's greatest scientists. The detection of crime is a phase of his work, just as military service was a phase of George Washington's; but you can no more compare him with professional police officers than you can compare Washington with professional soldiers."

Mr. Richards looked from de Grandin to me, then back again. "I'm sorry," he confessed, extending his hand to the little Frenchman, "and I shall be very glad for any assistance you may care to render, sir.

"To be frank"—he motioned us to seats as he began pacing the floor nervously — "Mrs. Richards' death was not quite so natural as Dr. Trowbridge believes. Though it's perfectly true she had been suffering from heart disease for some time, it was not heart disease alone which caused

her death. She was scared to death, literally.

"I returned from New York, where I'd been attending a banquet given by my alumni association, about 2 o'clock this morning. I let myself in with my latch key and went upstairs to my room, which adjoined my wife's, and was beginning to undress when I heard her call out in terror. I flung the connecting door open and ran into her bedroom just in time to see her fall to the floor beside her bed, clutching at her throat and trying to say something about a hand."

"Ah?" de Grandin looked at our host with his sharp cat-stare. "And then?"

"And then I saw—well, I fancied I saw a—a something drift across the room, about level with my shoulders, and go out the window. I ran over to where my wife lay, and—and when I got there she was dead."

"Ah?" murmured de Grandin thoughtfully, inspecting his well-manicured nails with an air of preoccupation.

Richards gave him an annoyed look as he continued: "It was not till this morning that I discovered all my wife's jewels and about twenty thousand dollars' worth of unregistered Liberty bonds had disappeared from the wall-safe in her room.

"Of course," he concluded, "I didn't really see anything in the air when I ran from my room. That's impossible."

"Quite obviously," I agreed.

"Sure," Sergeant Costello nodded.

"Not at all," Jules de Grandin denied, shaking his head vigorously in dissent. "It is more possible your eyes did not deceive you, *Monsieur*. What was it that you saw?"

Richards' annoyance deepened into exasperation. "It looked like a hand," he snapped. "A hand with four or five inches of wrist attached to it, *and no body*. Silly rot, of course. I didn't see any such thing!"

"*Quod erat demonstrandum!*" de Grandin replied softly.

"What say?" Mr. Richards demanded testily.

"I said this is truly a remarkable case."

"Well, do you want to look at the room?" Richards turned toward the door leading to the stairway.

"But no, *Monsieur*," de Grandin blandly refused. "The good Sergeant Costello has already looked over the ground. Doubtless he can tell me all I need to know. I shall look elsewhere for confirmation of a possible theory."

"Oh, all right," Richards agreed with a snort of ill-concealed contempt; "tackle the matter in your own way. I'll give you forty-eight hours to accomplish something; then I'll call up Blynn's agency and see what real detectives can do."

"*Monsieur* is more than generous in his allowance," de Grandin replied icily.

To me, as we left the house, he confided, "I should greatly enjoy pulling that Monsieur Richards' nose, Friend Trowbridge."

"CAN you come over to my house right away, Dr. Trowbridge?" a voice hailed me as de Grandin and I entered my office.

"Why, Mr. Kinnan," I answered, as I recognized the caller, "what's the matter?"

"Huh!" he exploded. "What isn't the matter? Hell's broken loose. My wife's had hysterics since this morning and I'm not sure I oughtn't ask you to commit me to some asylum for the feeble-minded."

"*Pardieu, Monsieur,*" de Grandin exclaimed, "that statement, he is vastly interesting, but not very instructive. You will explain, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Explain?" growled the other. "How am I going to explain something I know isn't so? At twenty

minutes past 5 this morning my wife and I saw something that wasn't there, and saw it take the Lafayette cup, to boot!"

"*Sacré nom d'un porc!*" de Grandin swore. "What is it that you say? You saw that which was not there, and saw it take a cup of le Marquis de Lafayette? *Non, non, non;* it is I who am of the deranged mind. Friend Trowbridge, look to me. I hear remarks which this gentleman has not made!"

In spite of himself, Kinnan laughed at the little Frenchman's tragic face. "I'll be more explicit," he promised, seating himself opposite me and drawing a cigar case from his pocket. "Smoke?" he asked, proffering the case to each of us in turn.

"Now, here goes, and I don't care whether you believe me or not, for I'm not at all sure I'm not a liar myself.

"The baby was fretful the entire early part of the evening, and we didn't get him to sleep till well after midnight. Along about 5 o'clock he woke up on another rampage, and my wife and I went into the nursery to see what we could do.

"Ella, the maid, had gone to New York for the night, and, as usual, there wasn't a drop of milk ready for the youngster. So Mrs. Kinnan and I trotted down to the dining room and I started to pasteurize some milk in the chafing dish. I can place the time exactly, for the library clock has been running erratically lately, and only yesterday I'd gotten it so it ran just ten minutes fast. Well, that clock had just struck half-past 5 when—like an echo of the gong—there came a crash at the window, and the pane was shattered, right before our eyes."

"Ah?" observed de Grandin, noncommittally.

Kinnan shot him a sidelong glance as he continued, "It had been broken by a hammer."

"Ah?" de Grandin edged slightly forward on his chair.

"And whether you believe me or not, that hammer was held in a hand—a woman's hand—*and that was all!* No arm, no body, just a hand—a hand that smashed that windowpane with a hammer, and *floated* through the air, as if it were attached to an invisible body, and took the Lafayette cup from the sideboard, *then floated away with it!*"

"A-a-ah!" de Grandin ejaculated on a rising accent, forgetting to puff at the cigar our caller had given him.

"Oh, I don't expect you to believe me," Kinnan shot back. "I'd say anyone who told me such a story was full of dope, or something, myself; but I tell you I saw it—or thought I did—and so did my wife. Anyhow"—he turned to us with a gesture of finality—"the Lafayette cup is gone."

"On the contrary, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin assured him gravely, "I do believe you, most implicitly. That same bodiless hand was seen at Monsieur Richards' home last night."

"The deuce!" This time it was Kinnan who looked skeptical. "You say someone else saw that hand? Wh— why, they *couldn't!*"

"Nevertheless, my friend, they did," the Frenchman asserted. "Now tell me, this Lafayette cup, what was it?"

"It's a silver wine goblet which belonged to my great-grandfather," Kinnan replied. "Intrinsically, I don't suppose it's worth more than twenty-five or thirty dollars; but it's valuable to us as a family heirloom and because Lafayette, when he made his second visit to this country, drank out of it at a banquet given in his honor. I've been offered up to a thousand dollars for it by collectors."

"*Morbleu!*" De Grandin ground the fire from his cigar in the ash-tray and beat his fingertips together in a nervous tattoo. "This is a remarkable

burglar we have here, *Messieurs,* a most remarkable burglar. He—or she—has a hand, but no body; he enter sick ladies' bedrooms and frightens away their lives, then steal their jewelry; he break honest men's windows with a hammer, then deprives them of their treasured heirlooms while they heat the milk for their babies. *Cordieu,* he will bear investigating, this one!"

"You don't believe me," Kinnan declared, half truculently, half shamefacedly.

"Have I not said I do?" the Frenchman answered, almost angrily. "When you have seen what I have seen, *Monsieur,—parbleu,* when you have seen one-half as much!—you will learn to believe many things which fools declare impossible.

"This hammer"—he rose, almost glaring at Kinnan, so intent was his stare—"where is he? I would see him, if you please."

"It's over at the house," our visitor answered, "lying right where it fell when the hand dropped it. Neither my wife nor I would touch it for a farm."

"Tremendous, gigantic, magnificent!" de Grandin ejaculated, nodding his head vigorously after each adjective. "Come, *mes amis,* let us hasten, let us fly. Trowbridge, my friend, you shall attend the so excellent Madame Kinnan. I, I shall go on the trail of this bodiless burglar, and it shall go hard, but I shall find him. *Morbleu, Monsieur le Fantôme,* when you kill that Madame Richards with fright, that is one thing; when you steal Monsieur Kinnan's cup of le Marquis de Lafayette, that is also one thing, but when you think to thumb your invisible nose at Jules de Grandin,—*parbleu,* that is something else again! We shall see who will make one *sacré singe* out of whom, and that right quickly."

THE hammer proved to be an ordinary one, with a nickeled head and imitation ebony handle, such as could be bought at any notion store for twenty-five cents; but de Grandin pounced on it like a hungry tomcat on a mouse or a gold prospector on a two-pound nugget or a Kimberley miner on a twelve-carat diamond.

"But this is wonderful; this is superb!" he almost cooed as he swaddled the implement in several layers of paper and stowed it tenderly away in an inside pocket of his great coat.

"Trowbridge, my f r i e n d"—he threw me one of his quick, enigmatic smiles—"do you attend the good Madame Kinnan. I have important duties to perform elsewhere. If possible, I shall return for dinner, and if I do, I pray you will have your amiable cook prepare for me one of her so delicious apple pies. If I return not"—his little blue eyes twinkled a moment with frosty laughter—"I shall eat all that pie for breakfast, like a good Yon-kee."

DINNER was long since over, and the requested apple pie had been reposing untouched on the pantry shelf for several hours when de Grandin popped from a taxicab like a jack-in-the-box from its case and rushed up the front steps, the waxed ends of his little blond mustache twitching like the whiskers of an excited tom-cat, his arms filled with bundles—a look of triumphant exhilaration on his face. "Quick, quick, Friend Trowbridge," he ordered as he deposited his packages on my office desk, "to the telephone! Call that Monsieur Richards, that rich man who so generously allowed me forty-eight hours to recover his lost treasures, and that Monsieur Kinnan, whose so precious cup of the Marquis de Lafayette was stolen—call them both and bid them come here, right away, at once, immediately!

"*Pardieu*"—he strode back and forth across my office with a step which was half run, half jig—"this Jules de Grandin, never is the task imposed too great for him!"

"What in the world's the matter with you?" I demanded as I rang up the Richards house.

"*Non, non,*" he replied, lighting a cigarette, then flinging it away unpuffed. "Ask me no questions, good friend, I do beseech you. Wait, only wait till those others come, then you shall hear Jules de Grandin speak. *Morbleu,* but he shall speak a great mouthful!"

THE Richards limousine, impressive in size, like its owner, and, like its owner, heavily upholstered, was panting before my door in half an hour, and Kinnan drove up in his modest sedan almost as soon. Sergeant Costello, looking mystified, but concealing his wonder with the inborn reticence of a professional policeman, came into the office close on Kinnan's heels.

"What's all this nonsense, Trowbridge?" Richards demanded testily as he sank into a chair. "Couldn't you have come over to my house, instead of dragging me out at this hour o' night?"

"Tut, tut, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin cut him short, running the admonitions so close together that they sounded like the exhaust of a miniature motorboat. "Tut, tut, *Monsieur,* is it not worth coming out into the cold to recover these?" From a brown-paper parcel before him he produced a purple velvet case which he snapped open with a dramatic gesture, disclosing an array of scintillating gems.

"These, I take it," he announced, "were once the property of *Madame,* your wife?"

"Great Scott!" gasped Richards, reaching out his hands for the jewels, "why, you *got* 'em!"

"But of course," de Grandin agreed, deftly withdrawing the stones from Richards' reach and restoring them to their paper bag. "Also, *Monsieur,* I have these." From another parcel he drew a sheaf of Liberty bonds, ruffling through them as a gambler might count his cards. "You said twenty thousand dollars' worth, I believe? *Très bien,* there are just twenty one-thousand dollar certificates here, according to my count.

"Monsieur Kinnan," he bowed to our other visitor, "permit that I restore to you the cup of Monsieur le Marquis Lafayette." The Lafayette cup was duly extracted from another package and handed to its owner.

"And now," de Grandin lifted an oblong pasteboard box of the sort used for shoes and held it toward us as a prestidigitator might hold the hat from which he is about to extract a rabbit, "I will ask you to give me closest attention. *Regardez, s'il vous plaît.* Is this not what you gentlemen saw last night?"

As he lifted the box lid we beheld, lying on a bed of crumpled tissue paper, what appeared to be the perfectly modeled reproduction of a beautiful feminine hand and wrist. The thumb and fingers, tipped with long, almond-shaped nails, were exquisitely slender and graceful, and the narrow palm, where it showed above the curling digits, was pink and soft-looking as the under side of a La France rose petal. Only the smear of collodion across the severed wrist told us we gazed on something which once pulsated with life instead of a marvelously exact reproduction.

"Is this not what you gentlemen saw last night?" de Grandin repeated, glancing from the lovely hand to Richards and Kinnan in turn.

Each nodded a mute confirmation, but forebore to speak, as though the sight of the eery, lifeless thing before him had placed a seal of silence on his lips.

"Very good; very, very good," de Grandin nodded vigorously. "Now attend me, if you please:

"When Monsieur Kinnan told me of the hammer which broke his window last night I decided the road by which to trace this bodiless burglar was mapped out on that hammer's handle. *Pourquoi?* Because this hand which scares sick ladies to death and breaks windowpanes is one of three things. First"—he ticked off on his fingers—"it may be some mechanical device. In that case I shall find no traces. But it may be the ghost of someone who once lived, in which case, again, it is one of two things: a ghost hand, *per se,* or the reanimated flesh of one who is dead. Or, perchance, it is the hand of someone who can render the rest of him invisible.

"Now, then, if it is a ghost hand, either true ghost or living-dead flesh, it is like other hands, it has ridges and valleys and loops and whorls, which can be traced and recognized by fingerprint experts. Or, if a man can, by some process unknown to me, make all of him, save his hand, invisible, why, then, his hand, too, must leave finger marks. *Hein?*

"'Now,' Jules de Grandin asked Jules de Grandin, 'is it not highly probable that one who steal jewels and bonds and the cup of Monsieur le Marquis de Lafayette, has stolen before, perchance been apprehended, and fingerprinted?'

"'*Parbleu!* It is even as you say,' Jules de Grandin answer Jules de Grandin.

"Thereupon I take that hammer from Monsieur Kinnan's house and go with it to New York. I see the Commissioner of Police. '*Monsieur le Prefet,*' I say to him, 'I am Jules de Grandin. Do you know me?'

"'*Morbleu,* but I do,' reply that so excellent gentleman. 'Who but a fool has not heard of Jules de Grandin?' "

He paused a moment, casting a pregnant glance at Richards, then continued:

"'*Monsieur le Prefet,*' I reply, 'I would that you permit your identification experts to examine this hammer and tell me, of their kindness, whose fingerprints appear thereon.'

"*Bien,* the order was given, and in good time come the report that the hammer handle is autographed with the fingerprints of one Katherine O'Brien, otherwise known to the police as Catherine Levoy, and also known as Catherine Dunstan.

"The police of New York have a *dossier* for this lady which would do credit to the Paris *Sûreté.* They tell me she was in turn a shoplifter, a decoy-woman for some badger game gentlemen, a forger and the partner of one Professor Mysterio, a theatrical hypnotist. Indeed, they tell me, she was married to this professor *à l'Italienne,* and with him she traveled the country, sometimes giving exhibitions, sometimes indulging in crime, such as, for instance, burglary and pocket-picking.

"Now, about a year ago, while she and the professor are exhibiting themselves at Coney Island, this lady died. Her partner gave her a most remarkable funeral; but the ceremonies were marred by one untoward incident—while her body lay in the undertaker's mortuary some thief did climb in the window and remove one of her hands. In the dead of night he severed from the beautiful body of that wicked woman the hand which had often extracted property from other people's pockets, and made off with it; nor could all the policemen's efforts find out who did so ghoulish a deed.

"Meantime, the professor who was this woman's theatrical partner has retired from the stage and lives in New Jersey on the fortune he has amassed.

"'New Jersey, New Jersey,' I say to me. 'Why, that is the place where my dear Trowbridge lives, and where these so mysterious burglaries have taken place.'

"So back I come to Sergeant Costello and ask him if any stranger whose mode of income is unknown has lately moved into this vicinity. I have a picture of this Professor Mysterio which the New York police give me from their archives, and I show the picture to the good Costello.

"'*Pardieu*' (in English) he say, 'but I know the gentleman! He live in the Berryman house, out on the Andover Road, and do nothing for his living but smoke a pipe and drink whisky. Come, let us gather him in.'

"While Sergeant Costello and I ride out to that house I do much thinking. Hypnotism is thought, and thought is a thing—a thing which does not die. Now, if this dead woman had been in the habit of receiving mental commands from Professor Mysterio for so long, and had been accustomed to obey those commands with all parts of her body as soon as they were given, had she not formed a habit of obedience? Trowbridge, my friend, you are a physician, you have seen men die, even as I have. You know that the suddenly killed man falls in an attitude which was characteristic of him in life, is it not so?"

I nodded agreement.

"Very well, then," de Grandin continued, "I ask me if it is not possible that the hand this professor have commanded so many times in life can not be made to do his bidding after death? *Mon Dieu,* the idea is novel, but not for that reason impossible! Did not that so superb Monsieur Poe hint at some such thing in his story of the dying man who remained alive because he was hypnotized? Most assuredly.

"So, when we get to the house of Professor Mysterio, Sergeant Costello points his pistol at the gentleman and says, 'Put 'em up, buddee, we've got the deceased wood upon you!' Meanwhile, I search the house.

"I find Monsieur Richards' jewelry and his bonds; I find Monsieur Kinnan's cup of Monsieur le Marquis de Lafayette. I find much else, including this hand of a dead woman which are not itself dead. *Dieu de Dieu!* When I go to take it from its case it attack me like a living thing, and Sergeant Costello have to promise he will blow the top from the professor's head before he order it to be quiet. *And it obeyed his voice! Parbleu!* When I see that, I have the flesh of the geese all over me."

"Rot!" Richards flung the contemptuous comment like a missile. "I don't know what kind of hocus-pocus made that hand move; but if you expect to make me believe any such nonsense as this stuff you've been telling, you've got the wrong pig by the ear. I shouldn't be surprized if you and this Professor What's-His-Name were in cahoots in this thing, and you got cold feet and left your confederate holding the bag!"

I stared aghast at the man. De Grandin's vanity was as colossal as his ability, and though he was gentle as a woman in ordinary circumstances, like a woman, he was capable of sudden flares of vixenish temper when his regard for human life became no greater than his concern for a troublesome fly. If the little Frenchman had launched himself at his traducer like a bobcat attacking a hound I should have been less surprized than I was at the ominous calm with which he replaced the cover of the cardboard box containing the hand.

"Friend Trowbridge," he asked, the muscles of his jaws standing out like whipcords as he strove to prevent a telltale quiver from creeping into his face, "will you be good enough to represent me—*ha!*"

With the ejaculation he dodged suddenly downward, almost falling to the floor in his haste to avoid the flashing, white object which dashed at his face.

Nor was his dodge a split-second too soon. Like the lid of a boiling kettle, the top of the shoe box had lifted, and the slender, quiescent hand which lay within had leaped through the opening, risen throat-high in the air and hurtled across the intervening space like a quarrel from a cross-bow. With delicate, firm-muscled fingers outspread, it swooped through the air like a pouncing hawk, missed de Grandin's throat by the barest fraction of a second—and fastened itself, snapping like a strong-springed steel-trap, in the puffy flesh sagging over the collar of Willis Richards' dress shirt.

"*Ah—ulp!*" gasped, or, rather, croaked, the startled financier, falling backward in his chair and tearing futilely at the eldritch thing which sank its long, pointed nails into his purple skin. "Ah—God, it's choking me!"

Costello was at his side, striving with all his force to pry those white, slender fingers open. He might as well have tried to wrench apart the clasp of a chrome-steel handcuff.

"*Non, non,*" de Grandin shouted, "not that way, Sergeant. It is useless!"

Leaping across the room he jerked open the door of my instrument case, seized an autopsy knife and dashed his shoulder against the burly detective, almost sending him sprawling. Next instant, with the speed and precision of an expert surgeon, he was dissecting away the deadly white fingers fastened in Richards' dewlap.

"*C'est complet,*" he announced matter-of-factly as he finished his grisly task. "A restorative, if you please, Friend Trowbridge, and an antiseptic dressing for the wounds from the nails. He will not suffer unnecessarily."

Wheeling, he seized the receiver from my desk telephone and called authoritatively: "*Allo, allo,* the jail, if you please, *Mademoiselle Central!*"

There was a brief parley, finally he received his connection, then: "*Allo, Monsieur le Geôlier,* can you tell me of Professor Mysterio, please? How is he; what does he do?"

A pause: "Ah, do you say so? I thought as much. Many thanks, *Monsieur.*"

He turned to us, a look of satisfaction on his face. "My friends," he announced solemnly, "Professor Mysterio is no more. Two minutes ago the authorities at the city prison heard him call out distinctly in a loud voice, 'Katie, kill the Frenchman; I command you. Kill him!' When they rushed to his cell to discover the cause for his cries they were but in time to see him dash himself from his bed, having first bound his waist-belt firmly to his throat and the top of his barred door. The fall broke his neck. He died before they could cut him down.

"*Eh bien,*" he shook himself like a spaniel emerging from a pond, "'twas a lucky thing for me I saw that box top begin to lift and had the sense to dodge those dead fingers. None of you would have thought of the knife, I fear, before the thing had strangled my life away. As it is, I acted none too soon for Monsieur Richards' good."

Still red in the face, but regaining his self-possession under my ministrations, Willis Richards sat up in his chair. "If you'll give me my property, I'll be getting out of this hell-house," he announced gruffly, reaching for the jewels and bonds de Grandin had placed on the desk.

"Assuredly, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin agreed. "But first you will comply with the law, *n'est-ce-pas?* You have offered a reward of five thousand

dollars for your property's return. Make out two checks, if you please, one for half the amount to the good Sergeant Costello, the other, for a similar amount, to me."

"I'll be hanged if I do," the banker declared, glaring angrily at de Grandin. "Why should a man have to buy his own stuff back?"

Sergeant Costello rose ponderously to his feet and gathered the parcels containing Richards' belongings into his capacious hands. "Law's law," he announced decisively. "There'll be no bonds or jools returned till that reward's been paid."

"All right, all right," Richards agreed, reaching for his checkbook, "I'll pay you; but it's the damndest hold-up I've ever had pulled on me."

"H'M," growled Costello as the door slammed behind the irate banker, "if I ever catch that bird parkin' by a fireplug or exceedin' th' speed limit, he'll see a hold-up that *is* a hold-up. I'll give 'im every summons in my book, an' holler for more."

"*Tiens*, my friends, think of the swine no more," de Grandin commanded. "In France, had a man so insulted me, I should have called him out and run him through the body. But that one? *Pouf!* Gold is his life's blood. I hurt him far more by forcing the reward from him than if I had punctured his fat skin a dozen times.

"Meantime, Friend Trowbridge"—his little eyes snapped with the heat-lightning of his sudden smile—"there waits in the pantry that so delicious apple pie prepared for me by your excellent cook. Sergeant—Monsieur Kinnan, will you join us? Wind and w e a t h e r permitting, Friend Trowbridge and I purpose eating ourselves into one glorious case of indigestion."

THE next adventure of Jules de Grandin will take him into the gruesome cellars beneath "The House of Horror". Watch for this fascinating story in WEIRD TALES.

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The Silent Trees

by Frank Owen



"Softly he bent over the form of the lovely girl, and the beauty of the great room was dwarfed by comparison to the loveliness of Lun Pei Lo."

WITH the first breath of night Canton becomes a city of mystery, a place of lurking shadows, of soft-cadenced, subdued voices, of lanterns flickering wistfully out from the folds of darkness, of a thousand varied odors, some revolting, others that seem to possess all the allure and incense of the East.

That evening as I wandered through the narrow alleys that wind through the city like snakes, I noticed a Chinaman standing in the doorway of a tea-house. He was very tall, like a great reed, and he swayed somewhat, which emphasized the simile. He was dressed in a soft black, shapeless suit, unrelieved by any touch of color, a suit which seemed to have been cut from the velvet blackness of the Oriental night. His face was yellow but so pale that it seemed almost white, and his eyes lay in great pits. They glowed with a strange brilliancy like the eyes of a forest animal or of a man who has crossed the threshold of reason. His nose was a monstrosity crushed flat against his face and his lips were so thin they hardly existed. They

made no effort to hide his huge yellow teeth.

As I gazed into his face I paused, for he was smiling hideously and beckoning to me.

"If you will buy me some tea," he said in a soft voice which was beautifully modulated, "I will tell you a tale of adventure and romance that will cause your ennui to slip from you like a cloak."

"How did you know I was in search of adventure?" I demanded.

"That was very simple," said he. "When it grows cloudy, one knows that it will rain. One judges the weather by gazing on the face of nature. One judges a man's mood likewise by gazing into his face."

He led the way into the tea-house as he spoke, and in a few seconds we were seated at a small table in a far corner. The tea-house was dimly lighted and the scattered forms that slunk about the room seemed like wraiths. Overhead several lanterns burned dimly, yellow-blue lanterns that caressed the room with a peaceful shimmering light. A sleek Chinaman brought us tea and then silently withdrew. My companion closed his eyes and breathed deeply of the sweet aroma that rose softly to his nostrils.

"Tea," he said softly, "tea is a beverage of enchantment. It brings happiness and dreams. It brings forgetfulness. It is a medicine to cure all physical and moral ills." He paused for a moment, then he said, "My name is Yuan Yung and I dwell not far from here on an island in the Great River. What the island is called matters little. Where it is matters less. Sufficient it is that there is such an island, for it is an island like unto none that you have ever chanced upon."

Again he paused for a moment and breathed deeply of the tea aroma. I marveled that he made no effort to lift the dainty green-jade cup to his lips.

"On my island," he continued, "no sound is ever heard. Not a bird sings, not a flower laughs in the wind, even the great tree-tops are subdued. It is an island of sorrow. All nature is mourning, mourning for little Lun Pei Lo who used to make our island a floral garden of loveliness by her singing. You who have heard the greatest singers of the Occident, have yet to hear anything comparable to the singing of Lun Pei Lo, for when she sang even the flowers joined in the chorus. They blossomed more beautifully and fragrantly than ever, and the trees like great violins softly joined in the music. They swayed in perfect rhythm, and made music which even the spheres might envy. He only is a great singer who can harmonize with nature, and Lun Pei Lo was even greater, for nature harmonized with her. Life is a peculiar thing. Men wander through the valley toward the shadowy death caves beyond and always they think of attaining wealth, and riches and power. None of these is of the slightest importance. The wealth of the world is contained in sweet incense, the aroma of tea, in beautiful pictures, in music and in the glory of the skies. When we arrive at that station in life where we can estimate values, there will no longer be any necessity for dying. Life will be complete. On our island little Lun Pei Lo sang and all things joined in her songs. But now little Lun Pei Lo has gone and the trees are silent, the flowers are hushed and the birds no longer sing. Nothing but sadness remains. Even the great serpent who sleeps beneath the mountains mourns for her."

"If I would not be presuming," I hazarded, "I should like very much to visit your island."

He looked up quickly and his eyes narrowed until they were little more than slits. "I will take you there this very night," he said emphatically.

After that we sat in silence. I finished my tea and waited for him to do likewise, but he made no effort to raise the cup to his lips. He just inhaled the aroma until the tea had cooled, after which he reluctantly rose to his feet. Together we ambled through the winding crisscross alleys of Canton. He held my arm with fingers of steel, as though he feared I might flee. They bit into my flesh like teeth. At last we arrived at the water's edge. It was pitch-black. Yuan Yung clambered into a small boat from the bow of which hung a lantern, and I followed after him. When we were both seated he extinguished the light. The water was blacker than a river of jet and I could not make out the form of my companion. The sky was overcast and there was no moon. The night air was cold and cheerless and a sharp wind blew fitfully over the waters.

Soon the boat began to move. I assumed that Yuan Yung was rowing although I heard no sound of oars. The boat cut through the water as though it had no more texture than a phantom. The night was lifeless and still. On and on we drifted. As the moments passed I grew drowzy. It was very peaceful. Not a sound, not a sigh. At last I must have fallen into a deep sleep, for the next thing I knew it was morning.

I gazed slowly about me. To my surprize I lay beside a marvelous blue lake, a lake bluer than an April sky. Yuan Yung was nowhere in sight. Gone also was the boat in which we had come to the island. For awhile I waited for him to return, drinking in the beauty of the panorama that unfolded all about me. Hills covered with verdant trees etched sharply against a coral-blue sky. The grass was greener than any grass I had ever seen. And there were wild flowers in profusion growing on every side, flowers of every color and hue, a perfect riot of beauty! The air was so clear that I could see for miles about, and because of the immensity of the canvas on which I gazed everything seemed dwarfed by comparison. I was in a miniature world of loveliness. It was also a soundless world. Not the faintest murmuring rent the solitude. The trees were so still they might have been painted on a white sheet. Even the flowers did not move. No bird sang, nor could I detect the faintest suggestion of a breeze. It was so calm and lifeless that it made me shiver. I called aloud for Yuan Yung but my voice died out almost instantly without echo. I called again but it was useless. The air refused to take up my voice. I began to perspire as though some awful menace were at my heels. I was afraid to look back. It was ridiculous to succumb to nerves on such a perfect day. The sky was clear and on every hand I was enveloped in beauty. It was so beautiful that it was nauseating. I felt as though the very perfectness of the picture were stifling me, stealing my breath, binding me with chains. For awhile I waited by the roadside, then I commenced to walk. Even my footfalls made no sound. It was an island of dreadful silence.

On and on I wandered. The road wound over a slight hill and then dipped into a forest and I passed along it as though I were lost in a dream. All nature was soundless as though it had paused for some great event, perhaps to listen to the singing of Lun Pei Lo. My mind at that moment was as clear as crystal. All the worthless dross of life had been washed out. Had life stopped on the island when Lun Pei Lo vanished? Would the current of existence cease to flow onward until her return? These were mad thoughts but at the moment they seemed logical enough. Sanity at best is but a relative condition. A man slightly mad seems normal as compared to a maniac. Few

persons of earth are mentally in absolute balance. Superstitions are slight forms of insanity and often one is declared insane simply because he has views which one can not understand.

There was something awesome about that soundless road. I was terrified. Many things there were as mysterious as the blue lake. I noticed that the few coral clouds in the sky did not move. Stationary also was the sun. It did not even seem to cast off heat as it blazed down. Neither was the air cold. The climate was neutral. I marveled at this but not nearly as much as at the fact that I cast no shadow. I had read that only the dead cast no shadows. It was an old belief. Ancient also was the saying that a man's shadow is really his soul. When one casts no shadow one has lost one's soul. I had never given credence to such fantasies, yet now that I cast no shadow I shuddered. Was I dead? Was I a ghost? I laughed mirthlessly at the bare thought, but no sound came from my lips. I, too, was voiceless, as soundless as the silent trees. Now I quickened my pace. I sped down the road as though pursued by the wrath of the gods. My blood froze in my veins. My heart almost stopped beating. My lips grew cold. The whole island seemed to be a seething menace, yet it was more beautiful than a landscape by Corot.

Soon I came to a gray city, a deserted city, the weirdest place in which I had ever walked. It was as though some horrible plague had driven the inhabitants from their homes. I roamed through street after street of gray houses, all deserted and dead. They stood somberly malignant like bleached bones from which all flesh had been torn by vultures. All were of peculiar design, built like shelves, each floor with a stone balcony, opening into rooms of yawning blackness. I, who had always hated noise and clamor, who had yearned for solitude, was now crushed by the weight of that velvet silence. It enmeshed me as it lay about me in folds. My tongue was parched and dry, my lips blistered and cracked. I drew my blackened tongue across my lips, but it was without moisture. The rasping feel of it made me shudder.

How long I wandered helplessly about I do not know, but the next thing I remember I was standing in front of a house. It was a gray house, a forbidding house, not one bit different from the others. Yet it arrested my attention. Something within me, I know not what, urged me to enter that house. It was a command more subtle than the perfume of poppies, but I acceded to it without question. It was an onward urge that could not be disputed. I paused for a moment to get my courage somewhat into shape, then I entered the house. At first the halls seemed as gloomy as a night fog, an effect heightened by my sudden transition from the glaring sunlight to the subdued shadows, but as my vision gradually cleared I gasped at the vast splendor that lay before me. It was as though the city had been drained of all its grandeur until it was a drab thing in order that all the color and beauty might be concentrated into this one house. I knew instinctively that all the other houses would be as gray and colorless within as their drab exteriors.

All about were rich rugs and tapestries, rugs and draperies of every material and color. There were lamps and lanterns of all shapes and sizes, magnificent vases and small idols of solid gold, set with diamonds and pearls and precious stones. On the floor was a jade-green carpet more luxurious than grass.

In awe I passed through the rooms. Even though everything was as silent as death I walked slowly. It was hard to realize that I could not make a

sound. All the furnishings of the rooms were in excellent condition so it was strange that I should associate the grim building with great age. Still the suggestion of age persisted.

At last I came to a room larger and higher-vaulted than any of the others. The wealth of the house now dimmed, by comparison to the wealth I found here. Only Gautier could do justice in description. It was so gorgeous that it stunned. There is more intoxication in a truly beautiful picture than in rare wine. Here the colors were more of one tone, blues of exquisite harmony, soft velvets and silks more fragile than cobwebs. Through a great window the sun splashed into the room in wondrous glory, drenching everything with a soft yellow light. Nothing, I thought, could be more beautiful than this. And yet almost immediately I changed my mind, for in a far corner I beheld the form of a lovely girl. Softly I bent over her, and just as the loveliness of the other rooms had been dwarfed by comparison to the wealth of this one, so was the beauty of the great room dwarfed by comparison to the loveliness of Lun Pei Lo, for I knew that it was she. The same voice that urged me to enter the house now acquainted me with the name of the sleeping girl. Her eyes were closed but the lids were blue, canopied by lashes of wondrous length which caressed her cheeks. Like ivory was her skin, ivory which though pale seemed to glow with an inward pink coral light. Her lips were very red, softer and more fragrant than any flower. Lying there she seemed very young, little more than a child. Her body, though perfectly formed, was small and fragile, and I longed to crush her in my arms as though she were indeed a flower.

At that moment time ceased to be for me, even as it had ceased to be for the other things upon the island. I just stood and gazed down on the sleeping girl in open adoration. Never had I been as intense in my religious worship as I was in my worship of that girl.

I tried to picture how gorgeous she must be when those soft eyes were open. My forehead throbbed. I was as much a slave as any of the heroes told about in Greek legend. I longed to rouse Lun Pei Lo from her sleep, to hear her sing, to behold her smile. For the moment I forgot that the island was more silent than the heart of the Great Desert. That moment was the turning point in my life. I knew that having once seen the loveliness of Lun Pei Lo, everything would be changed thereafter.

MY REVERIES were interrupted by a sudden dull murmur. It came like a shock. The house trembled as though it were about to awake from a long sleep. It sounded more frightful to me than if it had been at drumpitch. At last the menace which I had felt was about to confront me. I wished to flee, but I could not leave little Lun Pei Lo to the mercies of unknown, invisible terrors. I hesitated for a moment only, then I seized her in my arms. At once the most awful thing happened that man could dream of. Her form was as light as air, as light as though it were but a shell, and as I drew her to me, she crumpled into dust even as mummies ofttimes crumble that have been hidden for centuries in Egyptian tombs. One moment she had lain before me as lovely as any flower, the next she was but dust at my feet. Dully I stood and gazed down upon the spot where she had vanished. The lovely face was gone, never to return. Mechanically I stooped and picked up a large blue-purple amethyst which had hung from a golden chain about her neck.

And now the murmurings increased to a mighty roar, a roar that shattered the crystal silence into a thousand tinkling fragments. It was

the last thing that cut the thread of my rationality. Stark, raving mad I rushed from the house. The spell of the canopy of silence was broken. Echo ran rampant throughout the island. The trees began to sway. They seemed to be moaning. Pell-mell I rushed up a white winding road, until I emerged on a shelf of rock overhanging the deep blue lake. Not for a moment did I hesitate, but leaped into space. Death itself was preferable to the unseen horrors of that island. As I plunged into the lake it was like plunging into the sky.

Mercifully at that moment unconciousness closed in about me. It was the end, I thought, and I was glad. Perhaps in death I could join the lovely little Lun Pei Lo.

WHEN I again opened my eyes all was blackness about me. I could not see a foot in any direction. My head throbbed dully and a nauseating sweet fragrance floated to my nostrils. For one wild moment I reflected that I must be at the bottom of the blue lake. But I dismissed that thought almost instantly. My brain was somewhat in balance and I was beginning to think sanely again. I felt about me until my hand encountered that which was evidently a curtain. I pushed it slowly aside and beheld an old Chinaman seated beside a table on which a feeble lamp burned. He was rolling some black gummy pellets. I watched him intently for awhile, then I arose and walked over to his side. My knees were stiff, my legs were as wobbly as though I were a hundred.

"Can you tell me," I asked, "how I happen to be here?"

He shook his head. "How can I?" said he slowly. "Though undoubtedly you are here for the same thing that all others come for—opium."

I was in a quandary. "How long have I been here?" I asked.

"Who knows?" he droned, shrugging his shoulders. "Perhaps two days, perhaps three. What does it matter, anyway? Since that which has gone belongs to the past, why ponder over it?"

I drew two gold pieces from my pocket. He eyed them greedily as I jingled them in my palm. "Who brought me here?" I persisted.

He twisted his shrunken lips with his fingers. His eyes narrowed with the great effort of thinking, then he said, "A man who was tall and thin, so thin that he might have been the shadow of a pestilence."

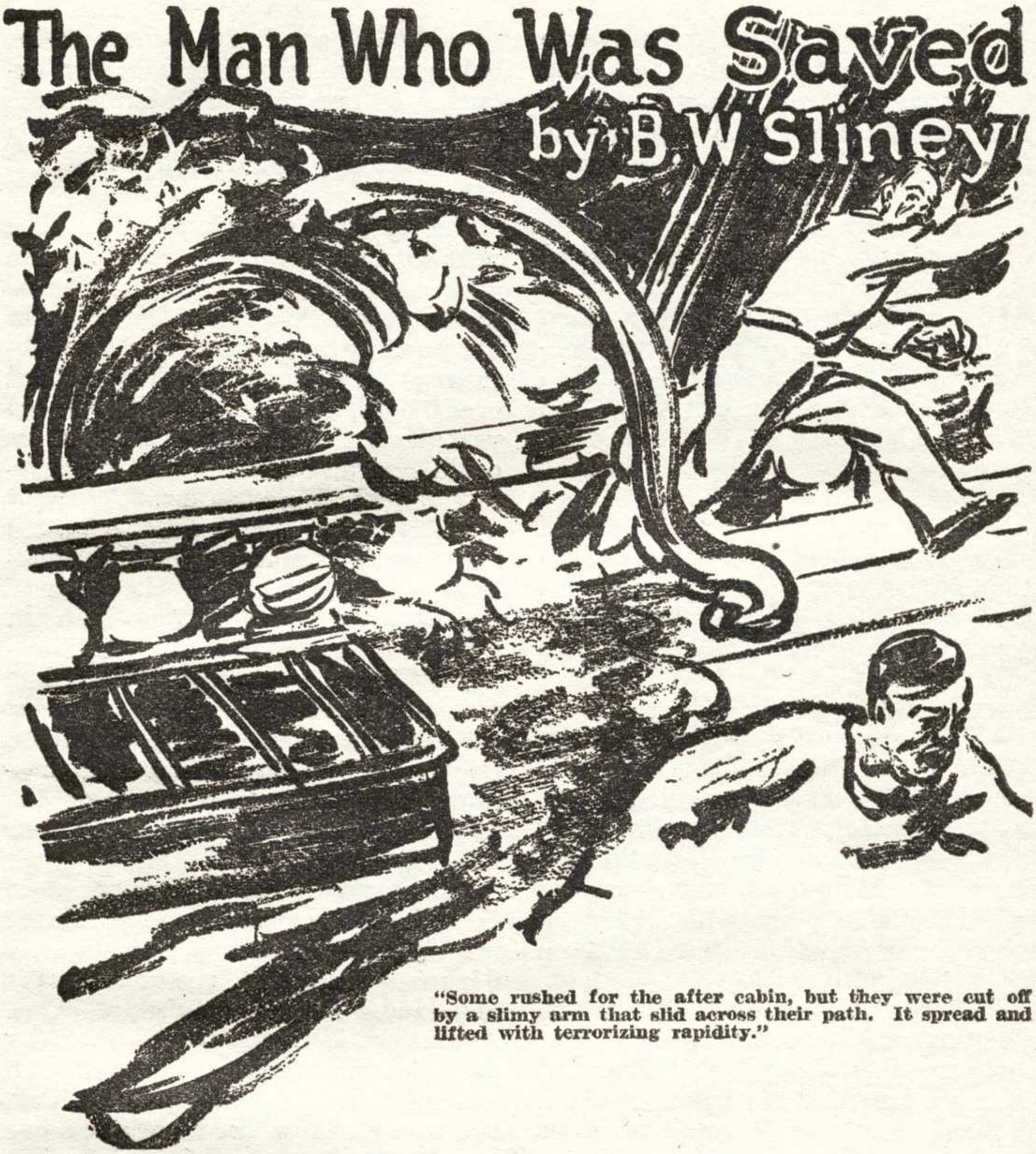
I slid one of the gold pieces across the table to him and without preliminaries I told him of my adventures on the island of the blue lake.

When I had finished, he eyed me queerly. "Of course you have been steeped in opium for days," he said, "and your story can not be given credence; but at least it is odd, for we of China have an old legend about Lun Pei Lo, who lived over two thousand years ago. She was a great singer. It was she who introduced melody into China. According to the legend a wizard fell in love with her and carried her away. He was captivated by her. He brought her flowers and jewels and wrought gold in profusion but failed to make her happy. He worshiped her as the earth worships the sun, but to no avail. She pined for the lover of her childhood. Daily she grew thinner and thinner until her life was almost extinct. In despair the wizard changed her lover into a reed which ever after grew beside the Blue Lake. Such is the legend. You must have been thinking of it when you came to this house and it became entwined in your dreams."

"Perhaps you are right," I said slowly, but I did not tell him that at that very moment I held in my hand a gorgeous blue-purple amethyst which little Lun Pei Lo had once worn upon her breast.

The Man Who Was Saved

by B. W. Sliney



"Some rushed for the after cabin, but they were cut off by a slimy arm that slid across their path. It spread and lifted with terrorizing rapidity."

"ONLY I escaped." The man whom they had found adrift in the dory hung his head. "The others"—the listeners bent nearer to catch his throatily whispered words—"the others . . . it got them — that monstrous, c u r s e d thing!" His eyes rolled back, showing bloodshot whites; his body tensed, and then he shook as with the ague. His attempt to say more resulted in stuttering failure.

"He had better be put to bed," the ship's doctor said. "His nerves are all gone. Heat and thirst and exposure, of course. Hallucinations. He'll come out of it in time."

So they put him in the hospital, where he raved for three days. And the things he said caused intense interest on board the freighter *Pacific Belle;* and among the crew lurking fear whispered that some of the things he said were true.

IT WAS a week before he came into his right mind again, and then the fevers and fears which had beset him passed. He was able to talk to the captain, and to tell a coherent story.

"There were seven of us," he said with sad recollection, as he glanced at the ship's officers, who had gathered about him on the poop deck, "who set out in a two-topmaster—the *Scudder*. It belonged to Bob Henry, who was our captain. Just a sort of lark, you know—an idle cruise for the joy of the sea, and the freedom.

"I was mate, for next to Bob, I knew more about handling a ship than the others. And so we sailed along the coast, putting into whatever ports we fancied, and living an idle, ideal life. All of us had long been friends.

"Then we rashly decided to make it across the Pacific, depending on a season of few storms to aid us. We were successful. Honolulu was easy; and from there we headed southward, made the Marquesas, and then we sailed from island group to island group—you know them all—until we made the Philippines.

"There we turned homeward, pointing our course for Guam. But midway to Apia our luck failed, and we were becalmed for days. We had a small auxiliary motor, which we used for a time to make headway, but it got out of order, and we were forced to remain in virtually the same spot for nearly a week. We did not especially mind, for we were in no great hurry, except that it was somewhat monotonous with so very little to do.

"One evening during our becalmed period, just toward sunset, Hal Rooney pointed out a great disturbance of the water some little distance from us. It shot up in sprays, and eddied in a most inexplicable manner, and then it suddenly ceased. We wondered about it for a long while, but no thinking or imagining or deducing on our part could explain the phenomenon.

"'Possibly,' Bob Henry said, 'it will appear again.'

"And, sure enough, it did. The next evening at the same hour we again noted that strange disturbance of the water. We knew that it could not possibly be a whale, nor any other large sea-creature of which we had ever heard, for the tumult was too vast; and the fact that none of us could offer an explanation of the mystery piqued our curiosity.

"The calm continued. The sea floated away from us endlessly, equally on all sides, caught at the edges of the sky, and became one with it. Once in a while a blackfish went blowing by, or an occasional whale. The waters teemed with life. At night the phosphor glow was almost livid, uncannily brilliant. And each evening that same disturbance of the water occurred somewhere in our neighborhood.

"It was with the third appearance that the thing became too much for us. We determined to put out in a dory and investigate the next time it appeared. It did not disappoint us. Again, at sunset, while the sky glowed extravagantly, flaunting an enormous batik at the parting day, the water almost dead ahead of our bows broke into a churning fury. We piled into the dory, which was ready alongside, and made for it, pulling as hard as we could. But before we were able to reach the spot, the maelstrom had ceased, and we gazed into the intense indigo of unruffled water that was nearly five miles deep.

"Following that attempt, we were more determined than ever to find out the nature of the thing. It was an amazingly large patch of sea that it churned, and, though the unbroken immensity of the space we were the center of gave us little for compari-

son, we judged the area to be approximately that of an acre—an unbelievably large expanse to show such agitation in the midst of so glassily calm a sea.

"The next afternoon, just as the sun fell into the sea, splashing all our horizons with myriad tints, a huge whale went lolling by, sounding and coming up with great jets of water cascading over it. I watched with the glasses as it drove powerfully through the water, peacefully taking its time. Suddenly, however, it changed. It displayed signs of confusion, of alarm. First it turned one way, then another, cutting about sharply—and then I very distinctly heard it give a groan of anguish. It was a heart-breaking sound—the cry of a great, helpless animal in mortal distress. Immediately afterward the water surrounding it broke into its daily wild disorder, and the leviathan seemed gripped by a force it could not escape. It struggled violently, throwing its huge bulk about with futile effort. Greater and greater the mêlée became, and then, suddenly, the whale was still.

"We looked at one another, fright in our eyes. It was tremendous, awful. And then, as we looked again out there, the whale lost all shape and the water became red with gore and blood as it was crushed to a pulp. In but a few minutes it was gone, utterly vanished from view—even the bloodiness of the water cleared—the whirling and splashing ceased, and the sun went down on a still sea. All of us were speechless. It was the most dreadful thing any of us had ever seen."

THE speaker paused in his narrative, shaken by the memory of what he had related. The captain and his officers looked at one another with veiled skepticism. The doctor raised an eyebrow. There seemed no doubt of it; the man was insane.

Presently he went on with his wildly impossible yarn. His listeners were attentive, but secretly unbelieving. In time, it was hoped, he might regain his mental balance. In the meanwhile——

"To say that we were shaken would not be half expressing our state of mind. It was so inexplicable, so wildly preposterous! I was for getting away as soon as possible, and so were several of the others. But the rest were keen to learn what the thing was. And, to settle any argument, the calm held unbroken and the motor continued in disrepair, despite our efforts over it.

"For three days, then, the thing did not come to the surface. We had decided that it was some sort of deep-sea creature, some gargantuan monster that came out of the vast depths of the ocean to feed. But we had never heard of such a thing, save in stories of early navigators' superstitions. We hesitated to believe the thing we had seen—we were afraid to believe it!

"It was now that fear came to us. Hitherto we had been curious, idly speculative, and inclined to laugh. Now our thoughts were interrupted by premonitions of disaster. Flying fish, as they flashed from the surface and splashed into the water about us, startled; and porpoises blundering into our vicinity brought us all on deck. At night, a lost puff of breeze, slatting the rigging against the sails, startled us into alarmed awakening. And though the same subject of possible danger from the unknown out of the deep occupied the mind of each of us, it was never spoken of. But there was in the air a chilling presence of dread.

"I believe we would have left that place had we been able. For the memory of the fate of the whale was ever vivid in our minds. Following the death of the whale, the monster did not rise, however, for three days,

as I have said. This gave us some sense of relief, but it was on that third day that the great tragedy occurred.

"I was occupied with fitting a new seat to the dory, which was swung up on deck, and the others were idling, making bets as to the quarter in which the creature would next appear, or if we should see it again.

"I was startled by a scream from one of the men, and immediately after followed the sound of churning water —a sound which sent the very essence of dread all through me and cowed my soul. Somehow I knew we were in the midst of the monster's rise to the surface. I stood and looked over the side. There was a horrible mass of pulsating green matter—a revolting substance that had no definite form, and yet was solid—a writhing, heaving island of the stuff.

"Even as I looked it surged up from the water and rolled over the side of the schooner, turning over on itself, slithering and cascading on the deck. Every one of us was frantic. Some rushed for the after cabin, but they were cut off by a slimy arm that slid across their path. It spread and lifted with terrorizing rapidity. Two of the men tried to climb a mast; Bob Henry raced toward the bow and fell. An instant later he was covered with the gruesome matter, even before he had a chance to cry out, and was hidden from sight. Hardly knowing what I did, I turned the dory over on myself, dragging Mark Whittmore, the nearest man to me, under with me. Fortunately I had removed all the seats, and there was just room for the two of us as we lay prone.

"Then came darkness and an inconceivably foul odor of decay as the monster mass pushed itself over the dory — a suffocating, interminable darkness, while we were cramped under that flat-bottomed boat, scarce daring to think, even, of the horror that crawled over us. When we thought our lungs would burst for the want of fresh air, light came under the dory once more, and gradually the slithering, churning, swishing of that thing which had boarded us ceased. For a long while, however, we were too frightened to move, but finally our concern for the fate of our companions compelled us to lift the dory.

"The sky glowed with the last rays of the setting sun, and the sea slept beneath it, undisturbed. But the decks of the *Scudder* were wet with a yellow-green, malodorous slime, and silence hung like a pall over the ship.

"We called. There was no answer —not even the mockery of an echo. With consternation seizing us we rushed into the afterhouse, but it was without a person in it. In a panic we ran to the forecastle, and it, too, was suggestively deserted. And nowhere on that ship did we find a soul. Every man, except ourselves, had disappeared. That thing"—his voice broke, and again into his face came that haunting pain—"that thing had got them all!"

For a while he paused, making strong effort to overcome his rising emotion, and the fear that memory brought him. The listeners looked away and were silent; and presently they heard his voice, firmly continuing the tale.

"You can not conceive of the terror which descended on us after that frightful discovery. Aimlessly, dazedly we searched the vessel through and through, but we were the only men aboard the *Scudder*. It was a fact that we had to face, but could not bring ourselves to believe.

"Night came quickly, and the moon and stars stared coldly down on us. We decided at length that to remain on the ship would be suicidal, for the calm still hung over the water like a dead thing, and the thought of the unspeakable thing that lived somewhere beneath us was appalling. So

we fitted the dory with water and food, and rowed away in the night from that ill-fated ship.

"Then there came interminable days of torture under a malignant sun, and nights of terror of what might lurk in the waters around us. And one morning I awoke to find myself alone in the dory. The day before Mark had talked of insanity, and I believe that he could not face the possibility.

"Now I attained the utmost in despair. I was, I believe, too shocked to think clearly, or I, too, might have gone over the side. From the morning of that discovery, until you picked me up, I was in a coma. Of the passage of time I do not recall.

"And such is my story, gentlemen. You may find it hard to believe. I find it difficult, myself, and wonder, sometimes, if it is not an insane conception of diseased imagination. I wish it were. But I am tormented with the reality."

THE *Pacific Belle* held her westward course for Manila. The story of the man who had been saved spread among the crew, where it was hotly debated, and quite generally accepted. The officers of the ship, however, avoided the subject, and particularly before the stranger it was never mentioned.

But one morning, just at dawn, a derelict schooner was sighted. The captain, awakened, ordered the *Pacific Belle* hove to while investigation was made. With closer inspection and increasing light it was made out to be the *Scudder*, of San Francisco. The man who had been saved was called.

"Yes!" he cried. "Yes! That's the boat—our schooner. But——"

He drooped, swayed. The mate caught him and called one of the crew.

"Take him to his cabin," he said, "and keep him there."

Investigation corroborated the statements the stranger had made. Furthermore, the *Scudder's* papers proved beyond doubt that the man they had aboard came from her. And since there was nothing to indicate that anything else could have possibly driven the men from the ship, their strange passenger's story assumed a verity that even the officers reluctantly admitted.

A short consultation decided the fate of the *Scudder*. Left as she was, derelict, she would have become a serious menace to shipping, and possible salvage value did not warrant the long tow into port. Dynamite was placed amidships and set off.

With a splintering crash the *Scudder* heaved upward and outward, and plunged into the deeps of the ocean. The *Pacific Belle* continued on her way.

Later in the day the captain studied his charts. "Do you think," he asked the mate, at length, "that there is really anything in the fellow's story?"

The mate shrugged. "Such things," he answered readily, "don't happen. He's off, that's all. All the men were gone from the *Scudder*, yes, but I'd hate to accept such an explanation for it."

"The water in this part of the ocean, mister," the captain slowly said, "is five miles deep—as deep as the tallest mountain is high. It's barely possible that there's a lot about things out here that we don't know, or even remotely suspect. However——"

THAT night, after the swollen moon went down, and after all slept, save the watches and the man who had come aboard from out of the ocean, the *Pacific Belle* plunged into stark, brief terror.

The stranger, affected by again seeing the *Scudder*, had been unable to sleep. After hours of restlessness, he

had gone to the bows, where he stared dully across the water. As he stood there, slowly, almost imperceptibly, he felt himself to be afraid.

An odor had come to him, an odor which brought to his mind the horror of his last day aboard the *Scudder*—the sickening, decay-laden odor of the monster from the deep. Then he listened with super-intent ears, and above the vessel's vibration he caught a sound of churning, swirling water. He screamed with a loudness that awoke everyone on the *Pacific Belle* as he recognized these things—a scream that brought everyone to his feet, anticipating calamity.

He turned from the prow and ran in stumbling haste across the deck and up the ladder to the bridge. The mate was there, alarmed at the cry of horror.

"Mister," he gasped, his mouth dry with panic, "mister! The thing —the monster! Stop the ship! Reverse her, for God's sake!"

The mate laughed with relief as he recognized the man. He had been in dread of something terrible, and it was only another fit.

"Come, now, old boy!" he said in an effort to comfort. "Better quiet down a bit, don't ——"

With another terrible scream the fellow was gone from the bridge. Jerking a preserver from the rail, he leaped free of the *Pacific Belle*.

"Man overboard!" The mate had seen him disappear and gave the alarm as he ran to the bridge controls. But before he reached them the speed of the *Pacific Belle* slackened abruptly, as though it had fouled the meshes of a gigantic net; and then it lost headway altogether. A bright, eery glow of phosphorescent green lighted the water in a vast area, suddenly bursting into a lurid brilliance which caught the vessel out of the night and revealed its helplessness to the stars.

The glowing green mass surged sweepingly toward the vessel, piled against it, rolled over it, clinging to its sides, flooding its decks. Men who had come out to investigate the shouting and confusion frantically rushed below deck, barricading ports and doors behind them. On his bridge the captain sent useless messages to the engine room. The ship could not move.

Then, slowly, inexorably, as the brilliance of the phosphorescent light lessened, the great mass which was its source began to sink. Gradually it settled, carrying the *Pacific Belle*, fair-sized steamer though she was, down with it. The waves closed over the ship's main deck, touched and submerged the bridge, poured down the funnels, sending clouds of steam hissing into the air, and finally even the tops of the masts disappeared. There had been no time for a wireless message, but a message would have been futile.

Again the waters calmed, but after a half-hour they were torn for a few minutes by a great rush of bubbles to the top, following the caving in, from depth pressure, of the *Pacific Belle's* bulkheads. But after that the surface was never more disturbed by the *Pacific Belle*.

Microcosmic in a terrifying vastness of water, a man floated on a preserver, in the path of a liner that later picked him up. And, as he slowly realized the irony of his second escape, he sobbed with futile pity for himself.

Bat's Belfry — by August W. Derleth



"The rock gave way, and I found myself in a vault with about a score of skeletons."

THE following letter was found among the papers of the late Sir Harry Everett Barclay of Charing Cross, London.

June 10, 1925.

My dear Marc:—

Having received no answer to my card, I can only surmise that it did not reach you. I am writing from my summer home here on the moor, a very secluded place. I am fondling the hope that you will give me a pleasant surprize by dropping in on me soon (as you hinted you might), for this is just the kind of house that would intrigue you. It is very similar to the Baskerville home which Sir Arthur Conan Doyle describes in his *Hound of the Baskervilles.* Vague rumors have it that the place is the abode of evil spirits, which idea I promptly and emphatically poohpoohed. You know that in the spiritual world I am but slightly interested, and that it is in wizardry that I delight. The thought that this quiet little building in the heart of England's peaceful moors should be the home of a multitude of evil spirits seems very foolish to me. However, the surroundings are exceedingly healthful and the house itself is partly an antique, which arouses my interest in archeology. So you see there is enough to divert my attention from these foolish rumors. Leon, my valet, is here with me and so is old Mortimer. You remember Mortimer, who always prepared such excellent bachelor dinners for us?

I have been here just twelve days, and I have explored this old house from cellar to garret. In the latter I brought to light an aged trunk, which I searched, and in which I found nine old books, several of whose title pages were torn away. One of the books, which I took to the small garret window, I finally distinguished

as *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, and this I at once decided was one of the first editions of the book ever printed.

At the cessation of the first three days a typical English fog descended with a vengeance upon the moor. At the first indication of this prank of the elements, which threatened completely to obscure the beautiful weather of the past, I had hauled out all the discoveries I had made in the garret of this building. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* I have already mentioned. There is also a book on the Black Art by De Rochas. Three books, by Orfilo, Swedenborg, and Cagliostro, I have laid temporarily aside. Then there are also Strindburg's *The Inferno,* Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine,* Poe's *Eureka,* and Flammarion's *Atmosphere.* You, my dear friend, may well imagine with what excitement these books filled me, for you know I am inclined toward sorcery. Orfilo, you know, was but a chemist and physiologist; Swedenborg and Strindburg, two who might be called mystics; Poe, whose *Eureka* did not aid me much in the path of witchcraft, nevertheless fascinated me; but the remaining five were as gold to me. Cagliostro, court magician of France; Madame Blavatsky, the priestess of Isis and of the Occult Doctrine; *Dracula,* with all its vampires; Flammarion's *Atmosphere,* with its diagnosis of the Gods of peoples; and De Rochas, of whom all I can say is to quote from August Strindburg's *The Inferno,* the following: "I do not excuse myself, and only ask the reader to remember this fact, in case he should ever feel inclined to practise magic, especially those forms of it called wizardry, or more properly witchcraft: that its reality has been placed beyond all doubt by De Rochas."

Truly, my friend, I wondered, for I had good reason to do so, what manner of man had resided here before my coming, who should be so fascinated by Poe, Orfilo, Strindburg, and De Rochas—four different types of authors. Fog or no fog, I determined to find out. There is not another dwelling near here and the nearest source of information is a village some miles away. This is rather odd, for this moor does not seem an undesirable place for a summer home. I stored the books away, and after informing my valet of my intentions to walk some miles to the village, I started out. I had not gone far, when Leon decided to accompany me, leaving Mortimer alone in the fog-surrounded house.

Leon and I established very little in the town. After a conversation with one of the grocers in the village, the only communicative person that we accosted, we found that the man who had last occupied the house was a Baronet Lohrville. It seemed that the people held the late baronet in awe, for they hesitated to speak of him. This grocer related a tale concerning the disappearance of four girls one dark night some years ago. Popular belief had and still has it that the baronet kidnaped them. This idea seems utterly ludicrous to me, for the superstitious villagers can not substantiate their suspicions. By the way, this merchant also informed us that the Lohrville home is called the "Bat's Belfry". Personally I can see no connection between the residence and the ascribed title, as I have not noticed any bats around during my sojourn here.

My meditations on this matter were rudely interrupted by Mortimer, who complained of bats in the cellar—a rather queer coincidence. He said that he continually felt them brushing against his cheeks and that he feared they would become entangled in his hair. Of course, Leon and I went down to look for them, but we could not see any of them. However, Leon stated that one struck him, which I doubt. It is just possible that

sudden drafts of air may have been the cause of the delusions.

This incident, Marc, was just the forerunner of the odd things that have been occurring since then. I am about to enumerate the most important of these incidents to you, and I hope you will be able to explain them.

Three days ago activities started in earnest. At that date Mortimer came to me and breathlessly informed me that no light could be kept in the cellar. Leon and I investigated and found that under no circumstances could a lamp or match be kept lit in the cellar, just as Mortimer had said. My only explanation of this is that it is due to the air currents in the cellar, which seem disturbed. It is true a flashlight could be kept alight, but even that seemed dimmed. I can not attempt to explain the later fact.

Yesterday, Leon, who is a devout Catholic, took a few drops from a flask of holy water, which he continually carries with him, and descended into the cellar with the firm intention of driving out, if there were therein ensconced, any evil spirits. On the bottom of the steps I noticed, some time ago, a large stone tablet. As Leon came down the steps, a large drop of the blessed fluid fell on this tablet. The drop of water actually sizzled while Leon muttered some incantations, in the midst of which he suddenly stopped and fled precipitantly, mumbling that the cellar was incontestably the very entrance to hell, guarded by the fiend incarnate, himself! I confess to you, my dear Marc, that I was astounded at this remarkable occurrence.

Last night, while the three of us sat together in the spacious drawing room of this building, the lamp was blown out. I say "blown out" because there is no doubt that it was, and by some superhuman agency. There was not a breath of air stirring outside, yet I, who was sitting just across from the lamp, felt a cool draft. No one else noticed this draft. It was just as if someone directly opposite me had blown forcibly at the lamp, or as if the wing of a powerful bird had passed by it.

There can be no doubt there is something radically wrong in this house, and I am determined to find out what it is, regardless of consequences.

(Here the letter terminates abruptly, as if it were to be completed at a later date.)

THE two doctors bending over the body of Sir Harry Barclay in Lohrville Manor at last ceased their examinations.

"I can not account for this astounding loss of blood, Dr. Mordaunt."

"Neither can I, Dr. Greene. He is so devoid of blood that some supernatural agency must have kept him alive!" He laughed lightly.

"About this loss of blood—I was figuring on internal hemorrhages as the cause, but there are absolutely no signs of anything of the sort. According to the expression of his features, which is too horrible for even me to gaze at——"

"And me."

"—— he died from some terrible fear of something, or else he witnessed some horrifying scene."

"Most likely the latter."

"I think we had better pronounce death due to internal hemorrhage and apoplexy."

"I agree."

"Then we shall do so."

The physicians bent over the open book on the table. Suddenly Dr. Greene straightened up and his hand delved into his pocket and came out with a match.

"Here is a match, Dr. Mordaunt. Scratch it and apply the flame to that book and say nothing to anyone."

"It is for the best."

EXCERPTS *from the journal of Sir Harry E. Barclay, found beside his body in Lohrville Manor on July 17, 1925.*

June 25—Last night I had a curious nightmare. I dreamed that I met a beautiful girl in the wood around my father's castle in Lancaster. Without knowing why, we embraced, our lips meeting and remaining in that position for at least half an hour! Queer dream that! I must have had another nightmare of a different nature, although I can not recall it; for, upon looking in the mirror this morning, I found my face devoid of all color—rather drawn.

Later—Leon has told me that he had a similar dream, and as he is a confirmed misogynist, I can not interpret it. Strange that it should be so parallel to mine in every way.

June 29—Mortimer came to me early this morning and said he would not stay another instant; for he had certainly seen a ghost last night. A handsome old man, he said. He seemed horrified that the old man had kissed him. He must have dreamed it. I persuaded him to stay on these grounds and solemnly told him to say nothing about it. Leon remarked that the dream had returned in every particular to him the preceding night, and that he was not feeling well. I advised him to see a doctor, but he roundly refused to do so. He said, referring to the horrible nightmare (as he termed it), that tonight he would sprinkle a few drops of holy water on himself and that (he stated) would drive away any evil influence, if there were any, connected with his dreams. Strange that he should attribute everything to evil entities!

Later—I made some inquiries today and I find that the description of the Baronet Lohrville fits to every detail the "ghost" of Mortimer's dream. I also learned that several small children disappeared from the countryside during the life of the last of the Lohrvilles;—not that they should be connected, but it seems the ignorant people ascribe their vanishing to the baronet.

June 30—Leon claims he did not have the dream (which, by the way, revisited me last night), because of the potent effect of the holy water.

July 1—Mortimer has left. He says he can not live in the same house with the devil. It seems he must have actually seen the ghost of old Lohrville, although Leon scoffs at the idea.

July 4—I had the same dream again last night. I felt very ill this morning, but was able to dispel the feeling easily during the day. Leon has used all the holy water, but as tomorrow is Sunday he will get some at the village parish when he attends mass.

July 5—I tried to procure the services of another chef this morning in the village, but I am all at sea. No one in the town will enter the house, not even for one hundred pounds a week, they declare! I shall be forced to get along without one or send to London.

Leon experienced a misfortune today. Riding home after mass, his holy water spilled almost all from the bottle, and later the bottle, containing the remainder of it, fell to the ground and broke. Leon, nonplussed, remarked that he would get another as soon as possible from the parish priest.

July 6—Both of us had the dream again last night. I feel rather weak, and Leon does, too. Leon went to a doctor, who asked him whether he had been cut, or severely injured so as to cause a heavy loss of blood, or if he had suffered from internal hemorrhages. Leon said no, and the doctor prescribed raw onions and some other things for Leon to eat. Leon forgot his holy water.

July 9—The dream again. Leon had a different nightmare—about an old man, who, he said, bit him. I asked him to show me where the man had bitten him in his dream, and when he loosened his collar to show me, sure enough, there were two tiny punctures on his throat. He and I are both feeling miserably weak.

July 15—Leon left me today. I am firmly convinced that he went suddenly mad, for this morning he evinced an intense desire to invade the cellar again. He said that something seemed to draw him. I did not stop him, and some time later, as I was engrossed in a volume of Wells, he came shrieking up the cellar steps and dashed madly through the room in which I sat. I ran after him and, cornering him in his room, forcibly detained him. I asked for an explanation and all he could do was moan over and over.

"*Mon Dieu, Monsieur,* leave this accursed place at once. Leave it, *Monsieur,* I beg of you. *Le diable——le diable!*" At this he dashed away from me and ran at top speed from the house, I after him. In the road I shouted after him and all I could catch of the words wafted back to me by the wind, were: "*Lamais——le diable——Mon Dieu——tablet——Book of Thoth.*" All very significant words, "*Le diable*" and "*Mon Dieu*"—"the devil" and "my God"—I paid little attention to. But Lamais was a species of female vampire known intimately to a few select sorcerers only, and the *Book of Thoth* was the Egyptian book of magic. For a few minutes I entertained the rather wild fancy that the *Book of Thoth* was ensconced somewhere in this building, and as I racked my brains for a suitable connection between "tablet" and *Book of Thoth* I at last became convinced that the book lay beneath the tablet at the foot of the cellar steps. **I am going down to investigate.**

JULY 16—I have it! The *Book of Thoth!* It was below the stone tablet as I thought. The spirits guarding it evidently did not wish me to disturb its resting place, for they roused the air currents to a semblance of a gale while I worked to get the stone away. The book is secured by a heavy lock of antique pattern.

I had the dream again last night, but in addition I could almost swear that I saw the ghosts of old Lohrville and four beautiful girls. What a coincidence! I am very weak today, hardly able to walk around. There is no doubt that this house is infested not by bats, but by vampires! Lamais! If I could only find their corpses I would drive sharp stakes through them.

Later—I made a new and shocking discovery today. I went down to the place where the tablet lay, and another rock below the cavity wherein the *Book of Thoth* had lain gave way below me and I found myself in a vault with about a score of skeletons—all of little children! If this house *is* inhabited by vampires, it is only too obvious that these skeletons are those of their unfortunate victims. However, I firmly believe that there is another cavern somewhere below, wherein the bodies of the vampires are hidden.

Later—I have been looking over the book by De Rochas and I have hit upon an excellent plan to discover the bodies of the vampires! I shall use the *Book of Thoth* to summon the vampires before me and force them to reveal the hiding place for their voluptuous bodies! De Rochas says that it can be done.

Nine o'clock—As the conditions are excellent at this time I am going to start to summon the vampires. Someone is passing and I hope he or she does not interrupt me in my work or tell anyone in the town to look in here. The book, as I mentioned before, is secured by a heavy seal, and

I had trouble to loosen it. At last I succeeded in breaking it and I opened the book to find the place I need in my work of conjuring up the vampires. I found it and I am beginning my incantations. The atmosphere in the room is changing slowly and it is becoming intolerably dark. The air currents in the room are swirling angrily, and the lamp has gone out . . . . I am confident that the vampires will appear soon.

I am correct. There are some shades materializing in the room. They are becoming more distinct . . . . there are five of them, four females and one male. Their features are very distinct. . . . They are casting covert glances in my direction. . . . Now they are glaring malevolently at me.

Good God! I have forgotten to place myself in a magic circle and I greatly fear the vampires will attack me! I am only too correct. They are moving in my direction. My God! . . . . But stay! They are halting! The old baronet is gazing at me with his glittering eyes fiery with hate. The four female vampires smile voluptuously upon me.

Now, if ever, is my chance to break their evil spell. *Prayer?* But I can not pray! I am forever banished from the sight of God for calling upon Satan to aid me. But even for that I can not pray . . . . I am hypnotized by the malefic leer disfiguring the countenance of the baronet. There is a sinister gleam in the eyes of the four beautiful ghouls. They glide toward me, arms outstretched. Their sinuous, obnoxious forms are before me; their crimson lips curved in a diabolically triumphant smile. I can not bear to see the soft caress of their tongues on their red lips. I am resisting with all the power of my will, but what is one mere will against an infernal horde of ghouls?

God! Their foul presence taints my very soul! The baronet is moving forward. His mordacious propinquity casts a reviling sensation of obscenity about me. If I can not appeal to God I must implore Satan to grant me time to construct the magic circle.

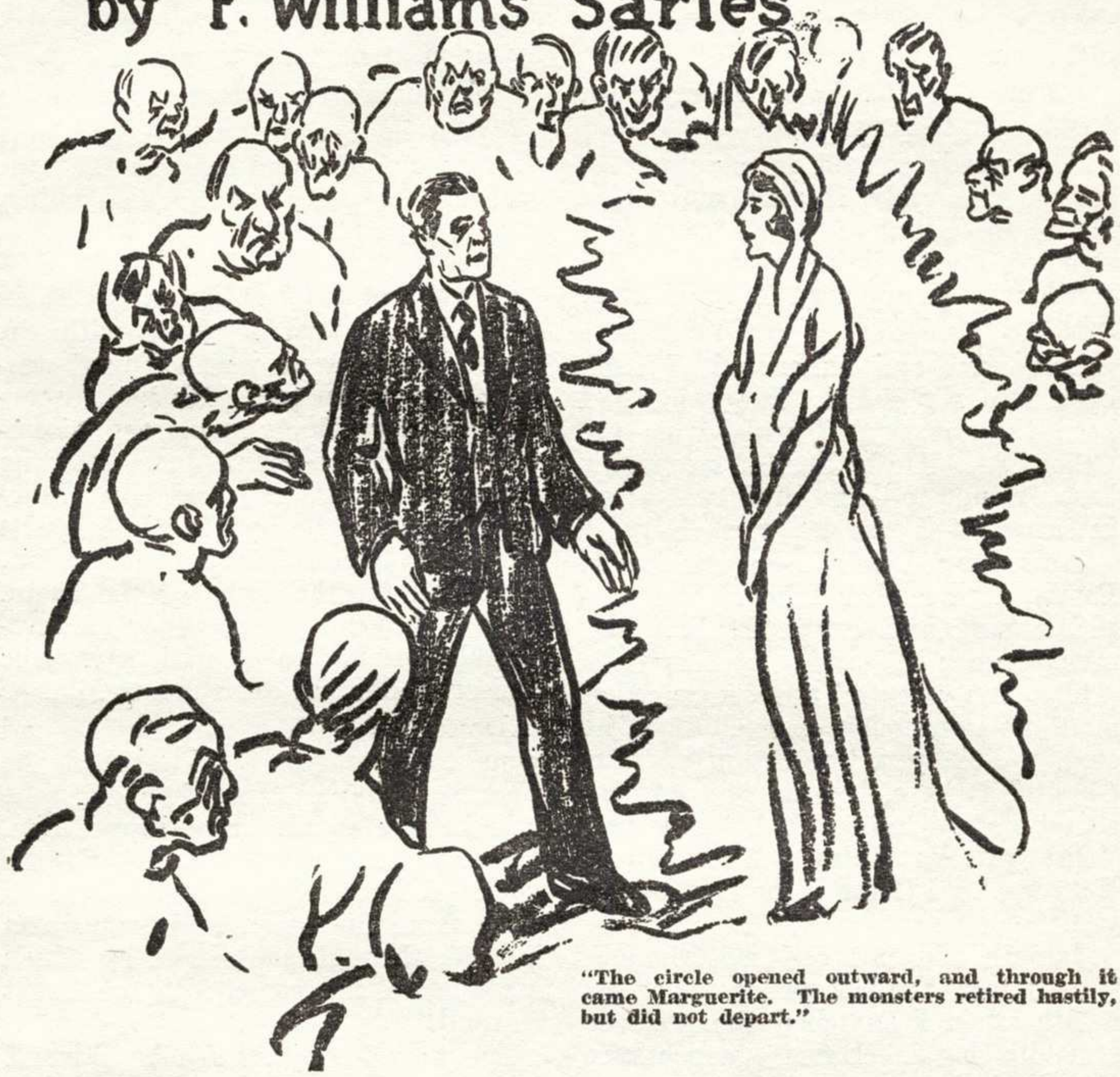
I can not tolerate their virulence . . . . I endeavored to rise but I could not do so. . . . I am no longer master of my own will! The vampires are leering demoniacally at me. . . . I am doomed to die . . . . and yet to live forever in the ranks of the Undead.

Their faces are approaching closer to mine and soon I shall sink into oblivion . . . . but anything is better than this . . . . to see the malignant Undead around me. . . . A sharp stinging sensation in my throat. . . . My God! . . . . it is—— . . . .



Queen of the Vortex

by F. Williams Sarles



"The circle opened outward, and through it came Marguerite. The monsters retired hastily, but did not depart."

I HAD mourned Paul Duval as dead until there came that mysterious voice from out of the infinite.

In my study is a radio receiver of more than ordinary workmanship. Not a set for amusement only, but a scientifically accurate instrument. Like most "fans" I liked to amuse myself by picking up distant stations. One night, as I idly turned the dials, I noticed the tubes grow brighter as certain markings on the dial were passed. I opened the cabinet and peered into it. Everything seemed to be in its proper position. Then, as I let the cover drop, the tubes began to glow with a brilliancy which grew until it exceeded that of the electric lights in the room.

"Something 'shorted'," I thought as my hand approached the instrument with the intention of shutting off the batteries. Then something happened which caused me to draw back my hand as though it had been stung.

I must have sensed that no earthly station was coming through. Perhaps it was because the first word called

was my name; perhaps it was because the tones that cried out from the ether were filled with a quality of sound which could come from no earthly source. Faint, vibrant, but clear came a voice:

"Harry! help! help! Harry! for God's sake help me, I am——"

The words cut off in a volume of sound, unearthly squeals and cries. My hand darted to the dial, but as I touched it the lights resumed their former brilliancy and I could hear nothing.

Unnerved and exhausted, I sank back into my chair. The voice had been that of Paul Duval—from the Other Side. He had called on me, his best friend, to help him, and—God in heaven!—I was helpless!

How long I sat I do not know. Dimly, I remember I heard the telephone ring and heard Janisch, my man, answer it.

The first part of the conversation made no impression on me. Then he said, "Well, yes," reluctantly, "Dr. Chaptel is here, but he has left instructions not to be called." A pause. "Oh! this is Baird's Sanitarium? Very well. I'll see if he'll speak to you."

Janisch did not call me, though. Hardly were the last words out of his mouth when I snatched the receiver from his hand. Baird's was where Duval's body was confined.

"Yes! Yes! What is it?" I demanded impatiently.

"Is this Dr. Chaptel?" came a voice.

"It is. What do you want?"

"Dr. Baird asked me to tell you Paul Duval has overpowered his guard and escaped."

"Are you sure?" I queried faintly.

The reply left no doubt. The attendant had heard a persistent tapping in Duval's cell. After a time, thinking it strange, he had opened the door to investigate, only to have the body bear him down in a moment. Before the man could collect his wits, Duval had somehow managed to escape. The guard could not be blamed, for the patient had never shown any signs of violence, and was consequently rated as harmlessly insane.

"What are you doing about it?"

"We have a party of attendants looking for him and have notified the police. As soon as we hear anything, we'll let you know."

A WORD of explanation is due those who are not familiar with the weird experiment which Duval successfully performed. He had discovered a ray which made the disembodied spirit bodies visible. Into the influence of this ray had come Marguerite, a girl he had loved, but who had died. Seeing her there, beautiful, angel-like in the light of the beam, he had become possessed of an irresistible longing to be with her. She had stretched her arms out to him.

Down the path of the ray he had gone to meet her. He reached the phantom shape. Into her arms he had been clasped. She kissed him, and Duval's body slumped to the floor. A moment later I saw his soul arise from his body, and walk, arm in arm, through the screen by which Marguerite had come, into the Great Beyond.

But Duval *was not dead!* When I had shut off the power and rushed to his side, I found his *body alive.* The soul, the intelligent part of his being, had gone from his body, but that body continued to breathe and otherwise perform the functions of life. What remained was mere unintelligent clay, animated by the spark of life. It was Duval's body, but not Duval. The part that was the real Paul did not inhabit its fleshly dwelling. That dwelling, that part which was left, was what men term an idiot.

Do you wonder at my surprize that this body had suddenly become animated; that it should attack a man,

when for several years it had even to be fed? For five years I had confined it in Baird's Sanitarium, diagnosed as having a progressively deteriorating dementia. And now——

EXPECTING a sleepless night, I finally went to bed. In spite of expectations, however, sleep overtook me; broken by dreams vague but terrible. Perhaps Duval's escape, coming so closely upon the voice, had filled my mind with half-formed horrors. Or it may have been my subconscious reactions to the presentiments which weighed upon my conscious mind. Perhaps, without knowing it, I was being prepared for what was to follow.

I awoke with a start. I knew I had been dreaming, but I knew it had not been a dream which awakened me. For a moment I did not know what it was. Moonlight was flooding the room. Nothing seemed amiss.

Then I saw it. Perhaps a slight creaking of the door had disturbed my slumbers. It was slowly swinging inward. I watched it, fascinated. It opened wider. A head was thrust into the room. The hair on it was wildly awry. There was a bloody scratch down one cheek. The eyes had a fixed, a set look, like those in the head of a dead man. But they were not sightless, for they rested on me for a moment with a gaze that sent quivering fright through my body. Then the mouth widened in a terrible leer.

With this, the fetters which bound me fell away, and I started to my feet. With the suddenness of a missile launched from a catapult, the body followed the head into the room with a terrific leap which sprawled me back on the bed. I tried to fight the Thing off with my hands, but fingers of dreadful power caught my wrists, holding them fast.

As the grotesquely twisted face was thrust into mine, I saw it was Duval's. But how changed from the old Duval! I noticed the creature, even as it held me, seemed trying to say something—to reassure me. But the vocal cords refused to form the words and the result was an unintelligible mumble.

Duval seemed to realize, at last, that I could not understand. An awful despair came into his face. The fingers tightened until it seemed my wrist bones would shatter under the pressure. Then the features relaxed, and I was drawn to my feet.

Powerless to resist, I was half carried, half dragged to the living room. He threw me heavily into a chair and turned away. As an automaton, he approached my radio and threw in the switch. The tubes grew bright. He carefully fixed the dials in a certain position. Without a word or gesture of warning, he dropped to the floor. Instantly, the light in the tubes grew brighter and a voice came from the set.

"It's all right, Harry," Duval's voice again; "I had to get in communication with you some way, and couldn't chance waiting for you accidentally to set the dials again."

"But — but, where are you?" I asked inanely.

"On the Other Side," he answered with a tinge of bitterness in his voice.

"Well, why are you — how did ——?" I began, a hundred questions at once swirling in my brain, clamoring for utterance.

"Don't make me explain now, old man. I am in danger, subject at any moment to attack from a force of which you have not the faintest conception. I want to return to life, to get back to my body, which, God help me, I left, but powerful influences are at work to keep me back. Harry! I can get back only with your help. Will you give it?"

"But—but why don't you rejoin your body? You were in it just now."

"Not in it, Harry. Just animating it with a very imperfect control. But don't waste time. I am not in rapport with the Second Cycle now, but may be at any moment. In other words, I am not observed now. When I am I shall have to stop." This last significantly.

"Go ahead, then." I was beginning to recover my mental stability somewhat by now. Had I known what was in store, I should not have told him to "go ahead" so boldly.

"Listen then! Get the old apparatus. Set it up the best you can. You may do this from my notes, if you can unscramble them. Set it up in this room. I can get you through this set, if you need anything explained. With the ray operating, and with your help, I believe I can get back.

"Get this carefully. Success may depend on it. Communication through the radio must not be disturbed, so do not touch it. A slight movement will throw it out of tune. And whatever you do——"

The voice stopped, was drowned out by an infernal screeching from the receiver. Then his voice again.

"Don't change the dials, Harry. Don't change the dials. My God! I believe they are taking me to the Vortex! Don't change the dials,—and watch my body. Don't change—a-a-a-a-ahhh——"

The despairing words changed to a hellish scream which drowned thought. A sound behind me. I turned in time to dodge a blow from the again-animated body of Duval. He did not attempt it again, but started toward the radio with the evident intention of doing something to it. With Duval's last words ringing in my ears, the idea came to me that he, least of all, would wish the set interfered with. The thought came to me it was not Duval in control this time. With the thought came action. I leaped at the body. I crumpled it to the floor just as the hands would have touched the instrument. Janisch came in answer to my frantic cries, and together we succeeded in overcoming the man, who did not seem to have the strength he had when I was attacked.

As soon as we had subdued it the body relaxed and was again the supine, inert mass of flesh which for five years had been the only earthly part of Duval.

Then the warning. From the set came a new voice, beautiful in its contralto cadences, sinister in its blood-chilling tones.

"Do not meddle in this, mortal. Beware what you do. I, Tasmari, Queen of the Vortex, sister of Bari, who is ruler of the Second Cycle, have spoken."

SEVERAL days passed. Yet no voice came from the radio. Duval's body remained inert, and I passed the time in feverish anxiety. Not daring to leave the set unguarded, for fear some malignant entity might control the body of Duval and wreck the instrument beyond all hope of further communication, I had watched it continually, snatching such sleep as I could in the room with the set; placing Janisch on guard when physical exhaustion drove me to rest.

But I had not been idle. All of Duval's apparatus had been brought to my study, and with the aid of his old note-books, I had begun the task of re-assembling the projectors. I knew I must get it together. Whether I could or not, I did not know.

It might be well here to recall the principle which Duval had discovered. Beginning with the known facts that matter and energy are indestructible, he reasoned that intelligence was something apart from either, a force which could not be destroyed. In its nature, if the hypothesis it could not be destroyed were correct, it must retain its character as

intelligence, and hence have a definite entity.

Experiments had led him to believe the soul was of a definite composition, too tenuous for the eye of man to behold. He reasoned further, that could he but make all the known rays of light visible to the eye, the total reflection from this unknown substance would render the soul perceptible.

His experiments had carried him farther and farther until at last he had achieved success. With the aid of his wonderful ray and a screen against which he projected it, he was able finally to bring actual disembodied entities into view as long as they remained in the path of the ray and in front of the screen.

The rest has been recorded. What he had done, what had happened to him beyond the pale, I had never known. Now he was calling on me to bring him back. I wanted to succeed, to help, but I was fearful, fearful of something. Maybe a prescience of future terror, maybe of admission we were delving into that of which no man should enquire.

THE day had come. I looked upon the machine, assembled from the notes Duval had left. Time after time I had come upon obstacles which it seemed I could not surmount. Again and again I had called upon Duval to instruct me. I was half mad at times. But the voice had not come again, and the silence mocked me.

You may imagine with what feelings, with what fears, I at last threw in the switch which controlled the projectors. Janisch, whom I had taken into my confidence, stood beside me. Would disembodied spirits be seen once more in the pale light of the ray? Would Marguerite be there, —Duval? A thin trickle of perspiration rolled down my forehead on to my cheeks. I found myself clenching my fists tightly. My eyes were held to the screen.

Gradually the ray gained in intensity. The luminous screen seemed to spring into greater brightness. My eyes strained for the first sight of the little pinpoints of light which would herald the materialization of spirits. My ears were attuned for the first faint bell-like sound, such as had announced the advent of Marguerite.

The screen was a riotous thing of color, light and shadow.

Then, as a meteor appears piercing the atmospheric envelope of the earth, the first tiny pinpoint appeared. A few more—then more. It was happening as it had happened that night when Duval had materialized Marguerite. The points of light would arrange themselves into definite outlines soon, and I would be assured the first step for Duval's rescue had been successfully taken. I watched eagerly.

My God! What was that? The little bells seemed ringing as before, but with a difference. They did not ring in musical cadences. They were harsh, discordant; a horror to the ears. And, the little points of light! As fast as they appeared, now, they were extinguished. Those which had come first died, one by one. Died! That is the word. The impression surged over me they were being killed. I felt as though they were living things, being put to death by the agency of some malignant power. A strange conflict of some sort was waging.

Desperately, I switched in more power and was rewarded for a moment by seeing the little lights come faster than they died. But the ascendancy was only for a moment. Soon they were all gone. All quenched with the same deadly method.

I was stunned. Failure! I turned trembling from the screen and reached for the controls. A sharp exclamation from Janisch brought my eyes back to the screen. The light and shadow played upon it, as before.

But there was something else there; something fearful. Janisch groaned in fright.

Within the beam there had grown an awful shape—awful in the sense of impressive power it gave. From its shadowy face, brilliant eyes bored into my soul. They fastened themselves on my brain. I was going. My very ego was being torn from the body it inhabited. Came a brilliant flash; momentary darkness and the sense of being borne through space immeasurable with the speed of a fleeting comet.

My eyes were tightly closed, until I became aware of a terrific light shining in my face. Slowly I unclosed my lids. What I saw would have unseated my reason, had such a thing been possible. I was peering through a sort of doorway, which had a familiar appearance to me. I recognized it as the framework of the screen, but *I was on the reverse side!* The beam was projected toward me, while near the controls, to one side of the machine, I saw Janisch hysterically working over a prone figure, which I knew at once to be mine.

I leaped up, dashed back into the screen crying:

"Janisch, Janisch, don't turn off the ray. I'm coming back." I tried to act as I had spoken, but a wave of irresistible force drew me back, and my last sight was a glimpse of Janisch's startled face as he looked in my direction.

I gazed wildly about me, but could see nothing, except the vague, golden light which covered everything. A feeling of utter helplessness swept over me. What could I do? Where could I go?

With an effort I obtained control over myself. I had been let in for something, I knew not what, and I suspected it would not be pleasant, but better to meet it resolutely than bound in the fetters of fear.

I shouted. In answer came a ripple of low mocking laughter. Seeming to come from nowhere, *she* appeared. It was, distinct now to my sight, the figure I had vaguely seen in the beam. The eyes were no longer terrible, though they were cold and chilled as the Arctic snows. They were set in a forehead of flawless beauty. A pale and noble forehead; correctly proportioned and flawless nose; slightly tinted cheeks and deliciously curved lips. Her figure was beautiful and devoid of clothing—enough to make the red blood flow swiftly through the veins of any man, but on me, at that time, she produced not the slightest emotion other than that of admiration for her beauty. In this plane, fleshly instincts do not exist.

As I gazed at her in wonder, the lips curved into a cool smile, and she said:

"You were told not to meddle, mortal."

"Where am I?" I asked, choosing to disregard her statement.

"In the Second Cycle."

"And you?"

"I am Tasmari," she replied haughtily.

"Tasmari, the owner of the warning voice," went through my mind and I stepped backward somewhat hastily. She noticed my movement and smiled at me with contempt. That smile made me ashamed of myself, somehow, and more,—it caused a hot resentment to pass over me. Who was she, spirit, angel, or demon, to assume an air of superiority to me? I was also a free spirit. Fear dropped from me, and from that time on I do not believe I felt it—at least not fear of the powers of the Second Cycle, though there is nothing reprehensible in fearing Bari and Tasmari, and the tremendous power they control.

"Then, Tasmari, where is Paul Duval?" I shot at her.

"Where you can not reach him."

"Then you are going to tell me where he is and how to reach him," I angrily cried as I stepped threateningly toward her.

"Stay where you are!" commandingly.

"Tell me where Duval is, or I'll ——" I stopped. Tasmari's face grew terrible with anger and once again those eyes found mine. I suddenly felt weak and ill. I was held immovable in some power. She seemed to be receding from me. Pressure was exerted on me from every direction. Strange sensations pulsed over me in waves. Then her lips parted once more in a mocking smile and the pain left me. She seemed near me again, in her former position.

"Know, Harry Chaptel, that such as you may not threaten the Queen of the Vortex. That was but a small sample of the awful power I wield. Have you learned a lesson?"

I did not reply, but I cast my eyes to the ground, not caring to give her another opportunity to use her weapons against me.

"Ah! You fear me! That is good —and safe," she sneered.

"No, I do not fear you." The angry cloud began to form on her face again and I set myself to resist her, but her face cleared.

"Better that you did. But, remember this, Harry Chaptel, I charge you to communicate with no other until you have been before the Council. Beware of speaking to others."

With that she was gone, leaving me to stare rather stupidly at the spot where she had stood. I understood later, in this place where all is thought, that the entities are where they will themselves to be. Had I known it, I could have brought myself into the presence of Tasmari again by the mere act of concentrating my thought upon her. But I did not know it, and besides I had no wish to see her again.

Up to now, I had had no opportunity to look about me. I cast my eyes around and was disappointed. There was nothing anywhere except the golden light I have mentioned. No streets of gold. No angel choirs. Nothing which we are told may be expected on the Other Side. Where were the wonderful mansions? I tried to picture in my mind just what I had expected to see.

In the distance there now appeared a wondrous city. High-walled and many-towered it reared itself in splendor before my sight. From out its gates a resplendent host was pouring, while from the direction of the city came the sound of beautiful music, angel voices. As the rays of the setting sun send streamers of light upward into the clouds, so did the walls and towers shoot a glory of radiance interminably into the vastness above the scene. The glory of heaven, as I had pictured it, unfolded itself to me.

Never believing the stories of accepted belief concerning heaven, I had nevertheless considered them beautiful. In spite of unbelief, of agnosticism, there are these pictures in the mind of every man. They are drawn by the imagination, and are a part of us whether we realize it or not.

Since Duval had proved the existence of the ego after death, these thoughts had been much plainer. I had often speculated on what the Other Side would be like, and matured intellect could not banish the pictures placed in my mind during my childhood years.

Then here was the City of Gold. Its hosts of angels, archangels, seraphim and cherubim, pouring from its jeweled gates, encircling its majestic towers.

But the angel faces grew suddenly dim, and the Eternal City vanished from before me. A sullen red cloud grew in its place, and instead of the

singing I now heard the screechings of the damned. Brilliant flashes of jagged flame rent the cloud and there burst upon me a hellish horde.

They gibbered and screamed with a hate I could feel. They were evil, the army of Satan. Shouldering its way through the horrible throng came a hideous monster, who looked at me with evil triumph. It was the same that had preceded Marguerite in the ray on the first night of Duval's experiment. It was the soul of a degenerate murderer, she had informed Duval. As I remembered this, it came to me that each of the horrors I was beholding was the soul of someone who had previously existed in life. The evil they had let into their souls had made monsters of them. Was this to be my fate?

They pressed closer upon me. Sin and evil emanated from them in reeking, soul-scorching blasts. I felt myself filled with unholy thoughts, terrible desires. Only with an effort did I withstand the almost irresistible temptation to partake of their sinful debaucheries, to join with them in sinfulness. They surrounded me on every side.

"My God! my God!" I cried. "Is there no one to help me?"

At the sound of the Name, they fell back as in fear, thrusting out their hands as if to ward off a blow. They stayed thus for perhaps a heart's beat, then came swarming back to me again. Not to be denied this time, they beat me down with the evil of their thought. They confused me with a maelstrom of horrible desires sent from their beings to mine. I was about to perish. My soul was to lose itself in the hideousness of sin.

Penetrating the babel about me came the sound of tiny bronze bells. The monsters ceased their efforts toward me and looked uneasily about. The sound became plainer, and its music fell upon my tortured soul with the divine blessedness of a prayer. The circle opened outward, and through it came Marguerite. The monsters retired hastily, but did not depart. Gathered in the distance they watched, sullenly.

THOUGH I should have felt a gratefulness toward my rescuer, I found instead that my being was filled with resentment. Throughout the years that had passed since the night Duval had left, I had always cherished within my heart a sort of hatred for this woman — a hatred born of the fact that it was she who had tempted Paul beyond the pale. Now I felt my own troubles were due, in a large measure, to her. I should not have treated her as I did, however, and I offer no excuses, except— well, I was not entirely free from the evil which had just encompassed me.

When I saw the monsters had withdrawn, I looked into Marguerite's face. She met my eyes with a smile, and I returned it with a look of sullen hatred.

"So you are Marguerite?" I began.

"Yes," she replied simply, perplexed at my attitude.

"Have you come here to see the finish of the deviltry you began five years ago?" I asked harshly.

"To see—why, I came here to help you."

I laughed unbelievingly.

"Besides," haughtily, "the 'deviltry', as you call it, began with the mad desire of Paul to see what should have remained hidden from him."

"So that is your excuse," I flared. "I suppose you blame him because you enticed him into this place." She made no reply to this, but bowed her head.

"Why don't you answer me? No reason to ask. You—you—Satan! Was there ever a creature so despicable?" At the sound of the name of the Prince of Darkness, Marguer-

ite shuddered as if with fear, and the horde came leaping closer.

"Stop!" she cried, "there is——."

"I won't stop. You listen to me," I flared. "I know I can't hurt you here, but I can tell you what you are. A fiend out of hell! A traitress! The betrayer of the man who loved you! Knowing he loved you, you used your devilish witchery to lure him here. Having him here you desert him. You should be cast into the nethermost pit of hell," I screamed. At each angry word the horde had crept closer and closer.

"No more," she commanded coldly. "Would you engulf yourself again in the power of sin? Hatred has no place here—except among these," she gestured toward the monsters.

Seeing them again so close, I forced myself to be more calm. I did not want them howling around me again.

"Just the same, I have spoken my thoughts," I averred, unconsciously using a term, true in life, but out of place in the Second Cycle, where all is thought.

"Then I shall say to you the truth," she replied. "I have never deserted Paul Duval. You make accusations which you can not know are true, which *are* not true. How little you know!

"I have helped him, helped though it placed me in danger of the Vortex. If Bari or Tasmari knew a hundredth part of what I have done, I should not be here. Some day they will burst through my isolation and learn the truth. Even now Tasmari seeks the one who tried to meet you at the ray.

"Oh! if it were only myself to be considered, I would isolate myself from you with a barrier so strong that a thousand wills could not break it."

"I wish you would," I retorted. "Leave me to get Paul out of this and I don't care what you do."

"And if I do, will you free him?" she asked, a questioning smile on her lips.

"I will try."

"And how will you do it? Do you know where he is?"

Here she had me. I didn't have the slightest idea as to how to proceed to free Paul. It suddenly occurred to me I might have to have help. I looked at her more closely than I had done before. She was beautiful beyond a doubt.

"So," scornfully, "he does not know what to do. Yet he would drive away the only being in the Second Cycle who is willing to help."

"You help?" I queried. "How can you help?"

"I am one of the Council."

"That means nothing to me. If you are willing to help, why haven't you done so?"

"I have. But for me, Paul could never have gotten through to you. I tried to meet you first, but Tasmari interfered, and her power is so much greater than mine. I can not help Paul more, because he has set his mind against help from me."

"Why?" suspiciously.

"He loves me."

Paul still loved her after what she had done? After she had brought him to this plane? If he loved her, why did he want to return? Seeming to read me, she burst out impetuously:

"Ah! Can't **you** understand? Taking Paul through was such a little thing, it seemed, when I came here. Time? It doesn't exist in the Second Cycle. So what matters it, if a being comes here early or late? It must come sometime. I did not know his coming would not be like mine, leaving all desires of life behind.

"Paul is unhappy. Knowing he can do so much good in life, to keep so many from becoming as these," pointing to the horde, which was again in the distance, "he wants to

return. Other souls have wanted to go back, but they can not. But Paul, —his body lives on. He has the opportunity.'"

It suddenly came to me that I should like to return for the same reason. I had come to realize my own life had been spent searching in the wrong channel; that I should have used my knowledge to bring about a better humanity. Sickness and poverty beget evil, and evil made up the horde.

"Can't we be friends, and work together?" softly.

A feeling of tenderness and love welled up within me. The shutters had fallen from my eyes, and I was at last fit to be with Marguerite, to work with her.

"Yes!" I replied. I glanced in triumph toward the horde, but they had disappeared.

"Gone," she volunteered, noticing my look of surprize. "They existed only because your thoughts called them up. Thought is all in the Second Cycle."

"The Golden City?" I asked.

"Your thought also."

"Then they were not real?"

"Thought is the only reality there is," she answered enigmatically.

MARGUERITE and I stood before Paul Duval. Instructed by her, I had concentrated my thought on him, and had found myself almost at once in his presence. He was clothed as I had last seen him, for in the Second Cycle the beings are dressed as the eye of the beholder consciously, or subconsciously, sees them. That he should be clothed as I last saw him was natural.

He was suspended motionless a little above the plain on which we stood. He did not seem to see me, or to be aware of my presence. It was not until I spoke to him, and he did not answer, that I saw something was amiss.

He seemed encompassed in a clear amber substance, the nature of which I do not to this day really know. I stretched forth my hand to touch him, but the substance prevented it. At the same instant Duval's body seemed to be covered with a myriad of tiny golden flames. They flickered weirdly over him but did not seem to possess the quality of heat. I withdrew my hand and the flames subsided. I tried it again, and the fingers of fire flared up again, but brighter and somewhat angrily.

"Oh, don't! Don't try to touch him!" cried the girl.

"Why?" I asked stupidly.

"Can't you see he is isolated?"

"Isolated?"

"Yes. Tasmari isolated him for trying to communicate with you. They (she and Bari) feared he might get back to the First Cycle,—life."

"Why does this Bari want to keep him here?"

"That Bari knows best. Paul has been purified by the Thought Council. When that has occurred, the soul is subject to Bari, and Bari holds what he has."

This reminded me of what Tasmari had commanded. She had told me to speak to no one until I had been purified by this Thought Council. So that was her plan? After the Council had done its work, I could be held as was Duval, and neither of us could go back. She was afraid I would learn too much.

"Tasmari has commanded me to speak to no one," I stated. "What would happen if she found me speaking to you?"

"She would first force you before the Council. After, they would do with you as they wished, or as he wished. He is supreme. They might send you to the Vortex."

Duval had shrieked something about being carried to the Vortex, when he had talked with me over the radio. A sudden idea came to me.

"Is that the Vortex?" motioning to Paul.

"No, thank God, it isn't. The Vortex is—a horror. It is a maelstrom of punishing thoughts. There is no return for the soul cast in. It is a seething whirlpool of tempestuous sin. It drags you down and down and at last shatters the very entity which is you. It is death. The real death. After that there is nothing."

"There may be a Third Cycle?" I hazarded.

Her face brightened.

"That is what some of us think. If there were we should not fear Bari so."

If there were? How like our own life! Always the fear of the unknown. One veil torn aside, and another before us, impenetrable. Did things go on and on, or was there an end, a stopping place? Was there at last a heaven, surely a God? Maybe the inscrutable would unwind itself, maybe — but why speculate? My work was to get Paul Duval and myself back to life again.

"What power holds Paul?"

"The only one there is, the power of thought."

"If that is the case, why can't we get Paul out of there?"

"You could. I could, but it would mean punishment if I were caught. I have wanted to, so much, but Paul made me promise I wouldn't try, and has focused his thought against help from me. He has a strong will."

"Do you fear the Vortex?" I asked, with a shade of scorn, bred of my ignorance.

"Yes," candidly. "But that would not stop me from helping him. If I should break down the isolation, there is no place to go, and he would simply be put back into it again, and my usefulness would end."

"Could they put me in the—Vortex?"

"I do not know what your status is. Maybe they could."

"Could Tasmari?"

"Only if the Council has the power, and then only by its authority."

"Here goes for a try, anyhow," I exclaimed, touching once more the mantle about Paul.

"If you touch him, you will only injure him and warn Tasmari what you are about. You must concentrate your thought on him. Entwine your being with his by thinking. You may be too weak and be drawn in with him. Be careful of——"

But I did not hear the rest. I was already doing as she had instructed. I was putting my whole being into the thought that Paul Duval was a free soul, unhampered by any barrier; once more by my side.

At first it did not seem as though I were accomplishing anything. Then I saw one of his fingers move. Hope aroused, I set myself more sternly to the task. His eyes opened, and he saw me. Then his arm lifted. A feeling of joy surged through me, but it was short-lived.

I was now opposed by some force. Some opposing power was grappling with my will, and at its thrust, I felt myself growing weaker. Paul's arm fell to his side once more, and his eyes closed. I was slowly brought nearer to him. I was being "drawn in" also.

The thought terrified me, and at that instant, I knew myself to be within the barrier. The little flames were licking at me now, as they had licked at Paul when I attempted to touch him. In the last effort I sent every erg of will-power remaining in me, crashing against the force which was overpowering me.

It was of no avail. Things seemed afar off now, and I knew a peace which was greater than I had ever thought possible. A gray mist gathered before me. Suddenly it was dissipated by a bright flash. The force I had been fighting left, and Paul and I were together.

I looked for Marguerite, but she was not to be seen. Somehow, I felt it was through her aid I had won.

COMPLETE silence was around us, made more profound by the cessation of Duval's voice. In some manner we were being protected from Tasmari. I felt this rather than knew it, and Duval had taken advantage of the respite to tell me of conditions in the Second Cycle. Speech is not necessary there, but possible, and it was more satisfactory to hear the sound of our voices.

It is strange, yet entirely logical, this story of the Second Cycle. As Duval told it, in a time past it had been found necessary to form the egos of the Second Cycle into some sort of organization. With so many entities, each with a freedom and power of will inconceivable to one yet in life, the Cycle had been a veritable chaos.

It was finally decided to give one intelligence supreme power. How the selection was made is a mystery; but the lot had fallen to Bari. He had once been the ruler of a civilization mightier than ours and so ancient as to have been lost in the records of time, in so far as those living were concerned.

Conscious and subconscious thought is a part of each intelligent being, so to give Bari authority which could be enforced without the possibility of resistance, the egos of the Second Cycle concentrated their subconscious thought on Bari. This was possible, because in this plane each entity has full control of the elements which compose his being. The result was a force composed of the mass subconsciousness of the whole.

Having obtained the supreme authority, which could have been taken away from him at any time by the co-ordinated agreement of the intelligences giving it, Bari made his position impregnable by forming the Thought Council.

It consists of a carefully selected number of the strongest wills, favorable to him and his policies. They exert their conscious will-power in unison with that of Bari on the subconscious wills of the whole. Thus, the Council, and therefore Bari, is absolute, for the conscious will controls the subconscious absolutely by the power of suggestion. In a measure, the entire spirit body of the Second Cycle is controlled by Bari, much as a hypnotized person is controlled by the hypnotist. There are points of difference, to be sure, but unexplainable to one in life. A rebel of the Council is easily beaten down by the subconsciousness of the whole, which Bari controls in himself. It is a sort of vicious circle.

As each newcomer arrives, he is brought before the Council and there compelled to give allegiance to Bari. This means the newly arrived intelligence, before he knows what it is all about, is asked to unite his subconsciousness with the mass subconciousness of the Cycle. On rare occasions when this is refused, obedience is compelled. After Purification, so called, the new one is a part of it all, able to do nothing without the knowledge of the rest. In other words, each unit is in constant rapport with the Cycle. The only relief from this is the individual isolation barrier each intelligence is able, depending upon his strength of will, to build about him. And this can be broken down, if enough will-power is exerted against it.

Bari's one weakness is real, though remote. It may happen another intelligence may become strong enough to gather others to him. With this nucleus an organization might form which could hold the old one off long enough to gain strength to attack it. There are many beings in the Second Cycle who would fly to a new stand-

ard should one appear strong enough to aid them in again controlling their own subconsciousness. Now, if one breaks away, he is beaten in detail. The thing is a sort of *divide et impera.*

This is where Duval had fallen out with Bari. Coming to the Cycle as he did, there remained a body to which he could return under proper conditions. There was nothing about it to unfit it for Duval's future use, since death had never occurred. Death would, of course, make the body untenable. Therefore, Bari feared that should Duval return to life he might obtain enough followers to unseat the present ruler, when all should have crossed over to the Other Side.

In spite of every obstacle which Bari and Tasmari placed before Duval, he had managed to partly free himself at times from the Cycle, with the aid of Marguerite. This was done by the two of them erecting a thought barrier against the Cycle. Marguerite had risked all in aiding him, and an unsteadiness crept into Duval's voice as he mentioned her. Poor, loyal little soul! His life in the Cycle had been happy with her, in a way we do not understand, since sex as we know it does not exist. There is nothing base about it, but it is more the union of positive and negative qualities, soul-satisfying and pure.

As for Tasmari, she was the real sister of Bari, to whom he had given a great deal of his power. She was of the Council and Queen of the Vortex.

Duval could not tell me what the Vortex was. He had never seen it. The thing was a mystery to those in the Second Cycle, as death is to those in the First. Duval did not think there was anything sinful about it, but thought it was merely the way out. He had never seen it, but told me that only through it could the soul die. He had risked it when he got into communication with me, a forbidden act.

"We'll have to be getting out of this," he stated at last. "As soon as I come into the thoughts of Bari or Tasmari they will know I am out of isolation, and be down upon us."

"What shall we do?"

"Is the ray operating?"

"It was when I left."

"It had better be now," he remarked dryly. "If it isn't, we are both in for it. It had not entered into my calculation you would come over. By the way," as a sudden thought struck him, "why did you come?"

I told him how it had happened.

"Tasmari's doings!" he exclaimed. "Clever, too. Don't you see? By getting you here, she thinks she can keep both of us. Thinks I need help from the life side. Well, I did. We both do, if the ray has been shut off. You weren't touched by it, were you?"

"No."

"Then I am not so sure she can hold you at all. I think your case is one similar to suspended animation. I believe you can return when you will it. In my case, I left by the ray and must return through its agency. Just why, I don't know. It must distend the molecules of my flesh. I know I can't will myself into it, for I tried. Tasmari took advantage of your concentration on the ray momentarily to break your hold on your body and bring you through."

"How could she do that?"

"Don't waste time talking. Men in the Orient have separated their astral bodies from the flesh, for thousands of years. But come," he commanded, "we haven't time to lose. I've taken up too much already telling about things, but thought you should know what you are up against.

"Listen carefully, Harry. *You must think yourself back at the screen.* At that moment our isolation barrier will break down, and we'll

have to work fast to build another when we get to the screen. But as soon as we are there, believe with all your mind that Bari and Tasmari can not reach us. Do you get the idea?''

I nodded.

''When I say 'three', be at the screen. One, two, three.''

IT SOUNDS almost humorous to relate this now, but I can assure you there was nothing funny about it then. At the word ''three'', I found myself in exactly the posture I had been, still looking at Duval, but the projectors were throwing their rays toward us. I was furiously concentrating to raise a barrier against Bari and Tasmari.

Thank God for the ray, and for the faithfulness of Janisch, who had kept this gateway open to us. We could go back. The Second Cycle had waited too long before striking.

Then from the room, carried to us on the ray, came the sound of a loud thumping. Voices were raised. Dimly in the background I could see our bodies, and also that which startled me to the roots of my being. Janisch was desperately trying to barricade the door of the laboratory, which was giving inward to violent attacks from without.

A voice was calling, ''Open, in the name of the law!'' Another voice, which I recognized as Baird's, cried out: ''I tell you there is something wrong in there, officer. Break in the door.''

An instant later, the door was quivering again from lusty blows rained on it. Should they get in before I could recover my body, there was no foretelling what might happen. Even though I could get back, the projectors might be damaged by the intruders, and that would leave Duval a captive. Janisch could never account for our bodies. Was success to be snatched from us at this last moment?

The same thought occurred to us both at the same instant. We sprang together for the screen. We won through into the room. But only for a breath. Something stopped us. It was as though we had flung ourselves into a tremendously heavy gale. We could attempt forward progress, continue to move as though forward, but instead of gaining ground we were losing it.

''What is it?'' I yelled at Duval.

''Bari!'' he gasped. The difference of the second we had paused to look into the room had been our undoing. Bari had become aware of our escape and had instantly launched his fearful power to draw us back. I glanced at the place where Janisch struggled to keep the door closed. My eyes returned to where Paul had been, but he had vanished. The next instant I was carried back, and before I realized what had taken place, I found myself again by the side of Paul, looking into the face of one whom I knew instantly to be Bari. His eyes were fixed on mine, coldly stern in their expression, and it took a mighty effort of will on my part to look away from them.

Gathered about him, every face turned to his, were at least a thousand souls, Tasmari among them. I knew the throng for what it was, the Council of Thought. Theirs were the wills which had broken down our isolation barrier and drawn us hurtling back into the presence of the Ruler of the Second Cycle. Our situation was desperate. Confronted with a mighty force, the projectors endangered by Baird, we were indeed in a hopeless position. If we were to get back to the screen before the invaders broke into the laboratory, we should have to act quickly, and action seemed impossible.

I looked questioningly at Paul, but his face gave me no hope. An expression of resigned despair had settled

there, which deepened when Bari spoke.

"Have done!" he ordered. At the command, the faces of the Council turned away from his and fastened on ours.

Instantly I felt the lessened tension and a new hope was born in me, which did not die even when Bari, seeming to read my thought, said: "Bari alone can hold you now." I had remembered what Paul had said about my case being similar to that of suspended animation. In that case Bari and his Council could not prevent my returning, no matter what happened to Duval. Once on the life side, I might be able to help Paul again.

"Bari can not hold me," I ventured, desperately determined to bluff it as long as possible. A frown appeared on his face, not of anger, but of perplexity. He was not sure. My hope grew stronger. Doubt in his mind was strength in mine. To hold me he had to *believe* he could. If I could shake that belief——

"You have broken the laws of the Second Cycle," he charged.

"I have never been under the law."

"No, but as an alien to the Cycle, you are subject to commands given you by the Council. These you have flaunted."

"The Council has given me no commands."

"You have broken one command, deny it if you dare," came hotly from Tasmari. Bari's face brightened perceptibly.

"What command, sister?" he queried softly.

"In the name of the Council, I commanded him to speak to no one until he had been before the Council," she replied, with a triumphant glance at me.

"Then I hold you fast," he rejoined, "and may pass sentence upon you."

I failed to see where the breaking of this command made me susceptible to the laws of the Cycle, and felt he was trying to weaken my belief, as I was trying to weaken his. And besides——. Then it came to me, and I took a malicious delight in making my next statement, for I felt it would hurt Tasmari.

"Still you can not hold me. Even if I had received a command in the name of the Council, you could not hold me, but I have never received such an order."

"You dare dispute my word?" challenged Tasmari angrily.

"I dare tell the truth. You said 'I charge you to communicate with no other'. You gave it in your own name, not in the name of the Council. Of course," turning to Bari in mock humility, "if Tasmari rules the Council, or if the Council——'

"Enough," thundered Bari. "We admit you have broken no command of the Council. You may return, but you will forget all you have seen or heard while in the Cycle. Now you," turning to Duval, "have broken our laws again and again. You are an incorrigible rebel. I sentence you to the Vortex."

A gasp came from Paul. I shall never want to see a spirit shaken as was his at that moment. His entire being quivered at the words.

"Is there no reprieve?" he slowly asked, at last.

"None, and the sentence shall be carried out at once. Stay with us and see a spirit racked in the Vortex," he invited me mockingly.

I groaned inwardly. Not only did I want to be spared the ordeal, but time was against me. Even now, rough hands might be destroying the projectors. But there was no hope for it. I had to go.

AS BARI spoke the entire scene changed. We had seemed to be in a stately hall during this period of our trial. Now it vanished and a broad, level plain took its place. It

ended abruptly in a sharp precipice. We proceeded to its very edge. Below, a gray mist was swirling, which seemed to sigh as it rapidly changed in contour. Little flashes of blue light intermingled with the gray, while the entire mass whirled rapidly toward a funnel-shaped center. The Vortex!

Duval looked over the edge. The throng stepped back away from him, leaving him alone, the focal point of all eyes. He turned and flashed a melancholy smile at me, which he tried to make seem cheerful.

"This is the end, old man. You did your best to help me." He sighed. "My own fault, anyway. Better hurry back while you may. The time has been short and the ray in all probability is still opening the way. Good-bye."

"My God, Paul! I can't leave you," I cried.

"There is no hope." Then, as I still hesitated, he cried harshly: "Get out of here, you fool! Get out! Here goes," and he crouched for his spring over the edge. I turned my head. There was a sound, as a whisper, which ran through the multitude. I looked back and saw Duval was no longer on the edge of the chasm.

No! He was running back from it, while in front of Bari was the slight figure of a woman,—Marguerite. She was speaking.

"You shall not send him in, Bari."

"By what do you question the sentence?"

"By the power of my will." Bari drew back from her in outraged majesty and surprize.

"You dare oppose it to—to mine?" he stammered.

"Yes, to yours and the whole Council," she answered defiantly.

"Well, if you must have it, here ——" grated Bari, bending those eyes, terrible with the power they controlled, upon her. But she did not wilt, as I expected. She remained erect before him. Duval was beside me.

"Come, Harry. It's our only chance," he cried.

"And leave her——?" wonderingly. I had not thought Paul Duval capable of deserting one who had helped him, especially when that one was in danger.

"Yes, you fool——!"

"But the Vortex?"

"Is not for her. She is one of the Council."

Waiting to hear no more, we again threw our wills to the screen. And only just in time. The door of the laboratory fell in, as I dashed down the path of the beam. Locating my body, I concentrated every thought on the one idea that I was in it. The next instant I was rewarded by feeling it around me. I tried to rise, but for a moment the gross flesh would not obey my commands. Then I staggered to my feet.

Duval was within the ray, dancing about like a madman. He tried to come into the room, but was able to go no farther than the confines of the ray. There was the sound of many feet running across the room. A sickening smash and a cry from Janisch told me he had been struck down by our well-meaning but dangerous friends. Then the beam faded rapidly. Someone had shut off the power.

Paul was fading out with the beam. I saw him leave, then heard his voice over the radio, which had not been disturbed, thank God. In a voice he tried to make calm, but which was filled with mortal anxiety, he cried:

"Turn on the power. Put my body in the beam. Quick, Harry! Quick! Bari has broken Marguerite. They are beginning to pull me back."

In one jump I had thrown in the power, knocking Baird down, as he tried to stop me. With a strength I did not dream of possessing, I carried Paul's body and threw it within the

path of the ray. He appeared instantly and fell on his body. For a moment he seemed to lie on top, then slowly sank into the flesh.

His soul had barely disappeared when Tasmari raged into sight. Without a second's hesitation she also fell on the body. Duval's intelligence began to reappear. On his body coruscations like molten gold showed for an instant and faded. The figure writhed as though in torment. Once again the soul of Duval penetrated his flesh. Outlining it now, there grew an aura of blinding iridescence, combining every color of the spectrum. The weirdness of this struggle of two beings for one body appalled me.

Suddenly it was ended. About the body the aura faded. Succeeding it came a myriad of little pinpoint lights. They grew in number, and swarmed away, where they whirled confusedly in the light of the ray. Then they gradually began to assume the outlines of a figure. Was it Paul or Tasmari? Materialization came himself?

more rapidly, and I caught a glimpse of a slender arm. It was Tasmari who was leaving. Paul had won.

Without more ado, I shut off the power. As the beam faded, these words came to me in the faintest of whispers.

"You win this time, but in the end you must return." The last glow faded and Tasmari was gone.

IN A few words I explained, or tried to explain, the situation to Baird, who thought Janisch had murdered both Duval and me. Duval had the appearance of one dead, but I knew that when three days had passed he would regain his senses. We had been successful. Still, I was depressed.

Trying to place what vaguely troubled me, it came to me.

Marguerite! How had she fared at the hands of Bari? God bless the staunch and loyal little soul! And Duval? Had he sacrificed her to save

The previous adventures of Duval, telling how he invented his strange machine and how he ventured into the Second Cycle, were told in "Duval's Weird Experiment," in the April number of WEIRD TALES. A later story will describe what happened to Marguerite at the hands of Bari. Watch for it in this magazine.



WEIRD STORY REPRINTS

No. 11. The Werewolf

By H. B. MARRYAT

MY FATHER was not born, or originally a resident, in the Hartz Mountains; he was the serf of a Hungarian nobleman, of great possessions, in Transylvania; but, although a serf, he was not by any means a poor or illiterate man. In fact, he was rich, and his intelligence and respectability were such that he had been raised by his lord to the stewardship; but whoever may happen to be born a serf, a serf he must remain, even though he become a wealthy man; such was the condition of my father. My father had been married for about five years; and, by his marriage, had three children — my eldest brother, Cæsar; myself (Hermann); and a sister named Marcella.

My mother was a very beautiful woman, unfortunately more beautiful than virtuous: she was seen and admired by the lord of the soil; my father was sent away upon some mission; and, during his absence, my mother, flattered by the attentions, and won by the assiduities, of this nobleman, yielded to his wishes. It so happened that my father returned very unexpectedly, and discovered the intrigue. The evidence of my mother's shame was positive; he surprized her in the company of her seducer! Carried away by the impetuosity of his feelings, he watched the opportunity of a meeting taking place between them, and murdered both his wife and her seducer. Conscious that, as a serf, not even the provocation which he had received would be allowed as a justification of his conduct, he hastily collected together what money he could lay his hands on, and, as we were then in the depth of winter, he put his horses to the sleigh, and taking his children with him, he set off in the middle of the night, and was far away before the tragical circumstance had become known. Aware that he would be pursued, and that he had no chance of escape if he remained in any portion of his native country (in which the authorities could lay hold of him), he continued his flight without intermission until he had buried himself in the intricacies and seclusion of the Hartz Mountains.

Of course, all that I have now told you I learned afterward. My oldest recollections are knit to a rude, yet comfortable cottage, in which I lived with my father, brother and sister. It was on the confines of one of those vast forests which cover the northern part of Germany; around it were a few acres of ground, which, during the summer months, my father cultivated, and which, though they yielded a doubtful harvest, were sufficient for our support. In the winter we remained much indoors, for, as my father followed the chase, we were left alone, and the wolves, during that season, incessantly prowled about. My father had purchased the cottage, and land about it, of one of the rude foresters, who gain their livelihood partly by hunting, and partly by burning charcoal, for the purpose of smelting the ore from the

neighboring mines; it was distant about two miles from any other habitation. I can call to mind the whole landscape now: the tall pines which rose up on the mountain above us, and the wide expanse of forest beneath, on the topmost boughs and heads of whose trees we looked down from our cottage, as the mountain below us rapidly descended into the distant valley. In summertime the prospect was beautiful; but during the severe winter, a more desolate scene could not well be imagined.

I said that, in the winter, my father occupied himself with the chase; every day he left us, and often would he lock the door, that we might not leave the cottage. He had no one to assist him, or to take care of us—indeed, it was not easy to find a female servant who would live in such a solitude; but, could he have found one, my father would not have received her, for he had imbibed a horror of the sex, as the difference of his conduct toward us, his two boys, and my poor little sister, Marcella, evidently proved. You may suppose we were sadly neglected; indeed, we suffered much, for my father, fearful that we might come to some harm, would not allow us fuel, when he left the cottage; and we were obliged, therefore, to creep under the heaps of bear-skins, and there to keep ourselves as warm as we could until he returned in the evening, when a blazing fire was our delight. That my father chose this restless sort of life may appear strange, but the fact was that he could not remain quiet; whether from remorse for having committed murder, or from the misery consequent on his change of situation, or from both combined, he was never happy unless he was in a state of activity. Children, however, when left much to themselves, acquire a thoughtfulness not common to their age. So it was with us; and during the short cold days of winter we would sit silent, longing for the happy hours when the snow would melt, and the leaves burst out, and the birds begin their songs, and when we should again be set at liberty.

Such was our peculiar and savage sort of life until my brother Cæsar was nine, myself seven, and my sister five years old, when the circumstances occurred on which is based the extraordinary narrative which I am about to relate.

One evening my father returned home rather later than usual; he had been unsuccessful, and, as the weather was very severe, and many feet of snow were upon the ground, he was not only very cold, but in a very bad humor. He had brought in wood, and we were all three of us gladly assisting each other in blowing on the embers to create the blaze, when he caught poor little Marcella by the arm and threw her aside; the child fell, struck her mouth, and bled very much. My brother ran to raise her up. Accustomed to ill usage, and afraid of my father, she did not dare to cry, but looked up in his face very piteously. My father drew his stool nearer to the hearth, muttered something in abuse of women, and busied himself with the fire, which both my brother and I had deserted when our sister was so unkindly treated. A cheerful blaze was soon the result of his exertions; but we did not, as usual, crowd round it. Marcella, still bleeding, retired to a corner, and my brother and I took our seats beside her, while my father hung over the fire gloomily and alone. Such had been our position for about half an hour, when the howl of a wolf, close under the window of the cottage, fell on our ears. My father started up and seized his gun; the howl was repeated, he examined the priming, and then hastily left the cottage, shutting the door after him. We all waited, anxiously listening, for we thought

that if he succeeded in shooting the wolf, he would return in a better humor; and although he was harsh to all of us, and particularly so to our little sister, still we loved our father, and loved to see him cheerful and happy, for what else had we to look up to? And I may here observe, that perhaps there never were three children who were fonder of each other; we did not, like other children, fight and dispute together; and if, by chance, any disagreement did arise between my elder brother and me, little Marcella would run to us, and kissing us both, seal, through her entreaties, the peace between us. Marcella was a lovely, amiable child; I can recall her beautiful features even now. Alas! poor little Marcella.

We waited for some time, but the report of the gun did not reach us, and my elder brother then said, "Our father has followed the wolf, and will not be back for some time. Marcella, let us wash the blood from your mouth, and then we will leave this corner, and go to the fire and warm ourselves."

We did so, and remained there until near midnight, every minute wondering, as it grew later, why our father did not return. We had no idea that he was in any danger, but we thought that he must have chased the wolf for a very long time.

"I will look out and see if Father is coming," said my brother Cæsar, going to the door.

"Take care," said Marcella, "the wolves must be about now, and we can not kill them, brother."

My brother opened the door very cautiously, and but a few inches; he peeped out. "I see nothing," said he, after a time, and once more he joined us at the fire.

"We have had no supper," said I, for my father usually cooked the meat as soon as he came home; and during his absence we had nothing but the fragments of the preceding day.

"And if our father comes home after his hunt, Cæsar," said Marcella, "he will be pleased to have some supper; let us cook it for him and for ourselves."

Cæsar climbed upon the stool, and reached down some meat — I forget now whether it was venison or bear's meat; but we cut off the usual quantity, and proceeded to dress it, as we used to do under our father's superintendence. We were all busied putting it into the platters before the fire, to await his coming, when we heard the sound of a horn. We listened—there was a noise outside, and a minute afterward my father entered, ushering in a young female and a large dark man in a hunter's dress.

PERHAPS I had better now relate what was only known to me many years afterward. When my father had left the cottage, he perceived a large white wolf about thirty yards from him; as soon as the animal saw my father, it retreated slowly, growling and snarling. My father followed; the animal did not run, but always kept at some distance; and my father did not like to fire until he was pretty certain that his ball would take effect: thus they went on for some time, the wolf now leaving my father far behind, and then stopping and snarling defiance at him, and then again, on his approach, setting off at speed.

Anxious to shoot the animal (for the white wolf is very rare), my father continued the pursuit for several hours, during which he continually ascended the mountain.

You must know that there are peculiar spots on those mountains which are supposed, and, as my story will prove, truly supposed, to be inhabited by the evil influences; they are well known to the huntsmen, who invariably avoid them. Now, one of these spots, an open space in the pine forests above us, had been pointed out

to my father as dangerous on that account. But, whether he disbelieved these wild stories, or whether, in his eager pursuit of the chase, he disregarded them, I know not; certain, however, it is that he was decoyed by the white wolf to this open space, when the animal appeared to slacken her speed. My father approached, came close up to her, raised his gun to his shoulder, and was about to fire, when the wolf suddenly disappeared. He thought that the snow on the ground must have dazzled his sight, and he let down his gun to look for the beast—but she was gone; how she could have escaped over the clearance, without his seeing her, was beyond his comprehension. Mortified at the ill success of his chase, he was about to retrace his steps, when he heard the distant sound of a horn. Astonishment at such a sound—at such an hour—in such a wilderness, made him forget for the moment his disappointment, and he remained riveted to the spot. In a minute the horn was blown a second time, and at no great distance; my father stood still, and listened: a third time it was blown. I forget the term used to express it, but it was the signal which, my father well knew, implied that the party was lost in the woods. In a few minutes more my father beheld a man on horseback, with a female seated on the crupper, enter the cleared space, and ride up to him. At first, my father called to mind the strange stories which he had heard of the supernatural beings who were said to frequent these mountains; but the nearer approach of the parties satisfied him that they were mortals like himself.

As soon as they came up to him, the man who guided the horse accosted him. "Friend Hunter, you are out late, the better fortune for us: we have ridden far, and are in fear of our lives, which are eagerly sought after. These mountains have enabled us to elude our pursuers; but if we find not shelter and refreshment, that will avail us little, as we must perish from hunger and the inclemency of the night. My daughter, who rides behind me, is now more dead than alive—say, can you assist us in our difficulty?"

"My cottage is some few miles distant," replied my father, "but I have little to offer you besides a shelter from the weather; to the little I have you are welcome. May I ask whence you come?"

"Yes, friend, it is no secret now; we have escaped from Transylvania, where my daughter's honor and my life were equally in jeopardy!"

This information was quite enough to raise an interest in my father's heart. He remembered his own escape: he remembered the loss of his wife's honor, and the tragedy by which it was wound up. He immediately, and warmly, offered all the assistance which he could afford them.

"There is no time to be lost, then, good sir," observed the horseman; "my daughter is chilled with the frost, and can not hold out much longer against the severity of the weather."

"Follow me," replied my father, leading the way toward home.

"I was lured away in pursuit of a large white wolf," observed my father; "it came to the very window of my hut, or I should not have been out at this time of night."

"The creature passed by us just as we came out of the wood," said the female in a silvery tone.

"I was nearly discharging my piece at it," observed the hunter; "but since it did us such good service, I am glad that I allowed it to escape."

IN ABOUT an hour and a half, during which my father walked at a rapid pace, the party arrived at the cottage, and, as I said before, came in.

"We are in good time, apparently," observed the dark hunter, catch-

ing the smell of the roasted meat, as he walked to the fire and surveyed my brother and sister and myself. "You have young cooks here, *Mynheer,*" he said.

"I am glad that we shall not have to wait," replied my father. "Come, mistress, seat yourself by the fire; you require warmth after your cold ride."

"And where can I put my horse, *Mynheer?*" observed the huntsman.

"I will take care of him," replied my father, going out of the cottage door.

The female must, however, be particularly described. She was young, and apparently twenty years of age. She was dressed in a traveling dress, deeply bordered with white fur, and wore a cap of white ermine on her head. Her features were very beautiful, at least I thought so, and so my father has since declared. Her hair was flaxen, glossy and shining, and bright as a mirror; and her mouth, although somewhat large when it was open, showed the most brilliant teeth I have ever beheld. But there was something about her eyes, bright as they were, which made us children afraid; they were so restless, so furtive; I could not at that time tell why, but I felt as if there was cruelty in her eye; and when she beckoned us to come to her, we approached her with fear and trembling. Still she was beautiful, very beautiful. She spoke kindly to my brother and myself, patted our heads, and caressed us; but Marcella would not come near her; on the contrary, she slunk away, and hid herself in the bed, and would not wait for the supper, which half an hour before she had been so anxious for.

My father, having put the horse into a close shed, soon returned, and supper was placed upon the table. When it was over, my father requested that the young lady would take possession of his bed, and he would remain at the fire, and sit up with her father. After some hesitation on her part, this arrangement was agreed to, and I and my brother crept into the other bed with Marcella, for we had as yet always slept together.

But we could not sleep; there was something so unusual, not only in seeing strange people, but in having those people sleep at the cottage, that we were bewildered. As for poor little Marcella, she was quiet, but I perceived that she trembled during the whole night, and sometimes I thought that she was checking a sob. My father had brought out some spirits, which he rarely used, and he and the strange hunter remained drinking and talking before the fire. Our ears were ready to catch the slightest whisper—so much was our curiosity excited.

"You said you came from Transylvania?" observed my father.

"Even so, *Mynheer,*" replied the hunter. "I was a serf to the noble house of ———; my master would insist upon my surrendering up my fair girl to his wishes; it ended in my giving him a few inches of my hunting knife."

"We are countrymen, and brothers in misfortune," replied my father, taking the huntsman's hand, and pressing it warmly.

"Indeed! Are you, then, from that country?"

"Yes; and I too have fled for my life. But mine is a melancholy tale."

"Your name?" inquired the hunter.

"Krantz."

"What! Krantz of———? I have heard your tale; you need not renew your grief by repeating it now. Welcome, most welcome, *Mynheer,* and, I may say, my worthy kinsman. I am your second cousin, Wilfred of Barnsdorf," cried the hunter, rising up and embracing my father.

They filled their horn mugs to the brim, and drank to one another, after

the German fashion. The conversation was then carried on in a low tone; all that we could collect from it was, that our new relative and his daughter were to take up their abode in our cottage, at least for the present. In about an hour they both fell back in their chairs, and appeared to sleep.

"Marcella, dear, did you hear?" said my brother in a low tone.

"Yes," replied Marcella, in a whisper; "I heard all. Oh! brother, I can not bear to look upon that woman —I feel so frightened."

My brother made no reply, and shortly afterward we were all three fast asleep.

WHEN we awoke the next morning we found that the hunter's daughter had arisen before us. I thought she looked more beautiful than ever. She came up to Marcella and caressed her; the child burst into tears, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

But, not to detain you with too long a story, the huntsman and his daughter were accommodated in the cottage. My father and he went out hunting daily, leaving Christina with us. She performed all the household duties; was very kind to us children; and, gradually, the dislike even of little Marcella wore away. But a great change took place in my father; he appeared to have conquered his aversion to the sex, and was most attentive to Christina. Often, after her father and we were in bed, would he sit up with her, conversing in a low tone by the fire. I ought to have mentioned that my father and the huntsman Wilfred slept in another portion of the cottage, and that the bed which he formerly occupied, and which was in the same room as ours, had been given up to the use of Christina. These visitors had been about three weeks at the cottage, when, one night, after we children had been sent to bed, a consultation was held. My father had asked Christina in marriage, and had obtained both her own consent and that of Wilfred; after this a conversation took place, which was, as nearly as I can recollect, as follows:

"You may take my child, Mynheer Krantz, and my blessing with her, and I shall then leave you and seek some other habitation—it matters little where."

"Why not remain here, Wilfred?"

"No, no, I am called elsewhere; let that suffice, and ask no more questions. You have my child."

"I thank you for her, and will duly value her; but there is one difficulty."

"I know what you would say; there is no priest here in this wild country: true, neither is there any law to bind; still must some ceremony pass between you, to satisfy a father. Will you consent to marry her after my fashion? If so, I will marry you directly."

"I will," replied my father.

"Then take her by the hand. Now, *Mynheer*, swear."

"I swear," repeated my father.

"By all the spirits of the Hartz Mountains——"

"Nay, why not by heaven?" interrupted my father.

"Because it is not my humor," rejoined Wilfred; "if I prefer that oath, less binding, perhaps, than another, surely you will not thwart me."

"Well, be it so then; have your humor. Will you make me swear by that in which I do not believe?"

"Yet many do so, who in outward appearance are Christians," rejoined Wilfred; "say, will you be married, or shall I take my daughter away with me?"

"Proceed," replied my father, impatiently.

"I swear by all the spirits of the Hartz Mountains, by all their power for good or for evil, that I take Chris-

tina for my wedded wife; that I will ever protect her, cherish her, and love her; that my hand shall never be raised against her to harm her."

My father repeated the words after Wilfred.

"And if I fail in this, my vow, may all the vengeance of the spirits fall upon me and upon my children; may they perish by the vulture, by the wolf, or other beasts of the forest; may their flesh be torn from their limbs, and their bones blanch in the wilderness; all this I swear."

My father hesitated, as he repeated the last words; little Marcella could not restrain herself, and as my father repeated the last sentence, she burst into tears. This sudden interruption appeared to discompose the party, particularly my father; he spoke harshly to the child, who controlled her sobs, burying her face under the bed-clothes.

Such was the second marriage of my father. The next morning the hunter Wilfred mounted his horse and rode away.

My father resumed his bed, which was in the same room as ours; and things went on much as before the marriage, except that our new stepmother did not show any kindness toward us; indeed, during my father's absence she would often beat us, particularly little Marcella, and her eyes would flash fire as she looked eagerly upon the fair and lovely child.

ONE night my sister awoke me and my brother.

"What is the matter?" said Cæsar.

"She has gone out," whispered Marcella.

"Gone out!"

"Yes, gone out at the door, in her night-clothes,'" replied the child; "I saw her get out of bed, look at my father to see if he slept, and then she went out at the door."

What could induce her to leave her bed, and all undressed to go out, in such bitter wintry weather, with the snow deep on the ground, was to us incomprehensible; we lay awake, and in about an hour we heard the growl of a wolf, close under the window.

"There is a wolf," said Cæsar; "she will be torn to pieces."

"Oh, no!" cried Marcella.

In a few minutes afterward our stepmother appeared; she was in her night-dress, as Marcella had stated. She let down the latch of the door, so as to make no noise, went to a pail of water, and washed her face and hands, and then slipped into the bed where my father lay.

We all three trembled, we hardly knew why, but we resolved to watch the next night: we did so—and not only on the ensuing night, but on many others, and always at about the same hour would our stepmother rise from her bed and leave the cottage—and after she was gone we invariably heard the growl of a wolf under our window, and always saw her, on her return, wash herself before she retired to bed. We observed, also, that she seldom sat down to meals, and that when she did, she appeared to eat with dislike; but when the meat was taken down, to be prepared for dinner, she would often furtively put a raw piece into her mouth.

My brother Cæsar was a courageous boy; he did not like to speak to my father until he knew more. He resolved that he would follow her out, and ascertain what she did. Marcella and I endeavored to dissuade him from this project; but he would not be controlled, and the very next night he lay down in his clothes, and as soon as our stepmother had left the cottage he jumped up, took down my father's gun, and followed her.

You may imagine in what a state of suspense Marcella and I remained during his absence. After a few minutes we heard the report of a gun. It did not awaken my father, and we lay trembling with anxiety. In a minute

afterward we saw our stepmother enter the cottage—her dress was bloody. I put my hand to Marcella's mouth to prevent her crying out, although I was myself in great alarm. Our stepmother approached my father's bed, looked to see if he was asleep, and then went to the chimney, and blew up the embers into a blaze.

"Who is there?" said my father, waking up.

"Lie still, dearest," replied my stepmother, "it is only me; I have lighted the fire to warm some water; I am not quite well."

My father turned round and was soon asleep; but we watched our stepmother. She changed her linen, and threw the garments she had worn into the fire; and we then perceived that her right leg was bleeding profusely, as if from a gunshot wound. She bandaged it up, and then dressing herself, remained before the fire until the break of day.

Poor little Marcella, her heart beat quick as she pressed me to her side—so indeed did mine. Where was our brother, Cæsar? How did my stepmother receive the wound unless from his gun? At last my father rose, and then for the first time I spoke, saying, "Father, where is my brother, Cæsar?"

"Your brother!" exclaimed he; "why, where can he be?"

"Merciful heaven! I thought as I lay very restless last night," observed our stepmother, "that I heard somebody open the latch of the door; and, dear me, husband, what has become of your gun?"

My father cast his eyes up above the chimney, and perceived that his gun was missing. For a moment he looked perplexed, then seizing a broadax, he went out of the cottage without saying another word.

He did not remain away from us long: in a few minutes he returned, bearing in his arms the mangled body of my poor brother; he laid it down, and covered up his face.

My stepmother rose up, and looked at the body, while Marcella and I threw ourselves by its side wailing and sobbing bitterly.

"Go to bed again, children," said she sharply. "Husband," continued she, "your boy must have taken the gun down to shoot a wolf, and the animal has been too powerful for him. Poor boy! He has paid dearly for his rashness."

My father made no reply; I wished to speak — to tell all — but Marcella, who perceived my intention, held me by the arm, and looked at me so imploringly, that I desisted.

My father, therefore, was left in his error; but Marcella and I, although we could not comprehend it, were conscious that our stepmother was in some way connected with my brother's death.

That day my father went out and dug a grave, and when he laid the body in the earth, he piled up stones over it, so that the wolves should not be able to dig it up. The shock of this catastrophe was to my poor father very severe; for several days he never went to the chase, although at times he would utter bitter anathemas and vengeance against the wolves.

But during this time of mourning on his part, my stepmother's nocturnal wanderings continued with the same regularity as before.

At last, my father took down his gun, to repair to the forest; but he soon returned, and appeared much annoyed.

"Would you believe it, Christina, that the wolves — perdition to the whole race!—have actually contrived to dig up the body of my poor boy, and now there is nothing left of him but his bones?"

"Indeed!" replied my stepmother. Marcella looked at me, and I saw in

her intelligent eye all she would have uttered.

"A wolf growls under our window every night, father," said I.

"Aye, indeed?—why did you not tell me, boy?—wake me the next time you hear it."

I saw my stepmother turn away; her eyes flashed fire, and she gnashed her teeth.

My father went out again, and covered up with a larger pile of stones the little remnants of my poor brother which the wolves had spared. Such was the first act of the tragedy.

THE spring now came on: the snow disappeared, and we were permitted to leave the cottage; but never would I quit, for one moment, my dear little sister, to whom, since the death of my brother, I was more ardently attached than ever; indeed, I was afraid to leave her alone with my stepmother, who appeared to have a particular pleasure in ill-treating the child. My father was now employed upon his little farm, and I was able to render him some assistance.

Marcella used to sit by us while we were at work, leaving my stepmother alone in the cottage. I ought to observe that, as the spring advanced, so did my stepmother decrease her nocturnal rambles, and we never heard the growl of the wolf under the window after I had spoken of it to my father.

One day, when my father and I were in the field, Marcella being with us, my stepmother came out, saying that she was going into the forest to collect some herbs my father wanted, and that Marcella must go to the cottage and watch the dinner. Marcella went, and my stepmother soon disappeared in the forest, taking a direction quite contrary to that in which the cottage stood, and leaving my father and me, as it were, between her and Marcella.

About an hour afterward we were startled by shrieks from the cottage, evidently the shrieks of little Marcella. "Marcella has burned herself, father," said I, throwing down my spade. My father threw down his, and we both hastened to the cottage. Before we could gain the door, out darted a large white wolf, which fled with the utmost celerity. My father had no weapon; he rushed into the cottage, and there saw poor little Marcella expiring; her body was dreadfully mangled, and the blood pouring from it had formed a large pool on the cottage floor. My father's first intention had been to seize his gun and pursue, but he was checked by this horrid spectacle; he knelt down by his dying child, and burst into tears: Marcella could just look kindly on us for a few seconds, and then her eyes were closed in death.

My father and I were still hanging over my poor sister's body when my stepmother came in. At the dreadful sight she expressed much concern, but she did not appear to recoil from the sight of blood, as most women do.

"Poor child!" said she; "it must have been that great white wolf which passed me just now, and frightened me so—she's quite dead, Krantz."

"I know it—I know it!" cried my father in agony.

I THOUGHT my father would never recover from the effects of this second tragedy: he mourned bitterly over the body of his sweet child, and for several days would not consign it to its grave, although frequently requested by my stepmother to do so. At last he yielded, and dug a grave for her close by that of my poor brother, and took every precaution that the wolves should not violate her remains.

I was now really miserable, as I lay alone in the bed which I had formerly shared with my brother and sister. I could not help thinking that

my stepmother was implicated in both their deaths, although I could not account for the manner; but I no longer felt afraid of her: my little heart was full of hatred and revenge.

The night after my sister had been buried, as I lay awake, I perceived my stepmother get up and go out of the cottage. I waited for some time, then dressed myself, and looked out through the door, which I half opened. The moon shone bright, and I could see the spot where my brother and my sister had been buried; and what was my horror, when I perceived my stepmother busily removing the stones from Marcella's grave.

She was in her white night-dress, and the moon shone full upon her. She was digging with her hands, and throwing away the stones behind her with all the ferocity of a wild beast. It was some time before I could collect my senses and decide what to do. At last, I perceived that she had arrived at the body, and raised it up to the side of the grave. I could bear it no longer; I ran to my father and awoke him.

"Father! father!" cried I; "dress yourself, and get your gun."

"What!" cried my father; "the wolves are there, are they?"

He jumped out of bed, threw on his clothes, and in his anxiety did not appear to perceive the absence of his wife. As soon as he was ready, I opened the door, he went out, and I followed him.

Imagine his horror, when (unprepared as he was for such a sight) he beheld, as he advanced toward the grave, not a wolf, but his wife, in her night-dress, on her hands and knees, crouching by the body of my sister, and tearing off large pieces of the flesh, and devouring them with all the avidity of a wolf. She was too busy to be aware of our approach. My father dropped his gun, his hair stood on end; so did mine; he breathed heavily, and then his breath for a time stopped. I picked up the gun and put it into his hand. Suddenly he appeared as if concentrated rage had restored him to double vigor; he leveled his piece, fired, and with a loud shriek, down fell the wretch whom he had fostered in his bosom.

"God of heaven!" cried my father, sinking down upon the earth in a swoon, as soon as he had discharged his gun.

I remained some time by his side before he recovered. "Where am I?" said he. "What has happened? —Oh! yes, yes! I recollect now. Heaven forgive me!"

He rose and we walked up to the grave; what again was our astonishment and horror to find that instead of the dead body of my stepmother, as we expected, there was lying over the remains of my poor sister, a large, white she-wolf.

"The white wolf!" exclaimed my father; "the white wolf which decoyed me into the forest—I see it all now—I have dealt with the spirits of the Hartz Mountains."

For some time my father remained in silence and deep thought. He then carefully lifted up the body of my sister, replaced it in the grave, and covered it over as before, having struck the head of the dead animal with the heel of his boot, and raving like a madman. He walked back to the cottage, shut the door, and threw himself on the bed; I did the same, for I was in a stupor of amazement.

EARLY in the morning we were both aroused by a loud knocking at the door, and in rushed the hunter Wilfred.

"My daughter!—man—my daughter!—where is my daughter?" cried he in a rage.

"Where the wretch, the fiend, should be, I trust," replied my father, starting up and displaying equal choler; "where she should be — in

hell!—Leave this cottage or you may fare worse."

"Ha-ha!" replied the hunter; "would you harm a potent spirit of the Hartz Mountains? Poor mortal, who must needs wed a werewolf."

"Out, demon! I defy thee and thy power."

"Yet shall you feel it; remember your oath—your solemn oath—never to raise your hand against her to harm her."

"I made no compact with evil spirits."

"You did; and if you failed in your vow, you were to meet the vengeance of the spirits. Your children were to perish by the vulture, the wolf——"

"Out, out, demon!"

"And their bones blanch in the wilderness. Ha-ha!"

My father, frantic with rage, seized his ax, and raised it over Wilfred's head to strike.

"All this I swear," continued the huntsman, mockingly.

The ax descended; but it passed through the form of the hunter, and my father lost his balance, and fell heavily on the floor.

"Mortal!" said the hunter, striding over my father's body; "we have power over those only who have committed murder. You have been guilty of double murder—you shall pay the penalty attached to your marriage vow. Two of your children are gone; the third is yet to follow—and follow them he will, for your oath is registered. Go—it were kindness to kill you—your punishment is—that you live!"

Horreur Sympathique

BY CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

Translated by Clark Ashton Smith

"From this bizarre and livid sky,
Tormented like your doom and mine
On your void spirit passing by,
What thoughts descend, O libertine?"

—Athirst for mortal things unsung,
In shadowy realms of lone surmise,
I will not whine like Ovid, flung
From out the Latin paradise.

Skies torn like strands of ocean-streams,
In you is mirrored all my pride!
Your slow, enormous clouds abide

The dolent hearses of my dreams;
Your glimmers mock with fluctuant lights
The hell wherein my heart delights.

Across The Gulf

by Henry S. Whitehead



"Then he thought his mother replaced the loosened covers and tucked them in about his shoulder."

FOR the first year, or thereabouts, after his Scotch mother's death the successful lawyer Alan Carrington was conscious, among his other feelings, of a kind of vague dread that she might appear as a character in one of his dreams, as, she had often assured him, her mother had come to her. Being the man he was, he resented this feeling as an incongruity. Yet, there was a certain background for the feeling of dread. It had been one of his practical mother's convictions that such an appearance of her long-dead mother always preceded a disaster in the family.

Such aversions as he might possess against the maternal side of his ancestry were all included in his dislike for belief in this kind of thing. When he agreed that "the Scotch are a dour race," he always had reference, at least mentally, to this superstitious strain, associated with that race from time immemorial, concrete to his experience because of this belief of his mother's, against which he had always fought.

He carried out dutifully, and with a high degree of professional skill, all her various expressed desires, and continued, after her death, to live in their large, comfortable house. Perhaps because his mother never did appear in such dreams as he happened to remember, his dread became less and less poignant. At the end of two years or so, occupied with the thronging interests of a public man in the full power of his early maturity, it had almost ceased to be so much as a memory.

In the spring of his forty-fourth year, Carrington, who had long

worked at high pressure and virtually without vacations, was apprized by certain mental and physical indications which his physician interpreted vigorously, that he must take at least the whole summer off and devote himself to recuperation. Rest, said the doctor, for his overworked mind and under-exercised body, was imperatively indicated.

Carrington was able to set his nearly innumerable interests and affairs in order in something like three weeks by means of highly concentrated efforts to that end. Then, exceedingly nervous, and not a little debilitated physically from this extra strain upon his depleted resources, he had to meet the problem of where he was to go and what he was to do. He was, of course, too deeply set in the rut of his routines to find such a decision easy. Fortunately, this problem was solved for him by a letter which he received unexpectedly from one of his cousins on his mother's side, the Reverend Fergus MacDonald, a gentleman with whom he had had only slight contacts.

Dr. MacDonald was a middle-aged, retired clergyman, whom an imminent decline had removed eight or ten years before from a brilliant, if underpaid, career in his own profession. After a few years sojourn in the Adirondacks he had emerged cured, and with an already growing reputation as a writer of that somewhat inelastic literary product emphasized by certain American magazines which seem to embalm a spinsterish austerity of the literary form under the label of distinction.

Dr. MacDonald had retained a developed pastoral instinct which he could no longer satisfy in the management of a parish. He was, besides, too little robust to risk assuming, at least for some time to come, the wearing burden of teaching. He compromised the matter by establishing a summer camp for boys in his still-desirable Adirondacks. Being devoid of experience in business matters he associated with himself a certain Thomas Starkey, a young man whom the ravages of the White Plague had snatched away from a sales-managership and driven into the quasi-exile of Saranac, where Dr. MacDonald had met him.

This association proved highly successful for the half-dozen years that it had lasted. Then Starkey, after a brave battle for his health, had succumbed, just at a period when his trained business intelligence would have been most helpful to the affairs of the camp.

Dazed at this blow, Dr. MacDonald had desisted from his labors after literary distinction long enough to write to his cousin Carrington, beseeching his legal and financial counsel. When Carrington had read the last of his cousin's finished periods, he decided at once, and dispatched a telegram announcing his immediate setting out for the camp, his intention to remain through the summer, and the promise to assume full charge of the business management. He started for the Adirondacks the next afternoon.

His presence brought immediate order out of confusion. Dr. MacDonald, on the evening of the second day of his cousin's administration of affairs, got down on his knees and returned thanks to his Maker for the undeserved beneficence which had sent this financial angel of light into the midst of his affairs, in this, his hour of dire need! Thereafter the reverend doctor immersed himself more and more deeply in his wonted task of producing the solid literature dear to the hearts of his editors.

But if Carrington's coming had improved matters at the camp, the balance of indebtedness was far from being one-sided. For the first week or so the reaction from his accustomed way of life had caused him to feel, if

anything, even staler and more nerve-racked than before. But that first unpleasantness past, the invigorating air of the balsam-laden pine woods began to show its restorative effects rapidly. He found that he was sleeping like the dead. He could not get enough sleep, it appeared. His appetite increased, and he found that he was putting on needed weight. The business management of a boys' camp, absurdly simple after the complex matters of Big Business with which he had long been occupied, was only a spice to this new existence among the deep shadows and sunny spaces of the Adirondack country. At the end of a month of this, he confidently declared himself a new man. By the first of August, instead of the nervous wreck who had arrived, sharp-visaged and cadaverous, two months before, Carrington presented the appearance of a robust, hard-muscled athlete of thirty, twenty-two pounds heavier and "without a nerve in his body".

ON THE evening of the fourth day of August, healthily weary after a long day's hike, Carrington retired soon after 9 o'clock, and fell immediately into a deep and restful sleep. Toward morning he dreamed of his mother for the first time since her death more than six years before. His dream took the form that he was lying here, in his own bed, awake,—a not altogether uncommon form of dream,—and that he was very chilly in the region of the left shoulder. As is well-known to those skilled in the scientific phenomena of the dream-state, now a very prominent portion of the material used in psychological study, this kind of sensation in a dream virtually always is the result of an actual physical condition, and is reproduced in the dream because of that actual background as a stimulus. Carrington's cold shoulder was toward the left-hand, or outside of the bed, which stood against the wall of his large, airy room.

In his dream he thought that he reached out his hand to replace the bed clothes, and as he did so his hand was softly, though firmly, taken, and his mother's well-remembered voice said: "Lie still, laddie; I'll tuck you in." Then he thought his mother replaced the loosened covers and tucked them in about his shoulder with her competent touch. He wanted to thank her, and as he could not see her because of the position in which he was lying, he endeavored to open his eyes and turn over, being in that state commonly thought of as between sleep and waking. With some considerable effort he succeeded in forcing open his reluctant eyes; but turning over was a much more difficult matter, it appeared. He had to fight against an overpowering inclination to sink back comfortably into the deep sleep, from which, in his dream, he had awakened to find his shoulder disagreeably uncomfortable. The warmth of the replaced covers was an additional inducement to sleep.

At last, with a determined wrench he overcame his desire to go to sleep again and rolled over to his left side by dint of a strong effort of his will, smiling gratefully and about to express his thanks. But at the instant of accomplishing this victory of the will, he actually awakened, in precisely the position recorded in his mind in the dream-state.

Where he had expected to meet his mother's eyes, he saw nothing, but there remained with him a persistent impression that he had felt the withdrawal of her hand from where, on his shoulder, it had rested caressingly. The grateful warmth of the bed-clothes in that cool morning remained, however, and he observed that they were well tucked in about that shoulder.

His dream had clearly been of the type which George Du Maurier

speaks of in *Peter Ibbetson*. He had "dreamed true," and it required several minutes before he could rid himself of the impression that his mother, moved by some strange whimsicality, had stepped out of his sight, perhaps hidden herself behind the bed! He was actually about to look back of the bed before the utter absurdity of the idea became fully apparent to him. The back of the bed stood close against the wall of the room. His mother had been dead more than six years.

He jumped out of bed at the sound of reveillé, blown by the camp bugler, and this abrupt action dissipated his impressions. Their memory remained, however, very clear-cut in his mind for the next two days. The impression of his mother's nearness in the course of that vivid dream had recalled her to his mind with the greatest clarity. With this revived impression of her, too, there marched, almost of necessity he supposed, in his mind the old idea which he had dreaded,—the idea that she would come to him to warn him of some impending danger.

Curiously enough, as he analyzed his sensations, he found that there remained none of the old resentment connected with this speculation, such as had characterized it during the period immediately after his mother's death. His maturity, the preoccupations of an exceptionally full and active life, and the tenderness which marked all his memories of his mother had served to remove from his mind all traces of that idea. The possibility of a "warning" in his dream of his dear mother only caused him to smile during those days after the dream during which the revived impression of his mother slowly faded thin, but it was the indulgent, slightly melancholy smile of a revived nostalgia, a gentle, faint sense of "homesickness" for her, such as might affect any middle-aged man recently reminded of a beloved mother in some rather intense fashion.

ON THE evening of the second day after his dream he was walking toward the camp garage with some visitors, a man and woman, parents of one of the boys at the camp, intending to drive with them to the village to guide them in some minor purchases. Just beside the well-worn trail through the great pine trees, half-way up the hill to the garage, the woman noticed a clump of large, brownish mushrooms, and enquired if they were of an edible variety. Carrington picked one and examined it. To his limited knowledge it seemed to have several of the marks of an edible mushroom. While they were standing beside the place where the mushrooms grew, one of the younger boys passed them.

"Crocker," called Mr. Carrington.

"Yes, Mr. Carrington," replied young Crocker, pausing.

"Crocker, your cabin is the one farthest south, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you going there just now?"

"Yes, Mr. Carrington; can I do anything for you?"

"Well, if it isn't too much trouble, you might take this mushroom over to Professor Benjamin's—you know where his camp is, just the other side of the wire fence beyond your cabin,—and ask him to let us know whether or not this is an edible mushroom. I'm not quite sure myself."

"Certainly," replied the boy, pleased to be allowed "out of bounds" even to the extent of the few rods separating the camp property from that of the gentleman named by Carrington, a university teacher regarded locally as a great expert on mushrooms, fungi, and suchlike things.

Carrington called after the disappearing boy.

"Oh, Crocker!"

"Yes, Mr. Carrington?"

"Throw it away if Dr. Benjamin says it's no good; but if he says it's all right, bring it back, please, and leave it on the mantel-shelf in the big living room. Do you mind?"

"All right, sir," shouted Crocker over his shoulder, and trotted on.

RETURNING from the village an hour later, Carrington found the mushroom on the mantel-shelf in the living room.

He placed it in a large paper bag, left it in the kitchen in a safe place, and, the next morning before breakfast, walked up the trail toward the garage and filled his paper bag with mushrooms.

He liked mushrooms, and so, doubtless, did the people who had noticed these. He decided he would prepare the mushrooms himself. There would be just about enough for three generous portions. Mushrooms were not commonly eaten as a breakfast dish, but,—this was camp!

Exchanging a pleasant "good morning" with the young colored man who served as assistant cook, and who was engaged in getting breakfast ready, and smilingly declining his offer to prepare the mushrooms, he peeled them, warmed a generous lump of fresh, country butter in a large frying pan, and began cooking them.

A delightfully appetizing odor arising from the pan provoked respectful banter from the young cook, amused at the camp-director's efforts along the lines of his own profession, and the two chatted while Carrington turned his mushrooms over and over in the butter with a long fork. When they were done exactly to a turn, and duly peppered and salted, Carrington left them in the pan, which he took off the stove, and set about the preparation of three *canapés* of fried toast. He was going to serve his mushrooms in style, as the grinning young cook slyly remarked. He grinned back, and divided the mushrooms into three equal portions, each on its *canapé*, which he asked the under-cook to keep hot in the oven during the brief interval until mess call should bring everybody at camp in to breakfast.

Then with his long fork he speared several small pieces of mushroom which had got broken in the pan. After blowing these cool on the fork, Carrington, grinning like a boy, put them into his mouth and began to eat them.

"Good, suh?" enquired the assistant cook.

"Delicious," mumbled Carrington, enthusiastically, his mouth full of the succulent bits. After he had swallowed his mouthful, he remarked:

"But I must have left a bit of the hide on one of 'em. There's a little trace of bitter."

"Look out for 'em, suh," enjoined the under-cook, suddenly grave. "They're plumb wicked when they ain't jus' right, suh."

"These are all right," returned Carrington, reassuringly. "I had Professor Benjamin look them over."

He sauntered out on the veranda, waiting for the bugle call. From many directions the boys and a few visitors were straggling in toward the mess hall after a morning dip in the lake and cabin inspection. From their room in the guest house the people with whom he had been the evening before came across the broad veranda toward him. He was just turning toward them with a smile of pleasant greeting when the very hand of death fell on him.

Without warning, a sudden terrible griping, accompanied by a deadly coldness, and this immediately followed by a pungent, burning heat, ran through his body. Great beads of sweat sprang out on his forehead. His knees began to give under him. Everything, all this pleasant world about him, of brilliant morning sunshine and deep, sharply-defined shad-

ow, turned greenish and dim. His senses started to slip away from him in the numbness which closed down like a relentless hand, crushing out his consciousness.

With an effort which seemed to wrench his soul and tear him with unimagined pain, he gathered all his waning forces, and, sustained only by a mighty effort of his powerful will, he staggered through the open doorway of the mess hall into the kitchen. He nearly collapsed as he leaned against the nearest table, articulating between fast-paralyzing lips:

"Water,—and mustard! Quick. The mushrooms!"

The head-cook, that moment arrived in the kitchen, happened to be quick-minded. The under-cook, too, had had, of course, some preparation for this possibility.

One of the men seized a bowl just used for beating eggs and with shaking hands poured it half-full of warm water from a heating kettle on the stove. Into this the other emptied nearly half a tin of dry mustard which he stirred about frantically with his floury hand. This, his eyes rolling with terror, he held to Carrington's lips, and Carrington, concentrating afresh all his remaining faculties, forced the nauseous fluid through his blue lips, and swallowed, painfully, great saving gulps of the powerful emetic.

Again and yet again the two negroes renewed the dose.

One of the counselors, on dining room duty, coming into the kitchen sensed something terribly amiss, and ran to support Carrington.

TEN minutes later, vastly nauseated, trembling with weakness, but safe, Carrington, leaning heavily on the young counselor, walked up and down behind the mess hall. His first words, after he could speak coherently, were to order the assistant cook to burn the contents of the three hot plates in the oven. . . .

He had eaten a large mouthful of one of the most deadly varieties of poisonous mushroom, one containing the swiftly-acting vegetable alkaloids which spell certain death. His few moments' respite, as he reasoned the matter out afterward, had been undoubtedly due to his having cooked the mushrooms in butter, of which he had been lavish. This, thoroughly soaked up by the mushrooms, had, for a brief period, resisted digestion.

Very gradually, as he walked up and down, taking in deep breaths of the sweet, pine-scented air, his strength returned to him. After he had thoroughly walked off the faintness which had followed the violent treatment to which he had subjected himself, he went up to his room, and, still terribly shaken by his experience and narrow escape from death, went to bed to rest.

Crocker, it appeared, had duly carried out his instructions. Dr. Benjamin had looked at the specimen and told the boy that there were several varieties of this mushroom, not easily to be distinguished from one another, of which some were wholesome, and one contained a deadly alkaloid. Being otherwise occupied at the time, he would have to defer his opinion until he had had an opportunity for a more thorough examination. He had handed back the mushroom submitted to him and the lad had given it to a counselor, who had put it on the mantel-shelf intending to report to Mr. Carrington the following morning.

Weak still, and very drowzy, Carrington lay on his bed and silently thanked the Powers above for having preserved his life.

Abruptly he thought of his mother. The warning!

At once it was as though she stood in the room beside his bed; as though

their long, close companionship had not been interrupted by death.

A wave of affectionate gratitude suffused him. Under its influence he rose, wearily, and sank to his knees beside the bed, his head on his arms, in the very spot where his mother had seemed to stand in his dream.

Tears welled into his eyes, and fell, unnoticed, as he communed silently with her who had brought him into the world, whose watchful love and care not even death could interrupt or vitiate.

Silently, fervently, he spoke across the gulf to his mother. . . .

He choked with silent sobs as understanding of her invincible love came to him and overwhelmed him. Then, to the accompaniment of a tremulous calmness which seemed to fall upon him abruptly, he had the sense of her, standing close beside him, as she had stood in his dream. He dared not raise his eyes, because now he knew that he was awake. It seemed to him as though she spoke, though there came to him no sensation of anything that could be compared to sound.

"Ye must be getting back into your bed, laddie."

And keeping his eyes tightly shut, lest he disturb this visitation, he awkwardly fumbled his way back into bed. He settled himself on his back, and an overpowering drowziness, perhaps begotten of his recent shock and its attendant bodily weakness, ran through him like a benediction and a refreshing wind.

As he drifted down over the threshhold of consciousness into the deep and prolonged sleep of physical exhaustion which completely restored him, his last remembrance was of the lingering caress of his mother's firm hand resting on his shoulder.

The Moon Dance

***By* A. LESLIE**

Throbbing drums, a cold, dead moon,
And a whispering tropic strand;
A play of shadows flitting free
Across the tide-washed sand.

A sighing wind that sobs and moans
And ever seems to flee,
A pale ghost wind that hurries on
To a quest in the open sea.

Louder! louder! throb the drums,
The shadows reel and sway,
And the sobbing wind goes shuddering by
On its endless, pathless way.

Slowly the cold moon sinks from sight
Behind the jungle's crest;
Softer and softer sound the drums,
And the shadows come to rest.

A Grisly Tale of African Voodoo Rites

VIALS *of* WRATH

By EDITH LYLE RAGSDALE

IT WAS Carson's back. There could be no doubt about that. I would have known him anywhere.

I pushed my way through the crowd and, shoving this way and that, finally overtook my old friend.

I hadn't seen Jim Carson for a number of years and remembered him as an affable, whole-hearted chap, with engaging Irish-blue eyes and tar-black hair. Imagine, then, my surprize when, as I reached him, I saw that his hair was snow-white, that the skin on his face was yellow and wrinkled like that of a mummy and seemed grown to the bones, that his eyes, once so merry, were deep-set in his cadaverous face, filled with a horror, a lurking fear, the eyes of a man who sees some hideous vision.

I tried to dissemble, to suppress my astonishment at this startling change in my old friend's appearance. But I might have saved myself the trouble. Carson seemed lost to all minor emotions. He looked through me, past me. The hand he offered was as cold and clammy as that of a dead man. His voice was a hollow echo.

A sort of chill emanated from the man, a chill which clung about me, penetrating my bones until the marrow ached, and lumping my blood until knots formed beneath my skin.

I wished, subconsciously, that I had not met up with him. I actually trembled, but I tried to make the best of my bad encounter.

My car was parked near by and, after a few words, I asked him to be my guest while in the city. Carson consented, so, even though I felt an emotion verging upon hysteria stealing over me, I drove out to the suburbs, where, as Maude was on her vacation, I was keeping bachelor hall.

I was glad my wife was gone. She is a nervous, high-strung woman. Not for worlds would I have subjected her to the ordeal of entertaining Carson. Man that I am, robust, and disgustingly material in my views, I have received a shock which time alone may eradicate.

The first hour after our arrival passed off smoothly. I prepared an appetizing meal for my guest and myself, and after supper we repaired to the big, cool porch, and there, over cigars, recounted our mutual boyhood experiences. Under the sedative influence of the weed, Carson seemed to thaw, to become more human, less a dead man.

I began to feel that I had made a mountain of a mole hill, that I had overestimated my friend's looks and manners.

I leaned back, puffing contentedly at my cigar. Carson was telling me of an experience he had had while coming home on the boat, during the days of submarine warfare. He was in the middle of a thrilling narrative when the telephone rang.

I arose and passed into the house. Maude was on the wire, three hundred miles away, wanting to know if I had fed the goldfish and if Bobs (her canary) was all right. After reassuring her on all points I returned to my guest.

At first I thought he was asleep, lying back in his chair. Then something about the pose struck me as odd. It was too rigid, too tense, to be natural.

I moved over to him, listened for his breathing. There was no sound. I touched him. He was cold. I thrust my hand into his shirt, next the skin. The heart seemed stilled.

I was afraid—abjectly afraid. Carson, to all appearances, was dead. I was alone. All my old fear and repugnance of the evening returned. I shuddered and my knees shook. I felt the hair at the base of my skull rise, like the bristles on the back of a dog when it sees shades in the dark.

I wondered if the authorities would arrest me. I cursed myself for running after and overtaking Carson, for carrying him out to my heretofore peaceful and uneventful h o m e. Maude, being psychic, might even object to living in a house overshadowed by a mysterious death. And I had been, until now, perfectly happy in the pretty little bungalow with its big lawn and prodigality of roses.

Then another thought struck me. What had caused Jim's death? When the telephone rang he had been talking with animation. Just prior to our coming out on the porch he had eaten a hearty supper.

Again I bent over Carson. I fancied I could see a change. He looked less rigid, more relaxed. I grew hopeful. Perhaps there might be a little life left. I ran to the telephone and called our family physician.

When the doctor arrived I had Carson stretched out on a lounge and was rubbing him with camphor. It was the first thing that occurred to me.

The doctor produced his stethoscope and began hunting for signs of animation. After a bit he looked at me and remarked reassuringly: "He isn't dead. Sort of coma. Has had a shock, a severe one, I judge. He'll rally from this, but I fear he won't last long. Three days, perhaps."

He bared Carson's arm and gave him a shot of strychnin. I watched, fascinated.

The doctor turned to me: "Better call an ambulance and have him taken to St. Mary's. He will need expert care—and there isn't a nurse here now you can get for love or money."

I acted upon the suggestion, and before midnight Carson was resting comfortably in the narrow, white hospital bed, watched over by a serious-eyed nun. I stayed with him as long as I could, then left with the promise that I would return the following morning.

WHEN I again entered Carson's presence I saw that his mind was clear. There was, also, an indefinable change in the poor chap's appearance. His eyes were free of the expression of horror. Even his skin looked less drawn. But death sat perched on the headboard.

Carson smiled weakly and pointed to a chair.

"Sit down, old man," he murmured. I obeyed, and for a few minutes there was no word spoken. Then, stretching out a lean hand he laid hold of my fingers and spoke.

"I guess I am about to pass out," he began, "and I am glad. Every minute, for seven years, I have longed for death."

He paused, struggling for breath. When he spoke again it was with less effort, and from the time he began telling me of the occurrence that turned him into an insatiate demon he never wavered or paused until the final word was spoken.

"You knew Helen, my wife," began Carson. "You knew her when we three attended the university. You knew how beautiful she was, with her glorious golden hair and brown eyes, her satin-white skin, fine in texture as a lily petal, and you surmised

her beautiful soul, her purity, her wonderful personality, but I alone knew her. I worshiped her as it is given to few to worship. Our love was without a flaw. The years never dimmed our affection, and the birth of our daughter, three years after our marriage, cemented all the stronger the bond between us.

"You remember my desire to be a missionary. You recall that after graduation I entered the college of theology. When I received my degree, when I became a regularly ordained minister of the gospel, I felt life held but little more of joy. My cup of happiness was running over.

"A month after I received my orders we found ourselves on shipboard, outward bound for a post on the African coast.

"I was a religious fanatic. I could not see that there was work, plenty of it, right at home. The command, 'Go ye into every land and preach my gospel', meant, to me, just that. I wanted to go into every land and spread the news.

"When we reached Africa and I saw what was before us I thrilled. The harvest was indeed ready for the reaping. I plunged into the work and for a time failed to see the hardships and dangers into which I had brought my wife.

"But, eventually, I began to sense these things. The climate failed to agree with my darling. She, though she never told me until long months afterward, feared the blacks. Her health grew bad, and not until our baby's birth did Helen regain her former buoyant strength. But with baby's advent my wife's sunny smile came back and life again assumed a rosy glow.

"We were, to a certain extent, well situated. The mission house was large, made of heavy logs, with strong shuttered doors and windows. We had, too, some of the comforts of civilization, such as screens to keep out the insects and serpents, manufactured goods shipped in from the States, and a private telephone line connecting my outposts with the mission house.

"From the first my wife's wonderful sweetness of manner and her great beauty acted upon the blacks like a charm. They gave her a native name which, translated, means 'Lily-white'.

"My success was phenomenal. Soon the work was progressing beyond my most sanguine hopes. The servants and laborers employed about the mission house were my first converts. These men and women forsook their hideous rites; voodooism disappeared from that particular point; and in its stead came peace, plenty and clean living.

"The early converts became in turn missionaries. Wherever they went, with whomsoever they talked, they, even though crudely, spread the gospel. And I loved my people. True, their skins were black and their ways were not my ways, but for all that I knew they were my brothers, spirit of my spirit. For more than three years I preached to them, taught them to read and write and work. I doctored their bodies as well as their souls. And in every way Helen, my Lily-white, aided me. But this peaceful existence was but the calm before the storm.

"ONE day a strapping black placed himself in my path. He looked worried and harried. A prescience of evil swept over me as he began in halting and lame English to tell me of Mogo, a powerful medicine man of the tribe, who was trying to demoralize and stampede my converts.

"From the man's disjointed narrative I learned that Mogo was practising the most revolting forms of voodooism, that he had instituted a revival of ancient heathen sacrifices, was practising cannibalism, and wag-

ing war against the spread of civilization and religion.

"I questioned the black, but, once having told me of the trouble, the fellow seemed to withdraw into himself and I could gather nothing further.

"All our servants were loyal. The big black men, three in number, employed about the place, vied with each other in their devotion to Helen and the baby. I never felt a fear for the safety of my loved ones, even though at times I was called miles away to other villages or even into the interior.

"One day, shortly after the conversation with the black, he again intercepted me. The story he had to tell me was exceptionally revolting. Mogo had gathered around him a following of degenerate negroes, and the next night, which happened to be full moon, there was to be a meeting with the added attraction of human sacrifice. The place of meeting was on the banks of a sluggish little river, not much more than a creek—a thick, oozy stream swarming with crocodiles.

"I decided to be on hand, even though the danger was great, and to prevent the sacrifice if possible. Because of the risk, I had to tell some of the facts to my wife. Naturally, she was shocked by the disclosures and entreated me to stay away from the scene of the crime.

"But this I could not do. I had given myself to the work. I would be a coward, a poltroon, less than a man, were I to let pass unrebuked an orgy such as Mogo planned.

"The distance from the mission house to the scene of the meeting was nearly twenty miles through swamp and underbrush and rank vegetation, past a small town, the last point where I could communicate with Helen by telephone, a hard, soul-sapping journey for a white man.

"I obtained the service of my informant as guide and we set out through the swamps. At the village I stopped for food and rest and the precious solace of a few words over the telephone with Helen. The dear girl, even though her heart was torn by fears, spoke bravely and encouragingly. She held our baby to the instrument and let her babble to 'Dada'.

"I told Helen that, should she want me, she could call me at this point, and a black would get the word to me. But Helen laughed away my fears. She had our three servants, besides the woman who did the cooking and housework since baby came.

"Just before dusk I, with the black guiding along before me, set out on the last lap of my journey. The moon was not yet up and the shadows were black all about us. From tree and bush came eery calls and strange noises, from the rank grass and vegetation the hiss and rustle of serpents.

"By the time the moon was up we had reached a vantage point, and, secreting ourselves, we watched the preparation for the consummation of the lustful deed.

"A throne of logs had been erected, and upon this Mogo, a powerful, villainous-looking giant, sat, directing the arrangements. From our covert I watched the play of the corded muscles beneath the satin-black skin, the bloodshot whites of the eyes, the cruel twist of the protruding lips.

"A crowd formed quickly. Like shadows, they slunk from out of the gloom. A big heap of inflammable material was piled in an open space a few yards from the throne, near the river bank.

"I could not understand much of Mogo's harangue. But that he was a sort of spellbinder I could readily see. As he talked, his followers, many of whom had professed the Christian faith, fell prone before the throne. For an hour the big black talked, lashing the crowd to fury.

"Suddenly Mogo sprang to his feet, waving his arms, shouting, eyes rolling, foam flecking his lips.

"The negroes seemed to go mad. Those that had fallen to the ground now leapt to their feet and, men and women alike, began tearing their garments. Someone set fire to the brushheap, and I sickened as I saw the blacks join hands and dance, naked, around the blazing pyre.

"The dance grew in violence and abandonment. With the stripping off of their garments, civilization and religion were cast aside. They were just what their ancestors had been. They screamed a chant; they leapt into the air; they clawed their flesh until blood mingled with the sweat of their glistening bodies. And Mogo urged them on.

"Out over the sluggish water the blood-red glow of the fire crept. A bull crocodile stuck his repulsive head above the scum and snapped his jaws.

"A hideous old hag ran to the shadows just without the brilliant circle of firelight and caught up a newborn child, unwashed and unbandaged, and with toothless mouthings she laid it in Mogo's hands.

"The medicine man sprang up, screamed a sort of prayer or incantation and, before I could divine his intention, flung the wailing child into the open jaws of the crocodile. As the creature's jaws crunched the writhing little body, a young and not uncomely woman dashed into the circle of light shrieking madly.

"Again Mogo began his chant. A dozen powerful blacks sprang forward and, as the crocodiles fought for the bleeding morsel, and as the waters turned a deeper red than that caused by the firelight, the young mother was seized and dragged, resisting, fighting every inch of the way, to the throne.

"I heard Mogo bellow a command; I saw a huge pot rushed to the fire. As my senses reeled, I saw the woman beheaded, dismembered and thrown into the pot.

"WHEN consciousness returned, I was lying on a bed in the village hotel. I essayed to rise, but I could not. I called, and a cowering black answered. It was my guide, to whom I owed my life.

"I asked him the time, how long I had been there. His answer was staggering. I had been unconscious three days!

"My first thought was of Helen. I knew her peril. I had caught enough of Mogo's harangue to understand . . .

"I knew, even though God had kept her safe, that her anxiety over my absence and silence must be maddening. I again tried to get up. But my knees were weak and I wabbled back, fell upon the bed. And less than ten steps away was the telephone.

"I dozed for a time. I was terribly ill; I felt that I was dying. I seemed to float between earth and sky.

"The shrill ringing of the telephone bell caught me, jerked me back to things mundane. I knew that it was Helen, that she needed me. Even before I, with the help of the black, managed to reach the instrument, a nameless dread clutched my heart.

"Mogo had gathered his followers about him and, with the craftiness of the devil, had worked upon their fears, their superstitions, until they became as wax in his hands. The Lily-white must be destroyed. Just so long as the yellow-haired woman lived, their god, Zombo, would frown upon them.

"All this Helen told me. I cried out and beat my hands, for I knew there was more to come. I sensed that danger menaced my darlings.

"Again my beloved's voice came to me: 'They are attacking the house now,' she said and the calmness of despair held her voice steady. 'They

are battering down the front door. Our servants are assisting them.'

"I cursed, *cursed,* CURSED! In that moment I became a devil. Even now, I am amazed at the depths of evil into which this horror plunged me.

"I called to Helen that I was coming to her. But her voice never trembled as she made answer. 'Do not leave the wire. It will be but a few minutes before it is all over. You could not possibly reach here in time. Let us talk to each other—until——'

"She told me, quite calmly, that she was barricaded in her chamber; that, when our servants deserted her, she had locked the doors and windows, taken the baby and repaired to the upper story, where the telephone was located.

" 'Helen,' I called, 'Helen, are you —armed?'

"Her voice came back, clearly, 'Yes. I will wait until I am certain. When I am certain——. It is the only way. Baby first. Then I——'

"Again a pause, then: 'They are in the house—coming up the stair. I hear our servants. There are four more with them . . . They are pounding on the door . . . It is beginning to crack. Darling, I must save—baby!'

"Frenzied with horror I crouched there, my ear to the receiver. I could hear blows rained upon the door. I heard a shot. I screamed, wildly. I knew that my baby, my bright-eyed darling, was dead. Again I heard Helen speaking: 'It is almost over, dear love,' she said. 'I have set fire to the room. Mogo's cannibals must not——'

"Again I heard a babel of sounds, of screams, curses and blows.

" 'The fire is burning rapidly,' came the dear voice. 'The blacks know I have outwitted them. But they are still at the door. I——'

"A rending crash interrupted her. The door caved in. I heard Helen scream. I heard a shot, then the connection was severed and I fell forward, unconscious.

"For days I was a maniac. When reason again asserted itself I returned to the scene of the tragedy. A pile of blackened embers was all that remained of the house. I searched the ruins and found a few human bones. These I gave Christian burial and over them I vowed a vow.

"It has taken me a long time to fulfil it, but—I have done so."

Carson's voice had become a mere whisper, but he struggled on, his eyes fixed on mine.

"Yes," he repeated, "it took a long time, but—I accomplished my vow. I found the seven who murdered my wife and babe, and one by one I *crucified them*—head down. If you ever visit Africa you can find their rotting carcasses in a cave, back a short distance from the mission house site. I am the only living person who knows of the existence of this cave, but" (here he produced a roughly sketched chart) "take this and you will find it without difficulty."

His eyes flickered and closed. For a moment I thought he had answered the last call. But with his ebbing breath he struggled on:

"From that day—I go insane when —I hear a telephone bell. I live again the awful agony of that hour. I can see it all—all!"

I tried to soothe him, but he seemed past all human help. I sat beside his cot, stunned, unable to think clearly.

For a time he slept. Then his eyes flew open, he sprang up in bed and a look of ecstasy overspread his drawn features.

"Helen!" he cried. "Why, Helen, my darling!"

My eyes involuntarily followed the direction of Carson's. When I looked at him again he was lying back on his pillows, a smile of serene peace upon his dead, gray face.

A Startling Tale of Thought Transmission by Radio

The Experiment of Erich Weigert

By SEWELL PEASLEE WRIGHT

THE moment I gazed out over the audience I saw him. He was seated far back under the balcony that overhung the little auditorium, but even in the heavy shadow I could see his eyes; eyes that seemed alight with cold brilliance, like a diamond in the moonlight.

Although I was more or less accustomed to public speaking, and was very much at home with my subject that evening, "Radio As It Used To Be," something about the unfaltering regard of the man under the balcony confused me. His eyes were on me constantly; every move I made, every gesture, every change in expression, those unwinking blue orbs seemed to register.

I wondered who he was; surely I had never seen him before, nor he me. I caught myself addressing myself to him, and when once his head seemed to nod slightly as though in approval of something I had said, a strange thrill of pleasure tingled along my spine. There was a power in the man; a sort of benign malignancy. I was glad when I finished and could escape from that unwavering regard.

After the meeting broke up he came up toward the stage, where I was chatting with several officers of the radio association responsible for the meeting I had just addressed. They moved away as they noted the stranger's obvious intention to speak to me.

He was a little man, I saw now, not more than five feet six inches in height, but his shoulders were broad and massive, and his head was larger than mine.

But it was his face that held my gaze. His eyes, as I had said, seemed to burn coldly, with the same chilly, weird blue light of an electric spark. They were deep-set eyes, separated with a thin, sharply beaked nose that somehow seemed repulsively cruel. His mouth was thin and turned down sharply at the corners, two deep wrinkles springing from near the base of his nose accenting its contour. Above a high forehead that bulged strangely clung tangled sparse gray locks.

He smiled ingratiatingly as he drew near, and as he spoke, his voice was surprizingly pleasant.

"Mr. Saylor, I enjoyed your talk very much indeed. For a man of your years you have a very keen insight into radio."

He offered his hand as he spoke, and I took it cordially. For all his unprepossessing appearance, there was a certain appeal about the man; the strength of his personality at-

tracted more than his appearance repelled.

"I've been working with radio for fourteen years now," I replied smiling. "Ham, Marconi 'op', experimental work for a manufacturer, designing, all that sort of thing. Bound to pick up a little here and there, you know."

"Yes, indeed! A great deal of experience for a young man. You seem—pardon me! I have neglected to introduce myself; Erich Weigert, at your service!" He bowed a quick little foreign, military bow, heels together. "If you have nothing else in mind, Mr. Saylor, and would be interested, I would like to take you through my own little laboratory this evening."

Erich Weigert! And an invitation to go through his laboratory! It is no wonder that I gasped. I had heard of him as a wealthy, somewhat mysterious recluse with scientific leanings, but I had never seen him before that memorable night.

WEIGERT'S machine soon whisked us out to his residence near the outskirts of the city. Only a few lights were burning as we turned in at the grass-grown drive, but I could make out the house as a massive, square pile, squat and ugly in the moonlight, topped with an octagonal cupola, like some uncouth excrudescence, its panes glaring bleakly over the rather extensive, high-walled grounds that surrounded the place.

The door was opened by a young woman whom a moment later Weigert introduced as his wife. The affection and pride in his voice as he presented me struck me as being the first real feeling that he had evidenced since I had met him.

He had a very real reason for his pride, for his wife was undeniably beautiful. The instant she raised her soft, dark eyes to mine I was struck almost dumb with their remarkable loveliness. I say I was struck almost dumb; I say that because to talk of love at first sight is to bring up visions of youthful exaggerations. It is true that as Vera Weigert and I looked into each other's eyes that night, something was born of that union of glances that never died—that never will die. Call it what you will, for I must on with my story.

I remember but vaguely the trip through the big bare laboratory that Weigert had made of two adjoining rooms at one side of the house. Later I became very well acquainted with the delicate instruments, the generators and transformers and the immense variety of tubes with which the laboratory was equipped, but that night my mind was too full of Vera Weigert. It was not until after Weigert invited me to a chair in front of the big fireplace in the front room, between himself and his wife, that the trend of his conversation began to make an impression on my mind.

"Your remark this evening that the mystery had all gone from radio, despite the fact that radio was doing greater marvels today than ever, struck me particularly," Weigert said with a nod of approval, glancing first at me, and then at his wife. "It is true, today they hook up eight tubes and hear from one coast to another or perhaps one continent listens to another—with the power of the sending station listed in many thousands of watts. Bah! It is like killing ants with a steam-roller! In the days when we caught the buzz and scratch of spark signals two thousand miles away — and more — with our crystals, silicon, galena, perikon — then there was mystery, romance, to radio. Today my barber's wife can twiddle the switches and dials of her set and copy from coast to coast as easily as she can change the records on her phonograph. The scientist, the man with imagination, has left that phase of radio far behind; it is

a husk from which all the sweetness has been sucked!"

"True," I nodded. "I find no interest in radio communications now. But, sir, the transmission of photographs by radio—and we are doing that now, you know—fires my imagination. I have been working myself along those lines," I added somewhat timidly, for Erich Weigert had a terrific force of personality that made me feel very young beside him. "Perhaps the day is not so far off when we shall be able to broadcast moving pictures as well as the music to accompany them!"

"*Aber! Aber!* That is but a step!" broke in Weigert, interrupting me with sudden and unexpected violence. "First code, then speech, then pictures. Good! A start, perhaps, but—not more than a start, Mr. Saylor!" He dropped his voice until it was little more than an insinuating whisper, and his eyes gleamed with indescribable earnestness. "*Thought!* That's the thing; the transmission of thought! Through the ages they have tried it. Some have claimed to have perfected it, but it was never so. Between two particular individuals, perhaps; but it has never been made a science. Radio *can* make it a science, Mr. Saylor; radio and *I!*"

I think he would have said more, but his wife deftly changed the subject, and Weigert allowed himself to be led by the soft leash of her voice. As for me, I was in a sort of uneasy paradise to be there beside her, to listen to her sweet voice, and the rest of the evening flew by far too quickly.

For days after two voices ruled my brain. One was her soft "Good night, Mr. Saylor!" and the other was Erich Weigert's cordial invitation to return to talk radio again some other night very soon. Should I go? Or should I heed the warning that my inner self shrieked in my mental ears? Should I place myself as one side of a triangle? And such a triangle! It was very evident that Weigert was wildly in love with his young wife, and with his temperament and personality—but why prolong the debate that raged in my mind? You know, if you have ever been a man, and young, how it was decided. I went—went not once but many times.

I think that Erich Weigert grew for me a real affection; I could follow him along the lesser-trodden paths of radio research and could even lead him into some of the ramifications of the great science. My ideas, or at least many of them, agreed with his own. And to the man who had cut himself off from the rest of the world that he might devote himself to his work, I suppose I was a welcome contact point with the outside.

It was the love that waxed and grew between Vera and myself that caused me the most concern. There was that between us that made every moment near her a bitter paradise; a joyous hell. And that she responded to my passion with a love as great as my own, I had only to look into her eyes to see.

A quick pressure of her hand, a touch on the arm in passing; little things, yet they were all we had. And they were enough to drive me to any madness.

ONE night Weigert excused himself for a moment, to fetch something from the laboratory. As he disappeared through the heavy drapes her eyes met mine, and for a long moment we sat, drinking deep of the forbidden draft. Then, compelled by a force greater than the will of either of us, we rose to our feet and an instant later I had her in my arms, my lips crushed on hers.

I thought that I caught out of the corner of my eyes, a movement of the drapes across the door, and she detected my sudden start.

"What is it, dear?" she whispered.

"Nothing. But I thought the drapes moved just then. It startled me for a moment."

"It might have been him!" she whispered fiercely. "He is a devil! He knows everything. Perhaps——" But before she could finish we heard his steps coming down the hall, and we hastened to seat ourselves.

Evidently Weigert had not been spying on us, for he was his normal self when he entered the room. Intensely jealous though he was, he had never seemed to see the love that was between his wife and me.

I should have read the man better; should have realized that those cold blue eyes missed nothing, and that such a personality could dissemble until—until——

"WE HAVE often talked about thought transmission by radio, Saylor. You remember?" Weigert was talking to me over the 'phone, as we often chatted of an afternoon, when both of us had a little time. There was a certain tenseness in his voice that vaguely excited me.

"Yes," I answered quickly. "Have you——?"

"I think so. I am going to try the experiment tonight. Would you care to be on hand and assist me?"

"I certainly deem it an honor to be asked!"

He chuckled as at some private bit of humor before he replied.

"Will you be on hand at 8 sharp, then? I must get to work now; there's a lot to do before tonight. Remember, 8 o'clock sharp!"

It was exactly three minutes of 8 when Erich Weigert admitted me that night. I showed him my watch, laughingly.

"See how well I obeyed orders?"

"Fine!" he nodded. "We will go directly to the laboratory; I am naturally anxious as to the success of our experiment."

The cold glitter in his eyes and the deepening of the harsh lines that accented the habitual sneer on the thin lips had told me at first glance that his nerves were near the breaking point, and as he spoke a vibrant undertone of his voice affirmed the truth of my judgment.

The laboratory, as I have said, was composed of two rooms, but tonight Weigert had pulled tightly shut the sliding doors between them. Before I had time to question him, even had I felt so inclined, he directed my attention to a table in the center of the room. On it was a mass of apparatus, in which I recognized many familiar instruments, although one or two of the devices were utterly foreign to my experience. Four receiving tubes burned near one edge of the tangle.

"Sit down in the chair, Saylor," suggested Weigert. "You're going to act as the receiving agent in this little test, since you so kindly volunteered to help. There; so."

He placed me in a big, overstuffed chair that stood beside the table and directed his attention to the apparatus.

"You see, I have reasoned it out this way," he commented as he worked: "thought is a function of the brain. Therefore"—he turned to me with an odd contrivance in his hand, a collarlike piece of apparatus, attached to some part of the array on the table by two long, flexible wires—"receiving of thought must be by getting in contact with the brain, either directly or through nerves running to the brain. Understand?"

I nodded, only partly understanding, and yet dominated utterly by the intense blue light that flared in his agate-hard blue eyes.

"So! Then we place this little collar of soft chamois around your neck, buckling it tightly in place," he continued, suiting the action to the word. "That cold sensation you feel at the back is nothing but a plate of heavy

silver foil; its function is to conduct to the nerve-cable of your spinal column the thought impulses after they are sufficiently amplified and energized by this apparatus."

For a few minutes he seemed to forget me utterly, and he leaned over the apparatus on the table, inspecting it, testing and adjusting. I watched him curiously, a premonition of evil settling down over me as a cold ocean fog rolls down into the lowlands. I was glad when he finally straightened up and once more spoke.

"Everything seems to be all ready," he said. "I'm not quite sure what current will be needed here, so I'll cut out this potentiometer slowly. You tell me"—and he put his face close to mine and glared down into my eyes—"what you feel."

"But—but the other subject?" I ventured. "Who is transmitting?"

"The other subject," he said curtly, "is in the next room. Keep your mind as free from outside thoughts as you can. Close your eyes. Relax."

In the stillness of the room I could hear the slight scrape of the contact arm over the wires of the potentiometer, but save for a nervous tickle up and down my spine I could feel nothing.

"Not enough, eh?" questioned Weigert, evidently watching my impassive face. I shook my head.

The potentiometer scraped again, and I became aware of a soft warmness in the region directly under the metal plate; a warmth that crept upward until it suffused the whole base of my brain. There was a sort of undulating quality about it that made me dizzy, that seemed to make me reel and sway even as I sat ensconced in the broad arms of the chair.

"It begins to make itself felt?"

I opened my eyes with a little start; his voice seemed to come from some outer world.

Weigert was peering down at me, his blue eyes alight with scientific fervor—or was it something more? He scowled as he saw my eyes open.

"Keep your eyes shut!" he commanded harshly. "How can the experiment succeed if you disobey orders?" I closed my eyes and sank back into the chair, and again the surging heat swept upward into my brain. I heard the potentiometer scrape; more and more . . . .

It is hard to put down in black and white that which sounds so incredible that I myself can hardly believe it. But I shall try.

The pulsation of the warm waves increased; slowly at first and then with a sudden rush. Although my eyes were tightly shut, the impression of great red roaring flames swept before me as though my face were buried in a very fountain of fire.

And then, gradually, a thought was born in my mind; not a thought as it springs to the normal, conscious mind, but a thought from without forced itself into my mind and grew there, swelling from an unrecognizable seed to a palpitant growth — and the thought that had been planted in my mind, and that grew there so vividly, as if before some inner eye, was a thought of *love!* Love as boundless as space itself; as real and actual as a mighty block of granite. Love; *love for me!* Soundless, formless words, as intangible and elusive as wisps of mist, swam through my bursting brain; words of affection, endearment, sacrifice, love.

I was aware, too, of another element, as though the picture was shot through with intermittent flashes of red, disrupting light. Pain! Agony! Fear! Despair! These were the things that were marring the beauty of my inward vision. I could feel my face writhe with the beauty and the horror of it all, but it held me enthralled in its mysterious grasp. I wanted to tear the accursed thing

from my throat, to leap up, to cry aloud——

Suddenly, totally, the torture stopped; there were only the warm, throbbing waves of feeling inundating my brain. I opened my eyes and leaped from the chair, cursing.

"What damnable thing is this you have here?" I shouted. "I have been to hell and back again! I should have gone crazy had you not turned it off when you did!"

The eager, curious light went from Erich Weigert's eyes, and in its place came a glint of sardonic amusement.

"I did not turn it off," he said calmly. "But I can imagine why you thought I did." He deftly removed the band around my neck and tossed it carelessly onto the table. "And now—would you not like to see—the other subject; the sender?"

An icy chill gripped my every nerve and sinew; there was something diabolically sinister in the man's face and in the soft tones of his voice.

I nodded dumbly, still dazed from the experiment, and stumbled in his wake to the closed double doors. He slid the doors open and stood aside that I might enter.

On an operating table near the door lay a figure covered with a long white sheet. A faint odor as of an anesthetic came to my nostrils, but there was something about the absolute, deathly stillness of the supine figure that told me I was in the presence of death itself.

Trembling, the blood draining from my face, I stood and stared at the still figure and at the instrument-littered table beside the operating table. Three small wires from the maze of instruments on the table disappeared under the edge of the sheet; two big transmitting tubes glowed yellowly in the bright light that flooded the room. A dim, horrible idea began to take shape in my mind.

"See!" chuckled Weigert, his voice grating on the silence like the screech of a rusty hinge. "The sending subject!"

He strode forward and tore the sheet from the figure.

I felt my knees tremble beneath me, and I leaned against the wall for support. *There on the table, dressed in a simple white robe, lay the body of Vera Weigert!*

My eyes refused to move from the fearful sight. A spot above either ear had been shaved, and on the scalp thus exposed a red circle with edges —my God!

"Just as the receiving element must work directly upon the nerve trunk," I heard Weigert saying, "the sending must be done, at least with the crude apparatus I have, direct from the emanating source. And that, of course, is—*the brain!* Hence the trephine that seems to strike you as so interesting.

"This little band passes under the head as you see, and presses two silver disks directly upon the brain; or, strictly speaking, upon the *dura mater*, to get the desired contact."

Faster and faster the man spoke—or did my reeling senses imagine that? His voice, from a calm, scientific monotone, rose almost to a shriek.

"There she is, Saylor! Why don't you caress her hand now? Why don't you hold her close and press her lips now, man? There she is, and with the last spark of her energy she sent you a message, Saylor! What was the message? You won't tell me? It must have been wonderful; wonderful!

"I knew the experiment would be a success! You two loved each other; you were attuned as two human beings seldom are attuned. It was an ideal opportunity to prove that I was right; that thought *could* be transmitted—and to avenge myself upon a faithless wife and a faithless friend!"

I tried to speak, but my dry tongue refused to move from the roof of my

mouth. But he saw my throat move, and he chuckled again.

"You would deny it, eh? You—— But no matter! Let me tell you how I did it. It will interest you.

"I told her what I was going to do. Told her that if she did not submit, I would take your life as the penalty. And—does this give you pleasure, Saylor?—she consented.

"I gave her scopolamin-morphin as an anesthetic, for I knew that would permit her subconscious mind to continue its functioning. Then, carefully—oh, very carefully, for I did not want her to die too soon!—I trephined the skull, just at the fissure of Sylvius, thus locating my electrodes in the sensory area. Very well thought out, was it not?

"I knew that her last thoughts would be of you; thoughts of love for her lover. Strong thoughts, you know; thoughts that would enable my unperfected apparatus to work; to prove that my idea is feasible! Thoughts that would hold over and run constantly through her subconscious mind. Thoughts of love, eh, Saylor? And thoughts of fear, too, perhaps? Ah! I thought I read that in your face, man; and can you blame her? It is not pleasant to die when you are young and very beautiful and in love!"

He paused and drew the tip of his tongue across his thin, bloodless lips.

"And—oh, this was a joke I had not thought of!—you thought I turned it off, did you? You false friend! You fool! You meddler! You heard"—and his voice rose to a shriek like that of a maniac in hell—"I tell you, Saylor, *you heard her die!*"

I shook off the icy grip that had numbed me and leaped for the man, but before I could sink my clutching fingers in his throat he stopped me at the point of a gun which he flashed from a pocket.

"Back!" he shrieked. "Back! I don't want to kill you; I want you to live and remember—but if you move, I'll shoot to maim. I have my plans all laid for my escape, and——"

Just then I lunged. The gun roared over my head and the stench of the powder smoke swirled in my nostrils. We went down on the floor together in a whirling, flaying heap. The instrument table fell over with a terrific crash, and as I fought I saw out of the corner of my eye a flicker of red flame shoot up as the tangled high-voltage wires hissed their danger signal.

It was over in a few minutes. He was a maniac, and fought with a maniac's strength, but I was possessed of ten thousand devils! I wrenched the gun from his hand and put it to his head, holding him down with my body and my left arm in a wrestling hold I had learned years ago.

His cold blue eyes looked up into mine, glinting with sardonic amusement.

"And now for the Great Experiment!" he said, panting. "Shoot!"

I glanced up at the still figure on the operating table. The flames were beginning to roar, now, and were licking fiercely at the woodwork. Then I placed the gun directly above his ear, closed my eyes and pulled the trigger.

I NEVER looked back. The papers ran a story of a recluse and his wife trapped in a night fire. The bodies were so burned that they could not detect the holes—both just above the ear.

But *I* know! *I* know! *I*, who heard, or felt, or lived, a woman's dying thoughts, *I* know.

And tonight—now, just as soon as I write the last word of this—I shall know more, for then I shall put the same gun to my head carefully just above the ear, and—pull—the—trigger. . . . .

A Story of Real Power

The Confession of a Madman

By JAMES COCKS

THE curtain is parted by an honest, fearless man, whose education was just sufficient to make a good laborious living and give him command of a coastwise ship. He knew nothing of the so-called cults of the past or present. Although he was not a scholar, his consciousness was thrilled with the knowledge that he was a *man*. He knew virtually nothing of what other men may have thought or written. But by virtue of the consciousness of manhood that abided in him, he dared to think and ask the reason why, and with equal persistence, search out the answer.

1

FOR reasons I need not explain here, I spent one week in the quaint little town of Padstow. It was a snug little seaport town teeming with industry, having no less than two shipbuilding yards working at full speed. It lay embedded in a small valley protected on three sides by high rolling hills—a haven in time of storm.

The entrance to this port is one of the most dangerous on the Cornish coast: Padstow Points on one side, Pentire Points on the other, both bristling with jagged rocks like the fangs of some huge monster. Some distance in from the open sea, there is a bar of sand called the Dunebar. This lies in the very center of the passageway leading into Padstow, and can be seen when the tide is low. Only a skilled pilot can guide a ship through in safety. Hundreds of ships and men have been engulfed in its treacherous quicksands.

The main walk leading from the town forms a large circle above the cliffs, designated by some as the Lovers' Walk; however, it is used by all alike, for it furnishes a continual refreshing view. As one traverses this winding path, it brings to view the sand dunes on the opposite side of the wide channel. Tradition says that here lies an entire town buried by a terrific sandstorm.

As one travels around the high cliffs, he is led directly to a commanding fort, containing a few guns which silently watch the entrance to this land-protected port. A little farther around the cliffs is Padstow Cove, where the high rolling ground is suddenly parted as if hewn out by some titanic force. A number of neat little cottages dot the sloping sides, and a pretty, sandy beach slants gracefully into the channel. Immediately in the center of this beach stands the life-boat house.

My advent into Padstow was in November; the weather was cold and unsettled. In the early part of my first evening in this quaint old town, I was sitting in the bar parlor smoking a cigar and warming my knees by the fire—perhaps feeling a little dull.

In a little while a strong wind came up, which soon became a gale. Mine

host came into the room and sat down opposite me by the fire. He said in a very serious tone, "I fear, sir, we are in for a terrible storm tonight. God pity any ship that comes near the Points!"

In answer to my casual enquiry, mine host pointed out the many dangers that confronted the mariner in time of storm. Before he had got through his rather prolonged description, the wind began to whistle around the corners and eaves of the roofs. The town seemed suddenly to wake up; many people were hurrying on the streets, and excited voices could be heard every few minutes; then an old seafaring man burst into the room, and, looking at mine host, shouted, "By God, Henry! There's a foreigner (ship) on the Dunebar!"

I sprang to my feet, put on my topcoat and left the room. Following the crowd, I came to the Lovers' Walk. I do not recall ever seeing such a change in the weather in so short a time. The sea was lashing itself into a fury, and I recalled mine host's remark: "I would pity any ship in such a storm!"

In a very short time we had reached a point overlooking the cove. There was indeed a ship fast going to pieces on the Dunebar! The terrific, monsterlike clouds were parted as if by some magic hand, leaving a clear space over the huge Points and revealing the terrible drama being enacted before our eyes. Never saw I such a scene—and never do I wish to see it again. The foundering ship was lifted as if by gigantic hands on the crest of high waves, bristling in their terrible whiteness; then they receded, leaving the trembling ship to strike the cruel Dunebar with a sickening crash. Even above the thunder and hiss of the sea we could hear the piercing shriek of splitting timber, and the snapping of bolts that once held the stately ship together. In a few minutes the ship was a mass of floating wreckage.

My attention was directed to a commanding figure standing alone on a jutting piece of rock overhanging the frightful sea. His sea-cap seemed glued to his head and shoulders, and his beard was combed by the cutting wind. Both hands were shading his eyes—he was scanning the angry sea.

I turned to a man by my side and asked, "Who is that man out there?"

The man replied, "Why, stranger, that's Tom Edivinn, the lion-hearted—the bravest man that ever stood in two shoes."

This stalwart, dark figure silhouetted against the sky, with Pentire Points frowning in the distance, seemed to fascinate me. Suddenly this figure turned and sprang like a cat from the jutting point and tore down the sloping hill to the cove. Many followed his example, but I was the first to get near him. There were many men and women at the cove, some bitterly weeping, for they knew only too well that on the morrow there would be bodies washed ashore.

I saw the beautiful lifeboat, spick and span, shining like a thing of life in the semi-gloom; on each side of her were the crew. I thought I had never seen such giants of manhood before. I knew these brave Cornishmen would sacrifice their lives without an instant's thought, if need be, to save the life of their fellow man. Tom, as we now shall call him, strode over to this group of silent, determined men. . . .

As I was soon to learn, Tom Edivinn was one of the bravest men on the Cornish coast. He was a powerful man, six feet three inches in height, wide-shouldered and somewhat gaunt—alert, as agile as a cat, as strong as an ox, with muscles of whiplike steel. He wore a full, well-trimmed beard, and, though kindly-looking, was grave in his demeanor.

As gentle as a lamb, yet he knew not the meaning of fear. Such were the general characteristics of this man whose figure, silhouetted against the sky on the jutting rock, had fascinated me. Some who had been with him in absolute danger, with death staring them in the face, said his eyes shone like balls of fire, and flashed like miniature lightning. An hundred times he had taken his life in his hands to rescue some mariner.

When Tom reached the lifeboat's crew, he cried out with a loud voice: "Come on, men!—there's a man out there alive!" He pointed to the raging sea. "He can't last more than a few minutes!"

The captain of the crew replied: "Tom, it's no use!—no boat can live in such a sea!"

There were now hundreds of people assembled, and all eyes were centered on this group of men.

Tom cried out, "No man shall die with Tom Edivinn looking on!"

His little boat was near at hand, and the next moment he was gliding with it over the slanting, slippery beach. With the receding wave he launched himself into the seething sea. A cry rent the air, "Brave Tom has gone to his doom!"

Every few minutes Tom was seen on the crest of a wave battling with the sea, and every time he appeared to view, a shout of thankfulness went up to God. He disappeared in a great hollow of the sea with a piece of wreckage to which clung the last life of the doomed ship. An instant later he was seen on the crest of a wave—there were two men in Tom's little boat!

Breathlessly the throng watched him. Could he make the narrow cove? If he could not, no power on earth could save him from certain death.

"Ah!" An intense sigh seemed to ooze from hungering hearts: "He's going to make it as sure as heaven!" In a few minutes he was seen on the crest of a mighty wave opposite the mouth of the cove—in another instant, like a feather he was carried into the cove and dashed upon the beach.

2

In the lifeboat house men and women ministered to the seaman whom Tom had rescued. The fellow was badly shaken up and dazed from his trying ordeal; he was sufficiently recovered, however, to recognize in Tom the one who had saved his life. Soon he was comfortably asleep between warm blankets.

When Tom was himself again he came and looked at the man he had saved. He gave a start, then a shade of pallor swept over his features, and this was quickly replaced with a look of fondest affection. He made no remark to those standing by, and soon he joined the others in watching for the floating dead.

A few evenings later I sat chatting with mine host in the bar parlor of the Cornish Arms. The weather was cold and the fire was very cheering. There seemed unusual activity in the tavern room, termed by some the "tap room" and by others "the kitchen." Soon there came the notes of joyous song, accompanied by the sweet strains of a violin. I sensed a wistful longing to be among those men of toil, to share with them their simple amusement.

Mine host seemed to have anticipated my desire.

"The boys will have a pleasant evening in the tap room tonight," he remarked. "I have seen to it they shall have a cheery fire. It will be a cold night, and many will have an extra pint of ale. If you would care to pass an hour with them, I will introduce you to the boys. I can assure you, you will hear some good yarns, songs, and jokes."

In a few minutes I was comfortably seated in their midst. I was surprized to learn that there was an organized rule for the evening's amusement: they had a regular chairman, who sat at the center of a long table, somewhat elevated, where he could command a view of the large room. He knew each one that could sing a song, tell a joke, or dance a jig. It was strictly understood that no orders could be given or filled while a part was being rendered. If the story was a long one, at given points there would be an intermission for a few minutes, to satisfy the wants of the throng. This order of procedure was only one evening of each week. If a stranger came, the privilege of contributing to the evening's amusement was extended.

I was gratified to see Tom Edivinn seated at the end of a large settee near the fire, immediately opposite where I sat, so I had a splendid opportunity to study him. He was certainly a remarkable-looking man, the most powerful I had seen in many a day; he was not fleshy, yet he was not thin, but bony and sinewy. His full beard was neatly trimmed to a point a little below his chin. His eyes were large, with heavy lashes, and crowned with bushy brows. His hair, beard, and brows were dark brown, a fitting background for his expansive forehead and rounded cheeks. He wore a heavy, coarse blue shirt, open at the throat. His head was capped with a heavy, oiled southwester, with sea-boots reaching above his knees. To my sense, he was a perfect type of the man of the sea, an ideal model for an artist.

WE HAD been enjoying a short intermission, when crack—crack—crack came from the chairman's hammer.

"Tom," said the chairman, "it's a long time since you told us a story. I have been reminded by your old friend, Moses Dingle here, that there is a story you've been promising to relate for more than five years. We have a long evening before us, and if you feel like telling it tonight, we shall be mighty glad to hear you. What do you say?"

A smile lit up Tom's grave features as he replied, "Mr. Chairman, there's a stiff northeaster blowing; I have just come in from the cliffs; it's mighty cold outside, and very comfortable in here by the fire, so you are welcome to my story to pass the evening away.

"Boys, strange as it may appear to you, I am more than willing to talk; in fact, I am eager, for it has fallen to the lot of but few to experience what I shall relate this evening. You may wonder what could have happened to make Tom Edivinn eager to talk. This last storm, the loss of life along the coast, the rescue of this man, whom you call the Grateful One, because of his undisguised gratitude for saving his life—this is the cause! It has touched every fiber of my being and set my mind ablaze. As you know, I've been scarcely outside of Padstow town, yet I have known this young man, termed the Grateful One, for many years. He is now being taken care of by my family.

"Boys, how often we've said to each other, 'If anyone had ever come back after being dead and would tell us about it, we would believe in the hereafter.' It is as one who has returned from the dead that I shall tell my tale.

"Before I'm through with my story, you may think I am still affected with my old complaint. I do not ask you to believe one word I'm going to say—it would not make any difference anyway. I'm going to tell you my story because I feel compelled to do so. Perhaps, right down in my heart, I want to stir you up a bit, and make you look a little closer to

your compass and chart, or think a little differently from your custom.

"Boys, I am going to refer to a period of my life that I know will surprize you. Out of respect to my feelings you have never whispered of it in my presence: I refer to the ten years of my insanity, or more particularly that period of my life between the years of twenty-five and thirty-five.

"This coming Christmas I shall be sixty years old. The record of my life, with the exception of those ten years, is fair, and known to most of you. As you know, I am not given to talking about myself. On this occasion, however, I can not help myself, as the tale concerns myself only. I can say honestly and fearlessly, without fear of contradiction, that outside of those ten years of incarceration in the Bodmin asylum I never cherished an evil thought against my fellow men. Why is it that a strong and robust man, with fifty years of unblemished life to his credit, should have sandwiched into it ten such years and yet not be conscious of a single act, or a moment of its time?

"From what I have learned from the testimony of others, I went insane without a moment's warning, and when I came out of it I did so just as quickly. At the moment they said my reason had returned, I felt as if some indignity had been put upon my person. I said to the professor, 'Why is it I have been called to pass through this ordeal? I feel as if I've been imposed upon!' He replied, 'My dear sir, you have had a disease, our treatment has rid you of it, you are now restored to your wonted health and strength.'

"I said very quietly to the professor, 'I'm certain that you have had a terrible time with me, and I am grateful for the care you have given me; but your treatment has had no part or place in the return of my reason.'

"Boys, I was born and raised in this little town; some of you have known me since I was a youth, I went with you to the penny-a-week school. I passed some of you a little in education; through the kindness of the Honorable Mr. Brune, I spent one year with his boys under their private tutor. I attended the Sunday school, Bible class, and all the preaching services. My boyhood was clean, and (I've heard) manly. My young manhood was virtuous, the energies of youth were conserved. I was as sound physically and mentally as any man that ever stood in a pair of shoes. I speak plainly, to show there were not the gross errors of youth and ignorance, whereby my future might have been undermined and weakened.

"When I reached my twenty-fifth year—a point that marked an epoch in my life—my mind was as clear as the noonday sun. The blood in my veins tingled with health; I felt as strong as a young bull. Life was sweet, I loved my fellow man; the appeal of want hurt me, the cry of help pierced my heart like a knife. I loved my wife and children, and they—thank God—loved me in return. Work was a pleasure, and idleness distasteful to me. I loved the sea; its jagged cliffs fascinated me: when the storm was fiercest I was there, for I could not enjoy the genial comfort of my home while the storm was raging. A great upheaving force ever prompted me to help my fellow man in distress.

"Boys, I have walked that Dunebar all hours of the night and day, trying to grasp the meaning of its treacherous depths, which have sucked down so many precious lives in its quicksands.

"I know you'll be surprized that I am blowing my own horn; my only excuse is that I've not blown it very much in the past. Many times, I, Tom Edivinn, your townsman and comrade, have gone out to that Dune-

bar and bent my knees over its ghastly depths and unknown dead, asking God to accept the strength of my limbs, and the devotion of my heart, to consecrate me to the service of my fellow men in saving them from its depths and the jagged rocks. I am simple enough to believe that the gigantic force which we call God heard my prayer and desire.

"The longest way around to a sick neighbor's cottage was my shortest way home. Once only have I felt like fighting and hurting my fellow man. One morning when I was out on the cliffs scanning the sea with my telescope, my attention was drawn to the Dunebar, I saw something sticking out of the sand, and I knew it was not the topmast of a ship slowly being sucked down: there was sea-weed attached to it. I could not make out what it was, so I went out to investigate. When I had removed the sea-weed, I gave a gasp of pain, for there stood revealed a man's arm sticking out of the sand. This is the only instance I know of the Dunebar ever giving up its dead. On the index finger was a gold ring. For a moment I was startled—it looked as if it was being offered me. I dug out the body, placed it in my boat and brought it in.

"When I reached our docks, I came alongside of a schooner lying there. She hailed from Liverpool. Her captain, a massive man, looked over the side and saw the corpse in my boat. 'Ah, you big landlubber,' he said, 'so that's what you do for a living, scraping sand for dead bodies! A low-down bodysnatcher! Why in thunder don't you go to work?'

"Well, boys, those words made me feel as I had never felt before. I made my boat fast, and went on the quay where the schooner lay. I said, 'Cap'n, step ashore a minute, I want to say a few words to you!' He jumped on the quay mighty quickly. I said, 'Cap'n, my name is Tom Edivinn. Take a walk for ten minutes and enquire about me; when you come back, if you don't take back your words, I'm going to ram them back down your throat. This is a new business to me; if I get started I ain't quite sure when I shall quit!'

"He came over and glared into my eyes; our noses almost hit. I said, 'You had better hurry along, or I shall withdraw the privilege!' At that he smiled and replied, 'You look pretty good, but I think I can go you one better. You had better take off those sea-boots and your coat; you can't scrap with those things on. I suppose I'll find out you're the best man in port, and the bully as well!'

"'Tarnation!' I said. 'You'd better hurry along, I'm getting impatient!'

"Well, boys, in about fifteen minutes he came back, held out his hand with a good-natured smile on his face, and said, 'Tom, those words don't go; I'm sorry I said them. Put on your boots and coat and let's have some home-brewed ale.'

"There was nothing on the corpse to identify it, except some tattooing on the right forearm; a full-rigged ship, an anchor, and the letters C. M. I gained permission to retain the ring. On the inside was engraved, 'From Mother, to A. M.'

"This ring I retained up to about five years ago, when I returned it to the mother of the young man I had dug out of the sands of the Dunebar. I want you to remember this incident, for I shall refer to it again before I am through with this story.

3

"Boys, I asked a while ago, how is it that a strong, robust man with fifty years of unblemished life to his credit, should have sandwiched into it ten such terrible years and yet not be conscious of a single act or a moment of its time? I feel now as I felt when my reason returned—that

some indignity had been put upon my person, that I had been imposed upon. My whole being welled up in protest. Here was I, a young man thirty-five years of age, in the full vigor of life, with ten years literally stolen out of it, over which I—that is to say, my individuality—had absolutely no part nor place, not even the consciousness of one solitary moment of its time.

"If it had not been for the testimony of my loved ones, and the growth and change I could so plainly see in them, I could not have believed that ten years of my life had been passed in an insane asylum. What was I to do? I had reasoning powers, and was analytically inclined. I was confronted with a blank wall—an impassable gulf.

"When I returned to the bosom of my family, my children around me, my wife placed her arms around my neck, and with tears streaming down her cheeks said, 'Oh Tom! It has been such a long wait!'

"I replied, 'My dear, I do not understand; I know that something has occurred, I know there is a lapse, and even the sense of lapse is so indistinct, I can not in any way define it. I sense a seeming haze; it has shape, circumference, color and form; yet I can not express or define a single detail. It is something between this moment and yesterday, but you say that my yesterday is to you ten years of loneliness, waiting, anxiety, and untold suffering.

" 'My wife,' I continued, 'I can assure you, to me it has been a very little while—just a short nap. Perhaps I can best explain it as a dream, and a pretty dream it must have been, for I am sure there was no element of nightmare in it.'

"Then I saw the lines of care and sorrow. Her hair was streaked with premature gray. My little boy of five was standing before me a robust lad of fifteen. My sweet baby girl of two was now a splendid girl of twelve, with a wealth of rich brown hair falling to her waist. I took them in my arms and wept. Those were the tears of a baffled man.

"When alone in my bedroom, I studied my features in a mirror. I looked older then, at thirty-five, than I do now at sixty. Some diabolical change had taken place. I removed my clothes and examined my person; it was covered with scars, bruises and contusions; my limbs and body were black, green and blue.

"My soul rebelled at what I saw. What cruelty, what indignity, shame, and injustice, had been inflicted on my person? I, who had devoted every breath within me to alleviate suffering, and had used my strength to battle with the unreasoning sea to help my fellow man, had been dashed unmercifully on jagged rocks and reefs I knew not of. No galley slave had been humiliated like this. Was this indeed I, who had been called by some 'the lion-hearted'? Every idealistic thought within me cried out. I walked my room in anger. I again felt that I would like to fight, just as I felt when that captain called me a body-snatcher.

"AFTER I had become used to my surroundings and felt settled, I called on good old Dr. Morely, one of the grandest men Cornwall has produced. I put the matter to him, and told him of my predicament. He said with all the compassion in his nature, 'My dear Tom, why bother about it? The indisputable fact remains, you have been insane. There has been a lapse in your memory of ten years. It is absolutely lost to you. It is impossible for you, while sane, to apprehend the state of your mind when insane!'

"Boys, this matter was always on my mind, yet I confided in no one, for I did not want my problem to become a theme for idle tongues and gossip.

"Well, I took up my life at thirty-five, where I had left it off at twenty-five. My mind was as sound as a bell, but my body was in a fearful state. My limbs were like props under me; the strength of my arms was gone, and the elasticity of my muscles missing. I felt as if I owed someone —or *it*—a good licking for misusing my property so.

"I was reminded of old Mother Jones, who went to Plymouth to spend a month with her daughter. She left her cottage spick and span, everything in order, everything in its place. Tramps took possession in her absence. When Mother Jones came back, the bed was in disorder, the carpets ruffled and the floor dirty—disorder, filth and neglect everywhere. I felt shocked, just like Mother Jones when she realized how her home had been desecrated. It took me a year to patch up my body and restore it to its previous condition. Thank God, I succeeded!"

At this point, crack went the hammer of the chairman, and there was an intermission of a few minutes. Tom looked at me and said, "Stranger, I see that you are taking notes of my story! Well, I'll finish my tale: if you think it is of sufficient interest, you may publish it to the world."

The waitresses were busy for a few minutes, then Tom continued.

"Boys, what proof have I that I am in your midst tonight telling you my story, my confession? That's the problem I have had to work out. Existence, consciousness, love, harmony, spirit, power, knowledge, are everlastingly existent; their laws are never for one instant inactive. I know that I exist, because the knowledge that I exist is the proof of my existence.

"Reasoning along those lines, that my knowledge of existence had no part in what took place at the asylum, I was forced to the conclusion that if my identity, my knowledge of self was not at the Bodmin asylum during those ten years of so-called insanity, it was simply somewhere else.

4

"Boys, one beautiful moonlight night I took my boat and fishing tackle and went out to the Dunebar. After setting my lines, I sat down and mused on many things, then I gave a start when my ten years of oblivion were brought to mind. I sat up stiff with the thought that my problem's solution was in my own mind and not in someone's else. I began to think about the lecturer that paid this town a visit. He told us about our objective and subjective minds. Now I don't pretend to know much about this, but it was made plain to my understanding before I had been long at the Dunebar that whatever the objective mind experienced in its daily routine was recorded somewhere in our own selves—call it subjective mind if you will; it could never be lost or annihilated, though we might lose all consciousness of it for many years, maybe a lifetime. I clapped my hands with pure joy when I understood this. Then I tried to lose all sense of my surroundings. The gentle swish of the water playing on the edge of the Dunebar became as distant music. After a while I seemed to be looking at a large volume of distant haze, mist, or cloudlike substance. This was slowly drawing toward me; as it drew close I could distinguish indistinct forms and color—not unlike a picture out of focus. I felt that if it came any nearer I should be swallowed up or enshrouded in it. A cell-like something opened in my mentality—instantly my mind became flooded with understanding. I was as one in an audience watching the projecting on the screen of a story in which I was the principal actor. As each scene was unfolded, I knew

absolutely what the next scene would be.

"I saw a stone cottage with a straw-thatched roof, having a center entrance for two families. On one side lived a childless couple; their only child had died and was buried in the churchyard near by. The mother gathers some flowers from the little front garden and visits the flower-kept grave. She returns to her home, takes out her child's clothes from a bureau drawer and kisses them affectionately, while tears roll down her cheeks. She prays to be blest with another child.

"On the other side of the cottage lives a widow with three children, a small boy and girl, and a grown son named Heney, a fine, strapping young man who follows the sea as able seaman. His ship is docked in the adjoining port, and they are expecting him home. The widow looks often out of the small, four-paned window, and then at the cook-stove. The table is laid for the expected visitor.

"The little boy and girl at the front garden give a cry of delight and rush to meet their big sailor brother. There is a happy gathering as they sit around the table. Heney fondles the little ones and produces some presents. The widow, looking very serious, comes to Heney, places her arms around his neck and shoulders and says, 'My son, your father lost his life at sea; won't you give it up and stay home and live with us?' Heney replies earnestly, 'Mother dear, I, like my dad, am cut out for the sea—I, too, expect to find a watery grave!'

"Boys, far more quickly than I'm telling you, the action of these two families was unfolded to my apprehension; yet there was no sense of hurry—every incident was properly punctuated with comma, colon, semicolon and period. The mental atmosphere and inner workings of these homes were fully understood. With the passing of time the childless couple's prayers are about to be answered.

"Now, my boys and friends," continued Tom, "I am coming to the great secret that baffled all my enquiry for years—and to me, the most wonderful experience that could unfold to the consciousness of man.

"ON THE morning of that fateful day when Padstow Town mourned for Tom Edivinn their townsman—that is to say, the morning of the day I was judged insane and committed to the Bodmin asylum—I went out to Gull Rock. While I was there, a ship signaled for a pilot. I boarded her and brought her in. When my day's work was done, I never felt better in my life. We have our gloomy days as well as our bright days, and this day was exceptionally bright. I returned to my home with a song in my heart; when the supper was over and the things cleared away, my wife came and gave me a kiss and said, 'Tom, the children and I are going to sing for you, to comfort your great big heart!' 'All right,' said I, sitting back in my easy chair and lighting my pipe.

"She sat at the organ, and the children stood at each side of her. She sang a number of songs, then she sang *Nearer My God to Thee*. With its opening strains came a warm mellow feeling in my bosom. As she continued to sing I felt it stealing through my entire person. I felt the blood quicken in my veins—my chest seemed to expand with glorious fire. A great light seemed suddenly to have become ignited in me—joy and love filled my soul.

"The lamp on the organ seemed magnified a thousandfold; it was a living brilliancy. It enveloped their persons; their forms seemed spiritualized and resplendent in their beauty. I, Tom Edivinn, big, rough and clumsy, felt like a little child—then

like a lightning bolt out of a clear sky I was seized with a sudden pain in my head and heart. I sprang from my seat to go toward my wife. I said brokenly, 'Mary,' I said; 'I—don't—feel—I—I!——' Then I fell, my head striking the edge of a chair. Then came an utter blank.

"Up to this point nothing had been added to what I already knew—though not a single incident or emotion had been omitted; I experienced the entire day over again, yet it was as one apart from it that I witnessed what occurred. I saw the fearful anguish of my beloved little family around my prostrate form. Then I was startled to see the skulking, hideous form of a hunchback in a corner of the room, looking with a leer of expectancy. Though I knew what was about to follow (as a third party, apparently), I simply marveled at what I saw. From the top of my head, to the soles of my feet, a something left my body and remained stationary just above my head. It was not unlike steam rising from a hot cloth. I saw a look of devilish glee stealing into the horrible features of that thing in the corner. In a few seconds I saw my complete form suspended in the air, rigid and in line with my body; and then—marvel of marvels—I saw my great (some call it astral) form contracting within itself, with a slight inward rolling movement, until it assumed the perfect size, shape and form of a babe. I experienced a thrill and emotion, an exquisite vibration of ecstasy that I have not language to express. Instantly the hunchback came between my infant form and the prostrate body and spread himself over it. As my form had been exhaled, his form was inhaled, or absorbed. He disappeared. As his actions for ten years while occupying my body were not a part of my consciousness, I was forced to learn from other sources what occurred.

"While I was seeing with my objective sense all that occurred I was realizing the unspeakable joy of an infant. With the shrinking or diminishing of my six feet three inches of form, my gross sinful nature shrank with it, until it became so minute, it was lost to consciousness—I was a pure babe.

"In and of ourselves we can not prove we were ever infants, or were ever born. Memory takes us back to a very early period of our life and then ceases—there is a gulf between the beginning of memory and the birth of our present existence, and we are forced to rely on the testimony of others. But how different with me, your humble townsman! I sensed and enjoyed all that took place during this period of infancy. There was no sense of time. My family was forgotten, for the four walls of my home disappeared, my infant form was surrounded with myriads of other babe forms, some more and some less developed than my own, luxuriating in billows of downy clouds, accompanied with the sweetest music mortal ever heard; then my infant form was released from its companions.

"Infinitesimally I sensed a feeling of fatigue, then I lapsed into a state of restful peace, from which I evolved to a consciousness of new objects and surroundings—I was a babe at my mother's bosom in the straw-thatched cottage.

5

"AT THE cottage there is great rejoicing. Heney the sailor is home for a visit, and he is fascinated with my baby self. He enjoys fondling the babe, whom he has dubbed 'Sonny.' My parents and his family marvel at his great love for the little one. Whenever he is away from home, every letter enquires for little Sonny.

"Naturally, and quickly, I saw the unfoldment from infancy to child-

hood, then from childhood to boyhood. I was thrilled when Heney wrote that he had bought Sonny's first suit of clothes—a velvet sailor suit with gold buttons. I, with his young brother and sister, rushed down the lane to meet him on his momentous visit. He carried a bundle, and in it was my first suit of boy's clothes.

"He played and romped with us; to me he was the great big man of the sea. On every visit he spent all his time with us children. I being the smallest, he gave me the most attention. With childish awe I listened to his tales of the sea. Hand in hand we would wander to the cliffs to view the passing ships, and watch the humble fishermen and sea birds.

"I was never very robust, though I was perfectly happy and knew nothing of pain or discomfort; this caused them to be more thoughtful, loving and kind."

At this point Tom stopped his narrative for a moment, then looked around the room and continued.

"Boys, I must cut my story short, for it would take me a week to tell you of the joys, hopes and desires of those glorious ten years of my life, experiencing again the throbs, impulses and inspirations of childhood. From the limitless depths of my subconscious mind an idea would well up, my objective mind would grasp it and put it into practise. I built a ship that Heney thought was nothing less than a marvel in detail. When I had finished it I rushed to my parents crying, 'I did it! I did it!' To my young and formative objective sense, it was absolutely new and original, yet every thought expressed in this piece of work was learned here in our own shipyards. I mention this as one of the thousand things I experienced —I can only touch upon a few.

"When I was between nine and ten years old, a birthday party was planned for Heney when he came home for his vacation. A mysterious visit had been made to a near-by town; a gold signet ring had been purchased; and on the evening of Heney's home-coming, everything was ready for the celebration. A jolly lot of villagers were assembled. After the presentation and the drinking of everybody's health, the fiddler started up, and young and old joined in the dance.

"One day, Heney and I paid a visit to the old parish churchyard. We sat in front of an old moss-covered headstone, trying to decipher the sunken letters. We cleared away the moss and dirt and discovered a verse. Heney prompted me to copy it into my schoolbook—I also memorized every word. It read:

Here lies the remains of Hyrum May,
Who dug the graves from day to day;
At last he could not dig no more:
For want of breath he died for sure.

His work is finished and well done,
He liked his ale, and a little rum.
He's done his best, his whole life through,
Paid his debts, was honest and true.

"Then we visited my little brother's grave, which had not been neglected during the past years. I turned to Heney and said, 'Heney, they have buried my little brother's body in there.' I pointed to the grave. 'Where is he now?' Heney looked at me in surprize and shook his head. I then looked him full in the eyes and said with a smile on my lips, 'In a little while, Daddy and Mommy will put my body in there too—but I shall be somewhere else.'

"Time and again, during my tenth year as Sonny, I was dimly conscious of my former stature as a man. To my immature boyhood mind it appeared to me as a state I would attain to, not already realized. Some months before my tenth birthday I was conscious I should leave my parents and loving friends through the gateway

called death—yet death itself had no terrors. As the months passed, I gradually become weaker, though I experienced no shadow of pain.

"A shadow fell over the two homes in the cottage, for I had ceased to leave my room. I sat the time away in a large elbow chair. Within reach were my boats, and other things I prized. The widow and her children and my parents were present. I turned to Heney and said gently, 'Heney, please play your music, and sing me a song of the sea.' Heney, almost choking with grief, got his concertina. Smiling through his tears he sang the desired song. I saw a spiritual halo cover my features and the eyes take on additional light as my boyish mind formed the powerful body of my former and present self standing in the room; then I held out my hands to the figure of my imagination. They said good-night, then the cottage was wrapped in darkness.

"My last birthday came as Sonny, and the hour of my departure was at hand. I saw myself on soft pillows; I looked lovingly into the eyes of my dear ones. I looked lingeringly at my boats and ships, then my eyes wandered to my best piece of work—the ship and stand, set on a small table. I smiled and beckoned Heney to me; I whispered to him, 'I did it! I did it!' Heney took my frail body in his arms and smiled on me through his tears. I closed my eyes, with one hand on my boats. Heney whispered to the others, 'Sonny is going on a long cruise—his little boat is going to founder!' I felt too tired to open my eyes, but I smiled and said, 'Dear Heney—I shall not founder—they are all waiting for me.' Then I fell asleep; my spirit passed; my conciousness of another ten years of childhood was sealed in my subconscious mind. They called it '*death.*'

6

"COMRADES, I've reached the end of my confession. It took me eight long years to make the discovery of my whereabouts during those ten years. For nine years the great secret was locked in my bosom: I dared not make it known, even to my family, for they would surely think I was losing my reason again; but the knowledge that I was never for a moment insane filled me with an unspeakable joy. The widow and her young children, my parents and Heney, were ever bright and burning in consciousness.

"When I awoke to my surroundings in the Bodmin asylum, I was in a stupor of thought for some time—then my thoughts became normal. It seemed as if I had awakened in the morning following a night of sleep—that the night before I had fallen and struck my little girl's chair and hurt my head. When my wife said, 'Oh Tom! it has been such a long wait!' it was simply all Latin to me. I did not know but that she had been sleeping by my side as usual during the preceding night.

"Where the cottage was located I had no means of knowing. Then came the morning of my discovery of something sticking out of the Dunebar. Under ordinary conditions I would not have paid any particular attention to it, but I was filled with a burning curiosity—I was impelled to go and examine that something sticking out of the sand. When I removed the seaweed, as I've already stated, I gave a gasp of pain, for there stood revealed a man's arm sticking out of the sand. On the index finger was a gold ring. For a moment I was startled, for it looked as if it was being offered me. Then I recognized its peculiarity, it being a gold signet ring. I hastily got my cockle-shovel from my boat and dug the body out. From some cause I

know nothing about, the body was in perfect condition. I got some water and washed the sand and slime from his face, then I stood up and looked the body over. Great God! I thought my heart would burst, for *I was looking at my childhood friend, my beloved Heney!* I fell almost fainting to my knees by his side—I wept like a child.

"When that Liverpool captain looked over the gunwale of his ship and saw the corpse in my boat and said, 'Ah, you big landlubber, so that's what you do for a living, scraping sand for dead bodies—a low-down bodysnatcher!'—had we started to fight, I am almost sure I should have killed him.

"I relieved the parish of the funeral expenses. Someone said it was one of my peculiar notions. The flowers on his grave are not allowed to die. As all know, my family and I visit the grave often.

"Two years after the burial of Heney, my boy visited the city of Truro. While there he bought an album of pictures of the unique spots of the Cornish coast and villages. In looking over it, I discovered a good picture of the straw-thatched cottage, and underneath a description of its location. It is less than seventy-five miles from here, not far from Truro.

"The following week I started out for a visit to the cottage. Great was my emotion, when the widow, now a sweet old lady, opened the door in answer to my knock. I spent one hour with her; it was taken up in praising her children. Lingeringly she dwelt on Heney and his great love for Sonny. Heney's ship, she said, had been lost with all hands on board some two years before.

"When I told her of the finding of his body, and presented her with his signet ring, she bathed my horny hands with her tears. While she was yet speaking, her daughter (a woman of thirty, married and a mother) came in with her brother (a fine, manly boy of thirty-three years, now the sole support of his widowed mother). I dared not tell them I was Sonny and their childhood companion.

"I enquired about the family next door. Together we went in to see them. They were living in the memory of their two beloved children. With pride they pointed to the life-size crayon portrait of Sonny beautifully framed on the wall. They showed me his school books. Here I read again the epitaph of Hyrum May, every word of which I had long ago committed to memory. When they pointed to Sonny's best piece of work, a full-rigged ship, my heart nearly overflowed. I murmured, 'I—did it!—I—did it!' They were thankful that Sonny had come in answer to prayer and filled a void in their hearts for ten sweet years. I longed to tell them all, but my lips were sealed.

"I had to hasten my departure, for, strong man though I am, emotion was tearing my heart apart. On my way home I visited the old churchyard. I sat in front of Hyrum May's headstone and pondered. The following week they all visited Padstow and Heney's flower-kept grave."

During Tom's story, the silence was so intense one could almost have heard a pin drop. Every eye was fixed upon him. He stood up and looked around into the eyes of his listeners. His great figure seemed to fill and round out; his chest heaved with inward emotion and his eyes flashed with joy and inspiration. He said in thunderous tones:

"Boys, he whom you have termed 'the Grateful One,' whom I rescued from the death-jaws of the Points and Dunebar, is Heney's brother—the widow's only support, and Sonny's childhood companion and playmate while at the straw-thatched cottage."

The Derelict Mine

A Mystery Serial

By FRANK A. MOCHNANT

The Story So Far

JAMES GERALDTON, whose father is manager of a mine in the heart of Australia, has an uncle reported drowned in the sinking of the *Titanic*. The uncle's death brings prosperity to the family. James goes to technical school, and is completing his course at the mine.

The lode in the old mine peters out, the mine is abandoned and landslips completely close it up. But strange clouds, with an odor as from a zinc plant, are seen over the old mine by superstitious miners. Phantom whisperings are heard, and the mine gets the reputation of being haunted. Then in the fading light of a winter afternoon a group of miners is terrified by seeing a form which glides into the ruins and disappears.

5

I HAD been on afternoon shift, and a few minutes past midnight had left the cage and was striding out for home, when I became aware of agitated voices. I turned my head and saw dim shadows moving to and fro in the vicinity of my father's office. With a vague sense of uneasiness I approached the door, and first one and then another of a scared-looking group made way for me. My father's old clerk lay motionless on the floor. A glance, however, satisfied me that he was not dead. Indeed, almost as I entered he began to come round. But he did not recover completely, and terror was stamped on his waking features.

Suddenly he cried out, "What did he come to me for? What did he come to me for?" Then he began to rave incoherently. In his delirium fragments of his own concerns became inextricably entangled with office matters. Full consciousness appeared to return for a moment only, and in that instant he threw himself up in a sitting posture, and with an expression as of concentrated horror peered past us all toward the open doorway. Several of the men involuntarily drew back into the room.

I stooped with the idea of assisting him back into the capacious chair from which he had evidently fallen, and he said with a sort of gasp or sob after each word, "He stood there just as though he had been alive."

At least four voices blended in an awe-struck exclamation of the single word, "Ghost."

The old clerk shuddered and sank back into his former position. One of the men placed a thick coat under his head and he began to breathe heavily. He had fallen into a natural but exhausted sleep.

I rang up the nearest cab proprietor and requested that a conveyance be sent immediately. Then I turned again to the men, all of whom still lingered in the office. I hoped to get a little light on the extraordinary turn of events that had been responsible for our assembling at all at that hour and under such strange circumstances. They were stout-hearted fellows, but were utterly dazed. All they could tell me was that they had heard a piercing scream from the direction of the room, and had rushed from different parts of the surface works. In fact, like myself they were just at the end of their shift. One or two others on their way to work had stopped for a minute or two to see what was occurring, but could not remain. Several of the men had arrived at the office together only to find Sadler alone and insensible, as I had seen him, and not in the more natural sleep in which he lay now.

I glanced over the table to see what had kept the clerk so late and found that he had been engaged in correspondence and other matters that had accumulated through the absence of one of our juniors who was down with typhoid.

Then came the rumble of wheels, and one of the men and I conveyed the still sleeping Sadler safely to his home. It was with a feeling of immense relief that I handed him over to the care of his capable housekeeper.

SINCE my search over the old mine premises I had been on better terms with my father, and so over the breakfast table in the morning I related the seizure that had taken his clerk. I rose really for the purpose, for though I was changing shift that day and would not be due at the mines till the following morning I should certainly not, after night shift, have risen till close upon lunch time.

It was then I learned that my father had been aware of the ghost rumors.

"These absurd ghost stories must have affected him," said he. "What do you make of them yourself?"

There was a trace of anxiety in his voice. I was startled.

"There is anything but a ghost at the bottom of it," I replied decisively.

"No, I am afraid it is not a ghost," he agreed cryptically.

"You are afraid not?"

I suppose I looked my astonishment. My father seemed uneasy, almost worried, as he answered, "Sadler's spectral friend paid a former visit to the office and possessed himself of a document which, under very peculiar circumstances certainly, would spell blue ruin for the lot of us."

My father paused, and then continued reflectively as if communing with himself, "It was only by chance that I discovered the loss. The safe had been opened and carefully locked again. In consequence of these rumors I went to dig out a plan of the old mine, but it, with the other document, was gone. It was my private safe and I alone have a key."

"Anything else missing?"

"Nothing. Even fifty gold sovereigns in the same drawer were left intact. In the whole safe there was nothing to indicate that it had been disturbed."

"When could the papers have been stolen?"

"Sometime in the last fortnight," said my father promptly. "It is just about two weeks since I opened the drawer and slipped in some gold. I recounted the coins at the time, and I distinctly remember seeing the papers."

"It's curious, the sovereigns not being touched," I mused, "for anyone nowadays might be tempted to pick up a sovereign as a sort of curio. However did you manage to collect fifty?"

My father did not heed my query, but went on meditatively, taking his cue from the first part of my remark.

"Yes, it is strange. I could almost wish that the coins had gone too. The funny part is that the plans can be of no use to anybody, and the document, except under the impossible circumstances I've hinted, might as well be destroyed. Indeed, I've intended to do so."

Then I expressed the question that had been clamoring in my head for some minutes: "What would the circumstances be?"

My father laughed uneasily as he replied, "Well then, if the only uncle you ever had should happen to revisit the glimpses of the moon, which is, as Euclid would have it, absurd, seeing that he went down with the *Titanic*."

"Have you informed the police?" I asked.

"Better not. The thief will find the document worthless and destroy

it, as no doubt he has done before this."

My father seemed to have regained his composure and was calmly smoking his pipe over a final cup of coffee when my mother came in with a gay "Excuse me, gentlemen; I'm late this morning as usual."

Then came in Martha with my mother's steaming porridge, and we conversed on general topics. Then, if I still remember the sequence of events on that particular morning, the telephone bell rang. My father stretched round and caught up a portable receiver which rested on a sideboard.

"Hello."

"_____"

"Yes, Mr. Geraldton speaking."

"_____"

"What! Dying, you say? Nonsense! I'll come at once."

Click, the receiver was replaced on the instrument, and the whole returned to the sideboard, and my father stood pale and erect. He spoke with evidence of a strain.

"Poor old Sadler's dying. I am going round now on my way to the office."

After he had gone I tumbled back into bed and slept till well past noon, when I dressed, lunched, and set off for Myrtle's.

Slightly out of my way, however, was Sadler's cottage, and as I neared his street I determined to call and at least inquire concerning him. His housekeeper admitted me. She had always been somewhat solemn in appearance, but now her whole bearing reflected the hopelessness of poor Sadler's case.

"He's going fast," was her greeting.

She led the way into the sick man's room, and as my eyes fell upon the bed I saw that the body of the aged clerk was already sinking into its last sleep. I walked round the bed and gazed down at the comatose form for a few minutes. Then with a certain feeling of depression which such scenes inevitably inspire I passed out into the passage, followed by the housekeeper.

"Poor old chap!" said I. "He must have had a shock. Did he not come to himself at all, Mrs. Hodson?"

"He was conscious for awhile this morning, when he insisted on sending for Mr. Geraldton—your father," replied the woman. "He is all right now, sir, I hope?" she added with seeming irrelevance.

"All right? Who?" I demanded, startled.

"Mr. Geraldton, you know."

"My father?" And in look and tone I must have exhausted all the interrogatives.

"Yes, he went in to see Sadler, and after a moment closed the door, and it was half an hour by the clock before he came out, and when he did he was white as a sheet, and dazed-like. I spoke to him, but he did not answer. Then he put his hand to his head and stumbled toward the front door. I asked him was he ill, but he never seemed to see me, and presently flung open the door and walked swiftly into the street. He looked awfully bad, though. I went back to Sadler, but he was dozing off and has not spoken since."

A few more words with Mrs. Hodson, and I was walking reflectively on my way. The woman's reference to my father made me uneasy. I debated within myself for a moment whether I should return home and await his arrival at the evening meal, but I concluded that had my father been seriously ill we should have been informed of it. It was natural, I argued, that the pater should feel the passing of a trusted servant of half a lifetime. Yet for the remainder of the day I fell into fits of abstraction from which Myrtle more than once laughingly aroused me.

IT WAS not a voice exactly, yet something within me seemed to press the query, "Does a trouble of that sort, tragic enough but more or less 'outside', make people turn suddenly ill? Especially people of my father's character? Was there possibly a subtler cause for his unwonted display of feeling?"

It was 10:30 or thereabouts, and I was striding home under a setting moon. It may have been that my nerves were not quite up to their standard. Perhaps the events of the past few weeks had affected me despite myself. Certain it was that I felt for the first time a vague sense of creepiness as I stepped across the old mine precincts.

I observed as I had not done before how grotesque the ruins appeared in the light of the early but now western moon. Long shadows trailed in weird shapes behind things. I was reflecting that a dark night would be preferable, when at the moment a heavy cloud slid over the diminishing disk. The sudden and prevailing gloom synchronizing with my thought gave me a queer start. Everything now seemed dull and indefinite, and I was nearing the timbers which were still stacked by the pathway. Then I heard a sound from a little distance in front of me as of a twig broken by a step. A figure darted from the neighborhood of the timber and rushed upon me with terrifying violence. Before I could recover from my astonishment I was borne heavily to the ground. A hand gripped my throat, and another my right arm as in a vise. A knee was pressed against my stomach. I believed that I was at the mercy of a dangerous maniac and gave myself up for lost.

"You infernal scoundrel, where is that receipt?"

As these words vibrated through my ears in familiar tones which even intense rage could not disguise, I thought for a moment that I had gone mad myself. With a desperate and sudden movement I swept my left hand across my chest and seized the wrist that moved above it, and cried in amazement, "Father!"

In a second the figure was helping me to my feet, and it was saying, "Jim! You? How deuced thin you've grown! Whatever are you doing here? Oh, Myrtle, of course." And even at that astounding moment I could not fail to notice a certain bitterness in his tone.

"But whatever is the trouble?" I urged.

We could scarcely see each other in the almost negligible light of the stars, but we moved as by a common impulse to the heap of timbers, and my father replied in a peculiarly hollow voice, "The impossible has happened. Your uncle has returned and is living somewhere on this mine. Old Sadler saw him at the office last night."

"But Sadler may have had an illusion or something."

"So I thought, and so I hoped, but I saw him myself and followed him here not an hour ago," said my father emphatically.

Suddenly he caught me by the arm again in a grip hardly less fierce than the last, and whispered in a sort of awed and suppressed excitement, "Look!"

I turned, and there below us was the light I had seen weeks before. My father then moved cautiously in its direction.

"It's no good, Father, it would vanish before we could reach it."

However, nothing would satisfy him but to crawl down the slope and pry among the ruins, as I had done, after that elusive light, and it disappeared when we were within a few feet of it, but this time peal on peal of blood-curdling and mocking laughter rang out all around us. I felt my cheek blanch. My father tore wildly about, and stumbled now over this

piece of debris, now over that, in a frenzy of petulance and anger. It was long past midnight before he calmed down a little, and we walked home together.

As we neared our gate he said, "It's war to the death between him and me, my boy, and in this particular war game he has all the guns."

"Whatever is it all about?"

"You'll know all too soon, boy, but he is an unscrupulous scoundrel, and it is ruin for me if I do not let the company in."

Then he squared his shoulders and threw his head back and snapped out, "So you see it's ruin."

I was somehow vaguely proud of him at that moment. The next we turned in.

6

From that time my father never recovered his wonted buoyancy. Within the next few weeks he was himself looking not unlike a ghost. He certainly was only the ghost of his former self, and his eyes wore a wild, haunted expression.

My mother did not at first appear to notice it, but one morning at breakfast she exclaimed, "Why, Harry, what have you been doing to yourself? You look positively ill."

My father merely laughed, but alas! it was but a ghost of his robust laugh.

"What is the matter with you?" my mother persisted.

"Oh, I am just run down a bit," he answered wearily. "The new clerk has not got into things yet."

My mother seemed reassured, but an evening or so later when we were alone she said, "What can be the matter with your father? Is anything wrong at the mine?"

I am no actor, and I fear that my answer was not quite free from trace of my own anxiety.

"Oh, no, everything is tip-top," I said. "He will be all right directly. Deuced strain running a big concern like that, you know."

Then, as much as anything to prevent her from pressing me further, I blurted out what I had been trying to make up my mind to say for months.

"Say, Mother, why don't you call on Mrs. Clysdale? It is absurd, my being engaged to Myrtle and your not receiving her properly. The pater won't have her here, and you never call."

"It is certainly absurd your being engaged to Myrtle," said my mother, and a faint flush crept over her face. This was a kind of smartness I had not formerly observed in her.

"Now look here, Mother, what is this mystery surrounding Myrtle? Why can't you call on her mother?"

Again this peculiar smartness, and it was startling.

"Because she has been dead eighteen years."

But the moment the words were out, my mother looked confused, and, I believe, almost literally bit her tongue. She had obviously been tempted to say more than she intended.

I considered a moment, then ejaculated, "Eighteen years ago! Then Myrtle was only two?"

My mother nodded assent.

"Who is Mrs. Clysdale?"

"An old widow nurse who adopted her."

My head swam, but I shot out one more question.

"Who is her father?"

"Her father? Why——" Then desperately, "Oh, he's dead, too."

I paced the room for a few minutes and I saw that my mother was looking pale and scared. At last I said as quietly as I could, "Does Myrtle know about this amiable arrangement?"

My mother hardly more than whispered, "No."

"What is Myrtle's real name, anyway?"

But my mother just repeated, "Real name?" and then came a half hysterical cry: "Oh!" And she left the room weeping, and I was not able again to get her to speak of Myrtle.

I went about that day in a sort of bad dream. I could only infer one thing from my mother's attitude: that Myrtle was a nameless waif. The revelation obsessed and haunted me. I had inherited rigid ideas, but that evening as I dressed, I muttered to myself, "What of it? Myrtle is Myrtle anyway."

From that time my affection for her was more ardent than ever.

MY FATHER was breaking up. He aged visibly in a few weeks, and now spent most of his evenings alone in his office. His nerves seemed shattered, and I began to entertain grave fears concerning the issue.

I had just finished tea one evening. It had been a depressing meal. My mother and I had exchanged but few words, in a detached way. I have often wondered since whether we may each have had a sense of impending disaster. I drew up a big chair for my mother before a belated October fire. It was not only a cold night, but it was inclined to rain. My mother sat with some fancy work in her lap, and I was standing for a moment on the hearth finishing a cigarette when the telephone bell rang at the instrument in my father's study. My mother started as from a revery and I strode across to the receiver. It was a direct line to the office.

It was a brief conversation and ran thus:

"That you, Jim?"

"Hello, Father. Yes."

"Meet me down at the Cross Roads at once. Better not say anything about it."

Before I could reply I heard the replacing of the receiver at the other end of the wire.

As I moved away from the instrument my mother met me at the door with a nervous, anxious expression on her face.

"Anything the matter?"

"Oh, no. I am wanted at the mine."

"It was Father ringing up. Was he all right?"

"Of course he's all right, Mother."

I donned my greatcoat and went out. I was puzzled, nevertheless, for the Cross Roads were some distance from the town. It may have been the dismal night that affected me, but I had not reached the gate before I returned for my heavy stick. It occurred to me that my father would propose another visit to the old mine-field, which lay not far beyond our appointed rendezvous. I walked briskly and was soon in the vicinity of our own mine, which I had to pass. Then, happening to glance up I saw that the light in my father's office had not been switched off, and I concluded that he had not yet started to meet me. I determined, therefore, to make the slight detour that would probably save me from a long wait in the damp and cold.

When I reached the office I found the door locked, and was about to hurry off, supposing that my father had left and that I might overtake him, but the thought flashed into my mind that it was a strange thing he had not switched off the light. This made me go round to the window at the side and peer in. My father was sitting at his table, but in a posture that held me horror-stricken. His left arm hung down at the side of the chair. The other, with a clenched fist, was stretched over the table, and his head was drooping on his breast. Mechanically, or, perhaps, in forlorn hope, I tapped on the pane, but the figure in the chair did not stir. Then

my eye was arrested by something on the table just beyond his clenched right hand. It was in appearance but a glass beaker about a quarter full of water, yet it sent a sort of clairvoyant chill through my already frozen blood, and I determined to get into the room without raising the alarm. With but little difficulty I opened the window, and passing quickly through closed it again on the inside and pulled down the blind.

My father was dead, but merely placing my hand for a moment over his heart I turned again, my own pounding within me, with desperate resolve. A finger which I plunged into the beaker I placed immediately upon my tongue, and my instinctive fear of a few moments before was confirmed. But for a later and more certain proof I took a test-tube from a pigeonhole and obtained some of the liquid from the beaker. Then cautiously I opened the door and tossed the remaining contents of the vessel away, and having rinsed it, half filled it from a tap outside the office, and replaced it upon the table. I rang up Dr. Harris, whom I knew my father had visited occasionally both in a professional and private capacity. I told the doctor briefly what had occurred, and he undertook to bring the sergeant of police with him. This saved me the necessity of communicating with the station myself. I then went to the door of the office and hailed a man who happened to be passing on some errand.

"Is Mr. Dalton about?" I inquired.

"Saw him just now in the engine room. Something is up with the big dynamo."

"Is Foreman Lane on shift?"

"Yes."

"Well, if you come across Lane tell him he is wanted at the office, and just slip back and tell Mr. Dalton that Mr. Geraldton would like to see him, will you?"

The man disappeared in the darkness, and within ten minutes Lane arrived at the office. I merely motioned toward my father's body. For a second or so I could not speak, but as Lane seemed about to approach the silent form I managed to say, "Better not touch anything, Lane."

The man stood looking down at my father, consternation written large on every feature. Then in a choking voice he blurted out, "Anything to do with the old mine, sir?"

"I am afraid so, Lane," I replied solemnly. Then with a feeling of defiance I could not myself quite understand I added, "It is the beginning of the end of it."

"Did the ghost come again, sir?" And his teeth chattered.

"I do not know, Lane. I do not think so, but we must wait and see what Dr. Harris says."

Dalton, who had left the engine room before my messenger returned there to seek him, came in now almost immediately, and I told him how I had discovered my father lifeless in his chair. Dalton was our electrical engineer. He bent over the lifeless form, then came toward me, all sympathy.

"This is a terrible blow for you, Mr. Geraldton, and will be for the whole mine, and indeed the town. Your father was popular all round, but he has been ill for some time. Several of us have noticed it. Whatever could it have been?" And again he moved toward the body in its chair, and I noticed that he glanced at the beaker. I noticed, further, that he paled, and cast a furtive glance at me and remained silent.

THE headlamps of a motor flashed down the road approaching the mine, and presently the car pulled up below us, and in a few minutes two figures moved across the field of one of our outer lights. As they neared

the office I advanced a pace or two to meet them.

"Good evening, Doctor. Good evening, Sergeant," I said in a voice as steady as I could command.

The sergeant, a tall, keen but genial man who had been associated with my father in the local bowling club, nodded gravely to Dalton and Lane, and almost simultaneously addressed me in terms of quite unofficial sympathy.

"Dr. Harris tells me that Mr. Geraldton has been under him for some time, but this is fearfully sudden and most distressing for you."

For several minutes he and the doctor examined the body and I watched them anxiously.

"He must have been dead for some hours," exclaimed the officer suddenly.

"Three at least," assented the doctor solemnly.

"Hours!" I cried. "Three hours! Why——" And I reeled, almost fainting, against the table.

Then in the blind instinct of preservation I did what I had never been actor enough to have done in cool reason, and I am convinced that I thereby prevented a post-mortem on my father's body and the untimely revelation of a blot on the family escutcheon. I seized the beaker and drank a couple of mouthfuls of the contents, and as it revived me I saw instantly that my action had a peculiar effect upon my companions. The sergeant sprang forward, but too late to prevent my swallowing the water. The doctor paled for a moment, but I felt somehow that he was making determined effort to keep his manner under control. He darted many furtive and anxious glances in my direction, however, and it was not till some minutes later, and I had recovered completely from my fainting turn, that I noticed an expression of relief pass over his face. With the exception of the curious glance that Dalton cast for a perceptible second upon the beaker as he entered the room, neither he nor Lane had given the slightest token of suspicion, but Dalton's face was a shade more serious, and his manner never so courteous as he touched the sergeant on the arm and turning his head slightly toward my poor father said quietly, "Shall we get him home before shift changes? Lane can fetch a stretcher."

The sergeant had been a trifle unnerved, and assented mechanically, and Lane was off like a shot.

The water in the beaker was retained by the officer for analysis and its innocent nature proved, but I am convinced that but for the diversion caused by my momentary weakness a post-mortem had been demanded. As it was, Dr. Harris' report of death due to heart failure was accepted. I have wondered if the doctor continued to suspect anything despite the analysis of the contents of the beaker. I do not know, but I myself analyzed the solution that I had kept back in the test-tube, and I know that my father was found dead in the first instance with a beaker that contained potassium cyanide at his hand. I had purposely left the water on my father's table, hoping that it would divert attention from the body and claim an immediate examination. It occurred to me that the discovery of the innocuous nature of the most obviously suspicious fluid would lead the official mind away from the idea of suicide, and thus an autopsy, which would have been almost certain had the body been the single object of interest, might not be demanded.

IN REGARD to the days immediately succeeding, I have little to record. They were days naturally dark under the pall of death, but for me they were days, too, intense with foreboding, and, indeed, as the sequel will show, they were soon to be eclipsed by horror upon horror.

The shock of my father's death, despite all I could do, had an alarming effect upon my mother, and for awhile I feared for her reason. After the funeral, however, I managed to persuade her to leave the district for an indefinite period of rest. I arranged by wire for apartments at a seaside resort near Sydney. It entailed a long railway journey, and it was necessary that she should have a companion. To my astonishment she asked for Myrtle, and it was settled that Myrtle should accompany her.

My father's affairs were in a peculiar condition. His private account at the bank was something less than a hundred pounds, and barely more than sufficient to meet current liabilities. He held war bonds, however, to the extent of five hundred pounds. His will was simple. It made everything over to my mother and appointed me her executor. The furniture was already in her name. The house belonged to the company, and when my mother left I had a week in which to vacate. The one thing that relieved the financial position for my mother was the fact that he had a fully paid-up life insurance policy for five thousand pounds. It had been an odd position for a reputedly wealthy man. I learned, too, from his financial agent and intimate friend, Mr. Finlayson, that he had within the last few months realized on estates and shares valued at more than seventy-five thousand pounds. Finlayson stated that my father had seemed fearfully worried, but had let drop no hint concerning the use to which he was putting so vast a sum.

7

IT WAS the second evening after the departure of my mother and Myrtle that I sat alone on the front veranda of my old home. On a small table at my side, and kept by the weight of my tobacco pouch from blowing away in the occasional puffs of an early summer breeze, was a telegram from Myrtle. She and my mother had arrived safely at their destination and my mother had stood the journey well.

I sank back in my chair and gave myself up to reflection. I had that afternoon arranged to lease a cottage where I considered that with Martha as housekeeper I should be comfortable enough till my marriage, which I hoped would take place within the year. My course was all but completed. My mother would, I knew, never return permanently to the district.

Presently old Toby, a favorite black cat of my father's, brushed several times against my leg, then sprang upon my knees. I stroked the sleek body, and the animal settled down against my waistcoat, and its deep purr gradually grew fainter till the low roar of the mines in the nearer distance was the only sound perceptible. I became deeply engrossed in my gloomy meditation. I began to link into a chain the peculiar incidents of the last few months, till the sense of mystery became oppressive, and a nameless dread of some intangible evil grew upon me. At last my mind reverted to the evening of the tragedy. I remembered it was exactly a fortnight back. My mind had been absorbed by matters of pressing moment, but now I was free to think, or rather, it seemed, compelled to think. Then came back to me the scene in the office, and the sergeant's voice came again clear in my memory: "He must have been dead several hours," and the doctor: "Three at least."

Something of the uncanny sensation that came over me then recurred now. Dead *hours*, when but minutes before he had spoken to me over the telephone demanding that I should meet him at the Cross Roads! What could he have intended to do? What made them think that he had been dead so long? Of course, they must

have been mistaken. My nerves had certainly undergone a great strain, but a thought was beginning to haunt me. Could he have spoken *after death?* And however irrelevant it may appear, I kept reminding myself that the study telephone was connected directly with the office. Perhaps vaguely I felt that it would be incompatible with the nature of a spirit to call up 'Exchange'. Firmly I refused to consider the spirit hypothesis.

"But," persisted an idea in my brain, "Harris and Sergeant Williams with their technical experience could not make such an error concerning the time that had elapsed since death. He must have been dead when the ring came. Then," I avowed within myself, "it was someone else who spoke." But with the thought I gripped the arms of my chair, for a new significance flashed upon me with paralyzing effect. If that message came from anyone else it must have been transmitted at my father's telephone with the corpse at the very elbow of the speaker!

I was stunned with the full force of this inference, and it may have been the next moment or it may have been half an hour later, but I was suddenly aroused by the strange behavior of the cat, which till that moment had been sleeping peacefully. He sprang on all fours upon my knee, his back arched and his hair bristling to the tip of his tail, and his eyes, wide and staring, glowed in the electric light. I thought for a moment that a strange dog might have wandered into the garden, but I noted that his head was not turned to the garden. He rather peered over my shoulder as if trying to discern something through the window at my back. It was the window of the room that had been my father's study!

"What's up, Toby, old chap?" I said, a little nervously, I fear, but he only snarled. Then he went flying across the veranda as I sprang to my feet. The telephone bell had rung! It was only a momentary vibration, but unmistakable, and my father's office had been locked up since the day following the tragedy!

I could feel my heart beating violently as I clutched my chair. Then the bell rang long and loud. I dashed into the house and into the room, and seized the receiver almost at the moment that the bell ceased ringing.

"Hello." I hardly recognized my own voice, and my lips were parched.

"That you, Jim? Meet me at the Cross Roads at once." It was my father's voice to the last tone.

"Who the——" I began with a desperate effort at self-mastery, but even at the moment I could hear the receiver being replaced at the other end of the wire.

I stood for a few seconds in a state of feverish excitement, and irresolute. Then I came to a sudden resolve to follow up what promised to be a clue. Merely waiting in my own room to load a revolver which I slipped into my pocket, I hurried off straight for the office. On arrival I found it dark and secured as I had last seen it. Snatching a bunch of keys from my pocket I flung the door open and switched on the light, but could find not the slightest trace of a recent entrant. I did not waste much time, however, and having switched off the light, I withdrew and locked the door again.

I was slipping my keys away when a burly figure sprang out of the darkness and growled, "What are you after?" Then as I looked up the man recognized me in the dim light and the voice became apologetic. "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir, but there was a fellow fumbling at that door not three minutes ago, and when I went up to him he made off. I tried to overtake him, and just as I came back I saw you and thought he must have doubled round somehow."

The man had a coil of wire and one or two small tools in his hand, and had evidently been working in the vicinity. I assured him that it was all right and hurried along to the main road again. So someone *had* been in the office, I reflected—someone with a duplicate Yale key.

As I neared the Cross Roads I saw a somewhat tall figure ahead of me. The head turned slightly at my footsteps, and a voice, the facsimile of my late father's, called out, "Here you are. Come!" And the figure moved forward with a quick swinging stride.

I would have run to catch up with it, but a couple of men were coming up the road toward the township, and I did not want to arrest their attention. By the time they had passed, the figure was out of sight, but I could hear the steps ahead and I walked rapidly on. Presently the voice came through the darkness, apparently some hundred yards or so on my left, and at almost right angles to the road: "This way."

I did not hesitate, but made the best of my way over the uneven ground, blundering now and then into a stunted shrub of salt bush. I had gone only some three hundred yards when I saw the dim outline of a ridge which I knew to be in the vicinity, and almost immediately a faint light shone through a doorway of a sort of dugout or humpy not two chains in front of me. I soon discovered that the light was from a hurricane lantern held by my strange guide, who on my approach merely said, "Here," and disappeared within the room.

I knew the place well enough—a humpy occupied by an old-age pensioner whom I had seen often, though casually, and who lived inoffensively here on the outskirt of the township. The ruins of the old mine were half a mile farther on and across the main road. I entered the shack and found the old man leaning against a rough table, upon which he had already placed the lantern. He was muffled up about the throat as I had always seen him, and he had on a broad-brimmed slouch hat. He wore, too, large tinted glasses, as was also his custom. In addition he had a thick beard, so little of his face was discernible. He was obviously out of breath, and signed for me to wait a moment before he could speak. I took the opportunity of looking round the dugout. It was just such a compartment as one would expect. The contents were simple but sufficient. Besides the table were several cooking utensils, a stretcher bed, and a cool safe knocked up from a packing case and some bagging. In the fireplace was a portable oven.

I had entertained no delusion from my setting out. The similarity of the voice to my father's could be explained only on the supposition that it was my uncle who had spoken. Yet though I had no means of knowing anything of my uncle's appearance I could not, somehow, reconcile what I was able to see of the apparently weak and utterly undistinctive face before me with the extraordinary personality and evil genius of the man who had been my father's lifelong persecutor. Several who had seen the "ghost" on the mine had stated that the face itself was terrifying in the extreme, but, of course, they might have imagined anything. Then I realized how little of the features before me were actually perceptible, and I became convinced that the muffler and hat, to say nothing of the glasses, were worn with the purpose of concealment. It was just dawning upon me that the head was unusually large, when the figure spoke. Ah, the voice again!

"Now are you prepared to come with me down the old mine? That is the question."

"The old mine!" I gasped. "Why, how? What for?"

"The feud between your father and me is at an end, and as the *casus belli* took place before you were born I bear you no malice, so we can begin square. Anyway, I want the services of a member of the family, and a man of nerve."

"What do you know of my nerve?" I put the question mechanically.

He laughed. It was a low, gurgling, unpleasant laugh, but he answered. "There are other reasons why it should be you, but you will need your nerve."

He went to the back wall of the room and removed two of the vertical timbers with the greatest ease. If there were one portion of the compartment which would appear freer from secret openings than another it would surely have been this, for the center of the wall where these timbers had been placed curved slightly inward as if under pressure from the earth behind it. Yet the removal revealed a dark passage of some kind down which for a foot or so the feeble light of the lantern found its way. Seizing the lantern my uncle (the voice precluded all doubt of his identity) stepped through the aperture and said, "Better come; it will pay."

I followed, and he adroitly replaced the timbers. They were hardly more than bark for thickness and weight. He then went ahead of me and almost immediately we were descending a series of rough wooden steps of gradual slope.

To some it might appear strange that I would venture in this manner into the bowels of the earth, so lest I should appear abnormally foolhardy, or abnormally courageous, I should point out that I had been born and bred among mines, and as a boy had often climbed down some old and disused and oblique shaft such as this. I was really as much at home underground as upon the surface.

The descent was not formidable, and I calculated that we had gone down about fifty feet when we came to a big drive. We passed along this at a rapid pace. Only here and there did we have to pick our way around fallen rock. The light shone, too, upon a narrow beaten track along the hard floor of this subterranean tunnel.

We had been going hardly twenty minutes before we entered a rough-hewn chamber. I took a swift glance around. It was evidently a natural cavern, but the walls had been trimmed considerably. I almost forgot my avuncular guide, who had paused and was now slightly behind me. I was just summing up the contents of the vault—a couple of stretcher beds, a large counter or laboratory table, an ancient pendulum clock near the wall at my right—when our merged shadows, which fell grotesquely on the left wall a little in front of me, suddenly leaped to the wall and portion of the ceiling at the far end of the cavern, and as suddenly ceased to exist, for in an instant the light of the lantern had been put out and the whole place surrendered to the dense black of underground. Then before I had time to collect my senses a metallic crash behind me reverberated through the chamber, and I turned helplessly in the darkness. In the few seconds of ominous silence that ensued I began to entertain the terrible suspicion that my eccentric relative had trapped and deserted me, but presently I heard stealthy movements within the room itself. Straining every nerve to catch the slightest sound I stood as probably only few could stand in such all but absolute dark. Then without the slightest warning and in a blinding flash the whole cavern was flooded with light.

For a perceptible fraction of a minute my uncle stood on the farther side of the counter-table with his fingers upon a switch and his back toward

me. The switch was one of a number on a board attached to the wall at my right as we entered. Rather nearer to me, though still at my right, was the clock I had already noted. In a vague way I had heard the ticking of this old timepiece, but now that I was no longer intent upon other sounds that I conceived might mean life or death in the darkness, I observed for the first time how unusually pronounced was this sound that so unerringly registered the swinging of the pendulum. At the moment astonishment seemed to eclipse for me every other emotion, and still the old man with his back toward me had his finger raised upon the switch he had just operated. I am convinced that he maintained this tableauesque posture merely to enable me to accustom my eyes to the glare so that he might have the full advantage of the dramatic effect of the next moment, for suddenly he turned round and faced me.

UNTIL that moment I had been prone to smile at Horatio's apprehension, in *Hamlet,* that a form could be so horrible "it might deprive of reason and draw into madness," but I doubt if I could go through such a moment again and recover my mental balance. I say "recover", for certainly during a period of interminable seconds I was deprived of reason by the very horror of the face that confronted me. About this face was something inexpressibly sinister. I venture to affirm that it would have been sufficient to strike loathing, if not terror, into anybody, but by the association of ideas it plunged me into a kind of mental paralysis. I had seen it somewhere before. I believe I swooned. I am not sure, but after awhile memory began to operate. With my eyes riveted upon the unspeakable horror that stood motionless at the other side of the table, I remembered.

As a boy of ten I once went with my mother to visit a house in a town some miles away. While my mother and a prim woman were talking in a reception room my eyes wandered around from picture to cabinet, from vase to window, as was natural enough, but presently they kept returning to a photograph that rested on the mantelshelf. There seemed to be something peculiar about it even across the room. Something in the pose arrested my attention. At last I deliberately walked over to the fireplace and gazed into the eyes of the photograph and was instantly precipitated into a sort of paralysis similar to that which I had just experienced. As a matter of fact I all but collapsed upon that former occasion, and reeled across the room and was in such obvious terror that my mother led me out of the house, and for months and even years I had a dread of meeting the original of the photograph. Knowing all I do now I regard this terror in a large measure as hereditary, nevertheless the face of the photograph was subtly hideous, especially the eyes. The whites showed clean round the irises, which through the extreme dilation of the pupils were reduced to ghastly rings of film. My mother on the way home told me to forget all about it, as it was the likeness of a bad man.

And now after a decade I found myself confronted with this same diabolical personality a little more devilish in the original than in the photograph that had so strangely affected me. After a period indefinite and eternal as a nightmare, and forgetting that I had already been assured within myself concerning his identity, I muttered feebly and mechanically, "My uncle!"

The gaunt enigma grinned sardonically and intoned, "Your prophetic soul, your uncle."

It occurred to me that I was in the hands of a possibly dangerous mad-

man, and I was trying to wonder how I might propitiate him when he continued in a calm, deliberate tone, "You must consider yourself my prisoner, or shall we say involuntary guest?"

"How long?" I managed to demand.

"For the term of my natural life," he replied in the same facetious vein in which he had acknowledged our relationship.

He then came round and sat upon one of the stretchers, and with an expressive sweep of the hand indicated the other for my similar use. His attire was rather more neat than I might have been led to expect. He wore a well-fitting sack suit of some dark material, and in lieu of a collar wore a surprizingly well-adjusted black silk scarf. His overcoat and several disguises lay on the big counter-table where he had evidently thrown them while the place was in darkness.

We sat on our respective stretchers facing each other. The ghastly eyes fastened upon my own seemed to be gaining a sort of mesmeric influence over me. The face itself was horrible in the extreme, but I have not been able to analyze its features. Indeed, there was an unnatural elusiveness about them which was in itself terrifying. I recall them now, but in at least a dozen variant yet equally devilish aspects. But the eyes with their infernal power remained invariable. I appeared deprived of movement as I sat gazing dully into them from the stretcher. The first shock of horror over, I sank into a lethargy, though fully conscious of my surroundings. Presently the grim figure sitting opposite me in an intent attitude with an attenuated hand on each thigh, spoke. Had I the mere sound of his voice to guide me, I might easily have imagined it to be my father.

"Now to business. I am supposed to be dead. Was duly, or unduly, reported to have gone down in the *Titanic*. The rumor suited me excellently, so naturally I did not trouble to deny it. Now I am nearly through, and you are to bury me as I direct. If you follow my instructions—well, very well, indeed." Here he raised a long, lean finger and spoke with the utmost impressiveness. "If you do not follow my instructions implicitly you will not leave this place alive, or dead either, for the matter of that."

He then leaned forward suddenly and peered at me intently, and exclaimed, "Your virtuous father never mentioned me, I suppose? No? Yes? We quarreled. A woman, of course. Gad, you're like your m o t h e r, though! About the face, that is. You have our physique."

For the first time he glanced aside and remained in a muse.

It may have been that his sinister power was for the moment averted, or it may have been his reference to my unfortunate parents, but certainly a new and fierce emotion swept over me, and I sprang to my feet, and my fingers were grasping my revolver.

"You murdered my father!" I cried hoarsely, almost towering over the still sitting figure of my uncle.

The indescribable eyes were once more upon me, and at close quarters were just about as much as I could stand and retain my reason, but the hideous face was absolutely expressive of no known emotion as the lips parted to observe, "Pray, my dear young Hamlet, consider who destroyed the evidence? Accessory after the fact, eh? By the way, if that toy goes off at that angle there will be no good, kind uncle to tell you where to find the key of that door, you know."

I was staggered, and in a daze I managed to get back to the other stretcher. I had spoken metaphorically, as it were, and here was a practical admission of a specific crime.

"You actually murdered my father?" I faltered imbecilely.

The monstrosity seemed puzzled for a moment and said with quite an injured air, "Well, you need not rub it in. Quite a natural sequence to our little quarrel, and he had diabetes anyway. That's why he always kept a beaker of water at his elbow. But if you saw——"

Then he gave a low gurgling laugh and ejaculated, "Murdered — you mean worried! He-he, worry never killed a Geraldton. Else, my Hamlet, you will certainly succumb before you get through this job."

I was more convinced than ever that I was dealing with a maniac, and gripped myself as well as I could for whatever might follow.

The incongruously familiar voice went on, "We had better get the instructions over, the next heart turn is going to get *me*."

He went over to the counter and opened a large trap-door and hauled out a long, queer-looking box. Its nature was obvious, but it would be difficult to conceive a more extraordinary coffin. The ends were square, but there was a considerable difference in the size of these squares. Indeed, he stood the whole thing on end, and it was perfectly stable. It was a sort of elongated pyramid. It had a lid, the narrow end of which was of glass. Then in the center of the small square end was a ring—the only handle. He removed the lid, and there within this outer case was screwed a coffin of regular shape. The head of the coffin from the shoulders fitted exactly in the outer case, but from the shoulders to the foot there was considerable space all round. It was clear that the whole thing was to be lowered vertically, but where?

As if in answer to the query that was beginning to shape itself in my brain, my uncle strode to a door in the wall opposite that at which we entered. This he swung open, and he beckoned me to follow him down a short stope. At the door he touched a switch and a light shone in what appeared to be a small chamber some yards away, but which upon our entering proved to be an old shaft. At first I thought we were at the bottom, but soon discovered that the floor was composed of remarkably heavy timber and several plates of sheet iron. Near the outer rim of the false floor was a hole rather more than a yard square, and just above it was a windlass. At the end of the rope coiled round the latter was a strong release hook.

My uncle gave a sweep of the hand toward what I had already conceived to be an unshapely grave, and said briefly, "The obvious," and moving toward the stope he added, "Now we can turn in."

This serial rises to a ghastly and thrilling climax in the description of the horrifying events that took place in the underground tomb in the derelict mine. The story will be concluded next month.

The Dance of Death

By JEAN LAHORS

(Translated by Edward Baxter Perry)

On a sounding stone,
With a blanched thigh-bone,
The bone of a saint, I fear,
Death strikes the hour
Of his wizard power,
And the specters haste to appear.

From their tombs they rise
In sepulchral guise,
Obeying the summons dread,
And gathering 'round,
With obeisance profound,
They salute the King of the Dead.

Then he stands in the middle
And tunes his fiddle,
And plays them a gruesome strain;
And each gibbering wight
In the moon's pale light
Must dance to that wild refrain.

Now the fiddle tells,
As the music swells,
Of the charnel's ghastly pleasures;
And they clatter their bones
As with hideous groans
They reel to those maddening measures.

The churchyard quakes
And the old abbey shakes
To the tread of the midnight host,
And the sod turns black
On each circling track,
Where a skeleton whirls with a ghost.

The night wind moans
In shuddering tones
Through the gloom of the cypress tree,
While the mad rout raves
Over yawning graves,
And the fiddle bow leaps with glee.

So the swift hours fly
Till the reddening sky
Gives warning of daylight near.
Then the first cock-crow
Sends them huddling below
To sleep for another year.



THE coupons at the end of The Eyrie are functioning well. They are giving us a good working knowledge of the type of stories that you, the readers, DON'T like, as well as the type you DO like; and they will thus work to the mutual benefit of both WEIRD TALES and its readers.

The tale in the March issue that has been most praised and blamed, cussed and discussed, is *Lochinvar Lodge,* by Clyde Burt Clason, the cover design story for that issue. A furious battle has raged among the readers regarding this story. It received a great many votes, but there were also a great many complaints; and as each complaint removes one vote, there is little left for *Lochinvar Lodge* in the final scoring that determines the favorite story of the readers in that issue.

"*Lochinvar Lodge* has a bad ending, and needs a sequel," writes one reader. "It is a wonderful story, but a rotten ending," writes H. G. Campbell, of Portsmouth, Virginia. "*Lochinvar Lodge* should never have been published unless the sequel was already written and in the office safe," writes C. M. Eddy, Jr., of Providence, Rhode Island. Seabury Quinn threatens to send de Grandin down into that dark hole in Lochinvar Lodge to find out what has become of the girl and the bearded dwarf unless Mr. Clason writes a sequel and solves the mystery himself. "The story has no satisfactory ending or explanation," writes Dr. F. A. Fagone, of Portland, Maine. "A wonderful story if it is true," writes Miss Edith Smith, of Houston, Texas. "The ending leaves too much to the imagination," writes Raymond Lester, of New York City. "Of all your good stories this one started out to be the best, but turned out to be the worst," writes Lee Byrd, of Lima, Ohio.

The story does not lack for defenders; in fact, the letters of enthusiastic praise outnumber the complaints. But so many are the coupons and letters that protest against leaving the ending of the story "hanging up in the air," that we have sent back to their authors two other stories against which the same complaint might be made, to have the endings clarified. The use of the coupons at the end of The Eyrie has made your demand very emphatic that the story endings shall not be vague or indefinite. Every bit of advice or criticism is always carefully studied. If only one or two readers object to a story, the objection may be merely a personal dislike; but if five or ten persons write in to voice a complaint against a story, we feel sure that the story has failed to make the mark with many hundreds who did not write in; and when forty or fifty persons vote against a story, *and all for the same reason*, then the readers have uncovered a fault in the story that will help

the magazine to avoid the same defect in other stories in the future. Every vote against *Lochinvar Lodge* was cast for the same reason: because the ending left too much to the reader's imagination.

The readers also picked out for condemnation Elwin J. Owens' story, *Dead in Three Hours.* "This is the kind of tale a three-year-old would call 'kinda scary'," writes Mildred R. Kaufmann, of Philadelphia. "The hero is cowardly," writes Grace L. McLoughlin, of Savona, New York. "There is no real motive for all the atrocities," writes Harold S. Farnese, of Los Angeles; "the story would be acceptable if one did not get the impression that it is weird merely for the sake of weirdness."

We hope you will continue to make full use of the coupons at the end of The Eyrie, not only to tell us what stories you like best, but also to let us know what stories you don't like, if any. That will give a great deal of help both to you, the readers, and to us, the publishers, in making WEIRD TALES more and more responsive to your liking. We think we know fairly well what kind of stories you like (the constant increase in the sales of the magazine shows that), but by your kindly help and criticism we want to make the magazine better and better, *without a single weak story in any issue.* That is our goal.

Mabel L. Pomeroy, of Corona, New York, asks for "more of the marvelous stories of Henry S. Whitehead. I can sit down now and visualize every one of his stories in WEIRD TALES," she adds. "Each one of them is altogether different from all the others, and each is a wonderful story which completely satisfies the reader." Several excellent tales by this author are in our hands for early publication in WEIRD TALES, and one of his stories appears in this issue.

"Powers' *The Jungle Monsters* is a ripsnortin' humdinger," writes Eli Colter, from Portland, Oregon. "Clever, well written, with the fine tang of humor and the salt of tears. If I were compelled to choose the best story in the March issue I'd have to draw straws between Powers' story and Wells' *A Dream of Armageddon.* But there isn't a poor story among the lists lately; everything stands up well worth reading."

Robert E. Howard, author of *Wolfshead,* suggests the old Norse sagas as a rich field for our series of reprints. "*The Saga of Grettir the Outlaw,*" he writes, "while told in plain, almost homely language, reaches the peak of horror. You will recall the terrific, night-long battle between the outlaw and the vampire, who had himself been slain by the Powers of Darkness."

"Some of the authors whose stories appear in WEIRD TALES," writes John Pooley Wright, of St. Joseph, Missouri, "are worthy successors to Edgar Allan Poe, their stories surpassing Poe's, at least in my humble opinion. I was given a copy of WEIRD TALES to read during a recent illness. I had never realized the worth of the magazine before; but now I have contracted a new habit: reading WEIRD TALES."

Writes E. H. Obermiller, of Chicago: "You are giving the young, hitherto obscure mystery writers, a chance at Poe's laurels, and the typical WEIRD TALES story is like American syncopation—fresh, virile, original, and not bound by conventions. I just finished reading the March issue, and it is the best in months."

Writes Harry R. Wallace, of Longview, Washington: "Your tales are so fine that when I get your magazine I can not stop reading until I have scoured it from cover to cover. Each month it seems better than the month

before. I think the novel by Eli Colter, *On the Dead Man's Chest,* is one of the best that I have ever read. It keeps the reader continually in suspense. I can hardly wait until the next issue of WEIRD TALES arrives. Give us more stories of other planets, such as those by J. Schlossel and by the author of *When the Green Star Waned.*"

"I would like to see WEIRD TALES come out twice a month if you could keep up your same high standard of good stories," writes Will O'Brien, of Berkeley, California, in a letter to The Eyrie. "I read a half dozen or more weekly, semi-monthly and monthly magazines, but enjoy WEIRD TALES most of all. I enjoy planet stories like *The Waning of a World,* ghost stories, horror stories, pseudo-scientific stories such as *Red Ether,* and werewolf stories—in fact, all the stories you publish."

C. Mason, of Winnipeg, Canada, writes to The Eyrie: "I found your March edition of WEIRD TALES wholly fascinating. I enjoyed every tale from cover to cover. *Lochinvar Lodge* had a very disheartening ending, but I enjoyed every line of it. *On the Dead Man's Chest* is extremely appealing and I look forward with pleasure to reading the last installment and hearing more from Felix Underwood."

Hazel Roby, of Belen, New Mexico, writes to The Eyrie: "I am a constant reader of WEIRD TALES and think it is the most thrilling, hair-raising book I have ever read. Why can't it be put out twice a month? All my friends read it and we are in a continuous uproar over deciding on the best stories."

Your votes for favorite story in the March issue have given first place to the weirdest story in the entire issue: *The Music of Madness,* by William E. Barrett. Your second and third choices have gone to *A Message From Space,* by J. Schlossel, and *Swamp Horror,* by Will Smith and R. J. Robbins. What is your favorite story in this issue?

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE MAY WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)----------	Why? ----------
(2)----------	----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out the coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 408 Holliday Building, Indianapolis, Ind.

Reader's name and address:

The Devil-Ray

(Continued from page 608)

ray of purple. The ship, volplaning now, roared on over their heads.

It was all over in a moment. That sinister patch of purple had passed over the water between them. It had touched no part of Ferris's body, but it had gone directly over the head and shoulders of the Spider. There was not a cry, not even a murmur. The Spider was gone!

In frantic haste Ferris swam about, calling the Spider's name as loudly as he dared. The plane had reached the castle and the last fitful roar of its engines shut out any chance of discovery. But the Spider? Ferris swam around once more, calling his name. He dived. Nothing. He dived again, this time deeper. Down, down, down, until his lungs seemed to split within him. He could stay down no longer, so he shot to the surface, his chest bursting.

There, floating still and white beside him in the sable waters of the Blennersee he found the Spider. But the thing that made the Spider what he was, the thing which had made him different from the mud on the lake bottom; the thing which made him eat and drink and laugh and talk —that thing was gone forever. Just a touch of the purple and it had vanished!

Ferris finally managed to tow the body to the shore. There, with the help of the waiting Lefty, he pulled the little man out to the narrow beach. Together they worked on the body for two hours. Two hours of fruitless effort. Inch by inch, they went over his body, but not a mark could they find. There was no water in his lungs. He was dead, but how? The purple light? It must be!

They were men used to acting in strange emergencies, so they scraped a shallow grave on the side of the Blennersee and buried there the thing that had been the Spider. When they had finished, Lefty told Ferris that he was through. Ferris could come with him if he would or he could stay behind and play a lone hand for the jewels. As for Lefty Fritz, he'd had enough; he was through.

And so that night Lefty tramped down out of the mountain and went his way. But Ferris, having made his choice, stayed behind.

In next month's WEIRD TALES is told how Ferris invaded Castle Blennerhof and came to grips with the mystery therein





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The Ghosts of Steamboat Coulee

(Continued from page 598)

"So I see," said the man addressed as Al.

Then the sheriff bent over me.

"Ready to talk, young man?" he demanded.

It must have mystified this one greatly when I leaped suddenly to my feet and ran my hands over him swiftly. How could they guess what it meant to me to learn that these two were flesh and blood?

"Thank God!" I cried. Then I began to tremble so violently that the man called Al, perforce, supported me with a burly arm about my shoulders. As he did so his eyes met those of the sheriff and a meaning glance passed between them.

The sheriff passed around the cabin, returning almost at once with three horses, saddled and bridled for the trail. The third horse was for me. Weakly, aided by Al, I mounted.

Then we clambered down into the dry stream and started toward Steamboat Rock.

I found my voice.

"For what am I wanted, sheriff?" I asked.

"For burglarious entry, son," he replied, not unkindly. "You went into a house in Palisades, while the owner and his wife were working in the fields, and stole every bit of food you could lay your hands on. There's no use denying it, for we found the sack you brought it away in, right in that there cabin!"

"But Hildreth, the wife of Plone, gave me that food!" I cried. "I didn't steal it!"

"Hildreth? Plone?" The sheriff fairly shouted the two names.

Then he turned and stared at his deputy — again that meaning exchange of glances. The sheriff regained control of himself.

"This Hildreth and Plone," he began, hesitating strangely, "did they have a son, a half-grown boy?"

"Yes! Yes!" I cried eagerly; "the boy's name was Reuben! He led me into Steamboat Coulee!"

Then I told them my story, from beginning to end, sparing none of the unbelievable details. When I had finished, the two of them turned in their saddles and looked back into the coulee, toward the now invisible log cabin we had left behind. The deputy shook his head, muttering, while the sheriff removed his hat and scratched his own poll. He spat judiciously into the sand of the dry stream before he spoke.

"Son," he said finally, "if I didn't know you was a stranger here I would swear that you was crazy as a loon. There ain't a darn thing real that you saw or heard, except the rattlesnakes and the bobcats!"

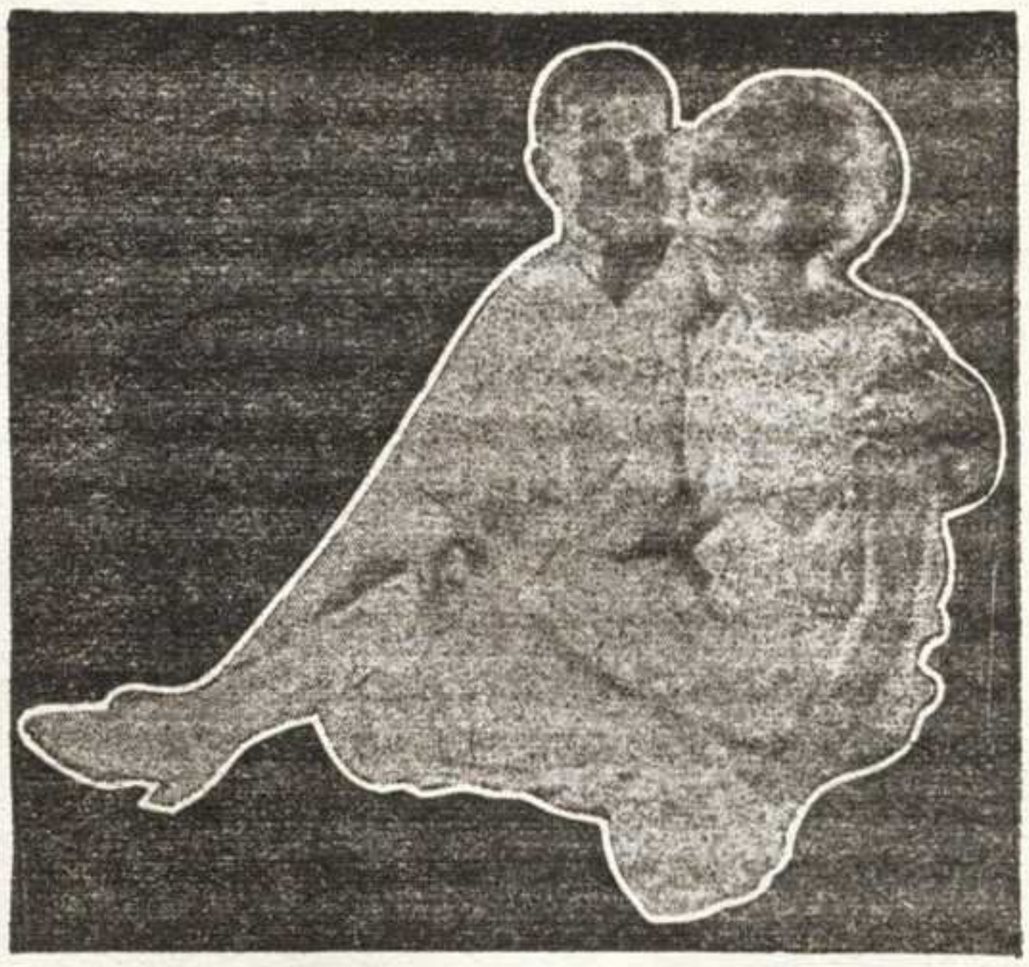
I interrupted him eagerly.

"But what about Plone, Hildreth and Reuben?"

"Plone and Reuben," he replied, "were hanged fifteen years ago! Right beside that cabin where we found you! Hildreth went crazy and ran away into the coulee. She was never seen again."

I waited, breathless, for the sheriff to continue.

"Plone and Reuben," he went on, "were the real bogy men of this coulee in the early days. They lived in that log cabin. Reuben used to lure strangers in there, where the two of them murdered the wanderers and robbed their dead bodies, burying them afterward in a gruesome graveyard farther inside Steamboat Coulee. Hildreth, so the story goes, tried to prevent these murders; but was unable to do so. Finally she reported to the pioneer authorities—and Plone cut her tongue out as punishment for the betrayal. God knows how many unsuspecting travelers the two made



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away with before they were found out and strung up without trial!''

''But how about Plone's farm in Moses Coulee, outside Steamboat, and the farmhouse where I met the family?''

''It's mine,'' replied the sheriff. ''There's never been a house on it to my knowledge. I foreclosed on it for the taxes, and the blasted land is so poor that even the rattlesnakes starve while they are crawling across it!''

''But I saw it as plainly as I see you!''

''But you're a sick man, ain't you? You never went near the place where you say the house was. We followed your footprints, and they left the main road at the foot of the Three Devils, from which they went, straight as a die, to the mouth of Steamboat Coulee! They was easy to follow, and if I hadn't had another case on I'd have picked you up before you ever could have reached the cabin!''

Would to God that he had! It would have saved me many a weird and terrifying nightmare in the nights which have followed.

THERE the matter ended—seemingly. The sheriff, not a bad fellow at all, put me in the way of work which, keeping me much in the open beneath God's purifying sunshine, is slowly but surely mending my ravished lungs. After a while there will come a day when I shall no longer be a sick man.

But, ever so often, I raise my eyes from my work, allowing them to wander, against my will, in the direction of that shadow against the walls of Moses Coulee — that shadow out of which seems slowly to float the stony likeness of a steamboat under reduced power.

As I turn my eyes away, exerting my will, I shake my head slowly, wondering.



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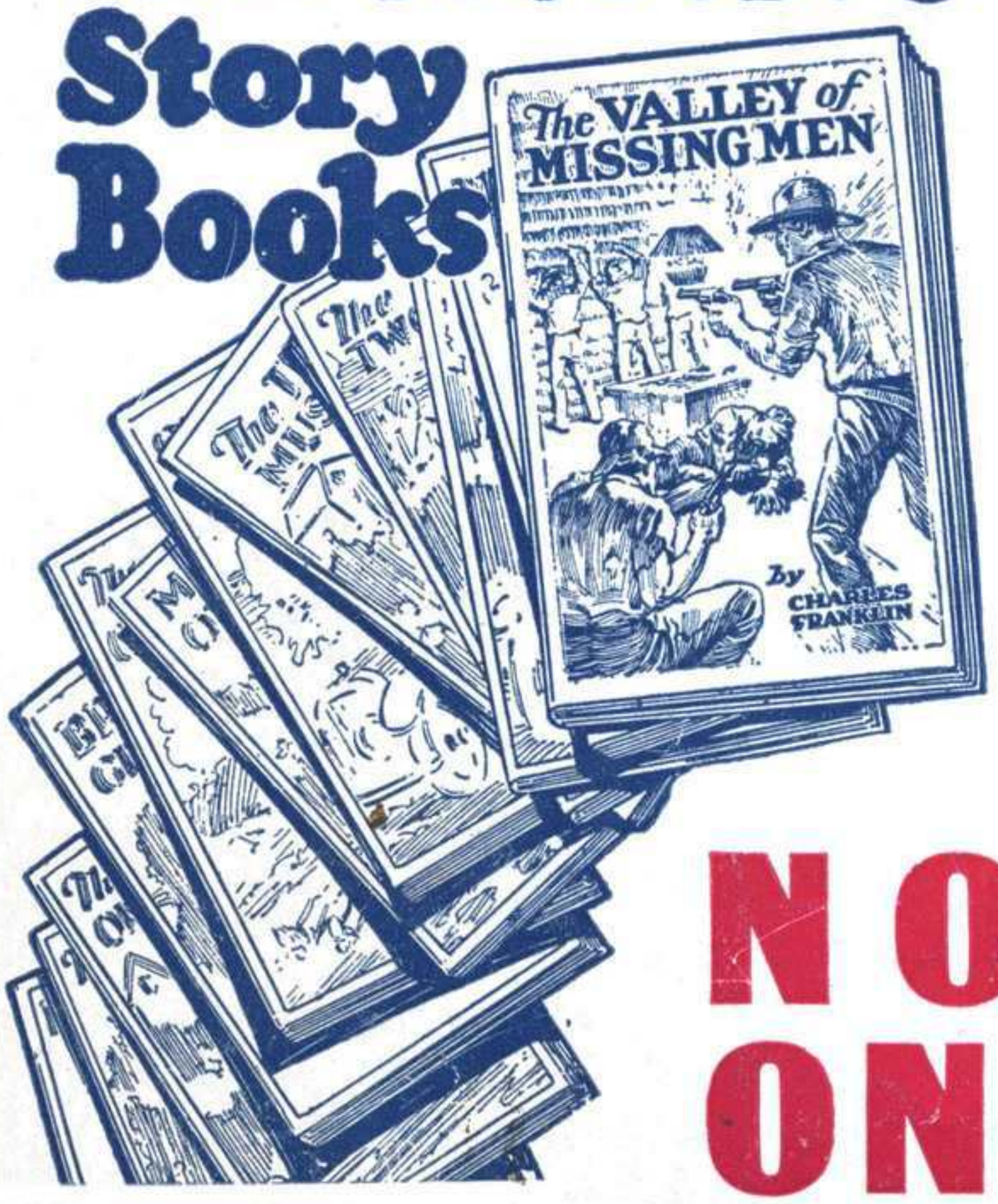
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