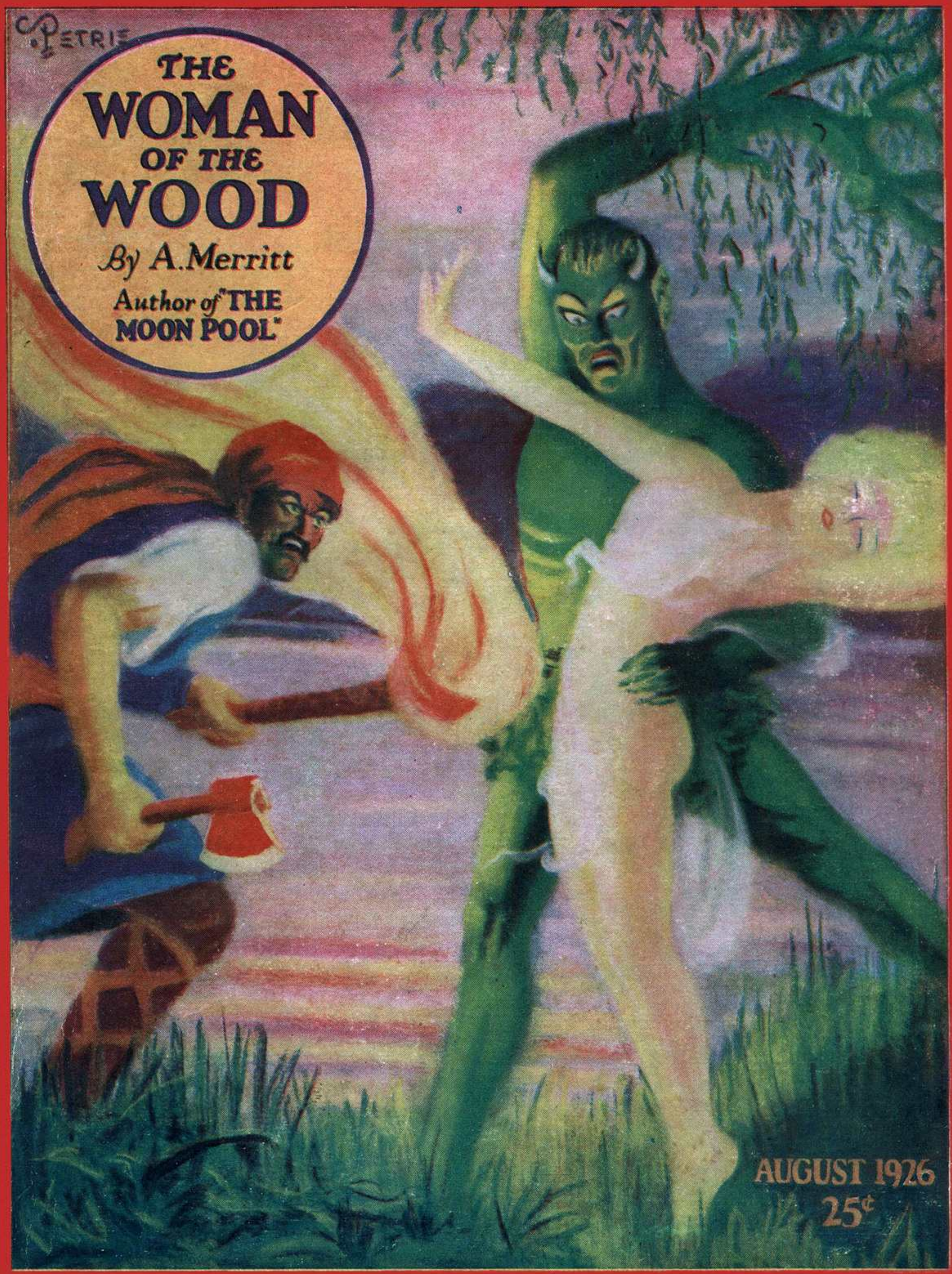
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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL



VOLUME VIII NUMBER 2

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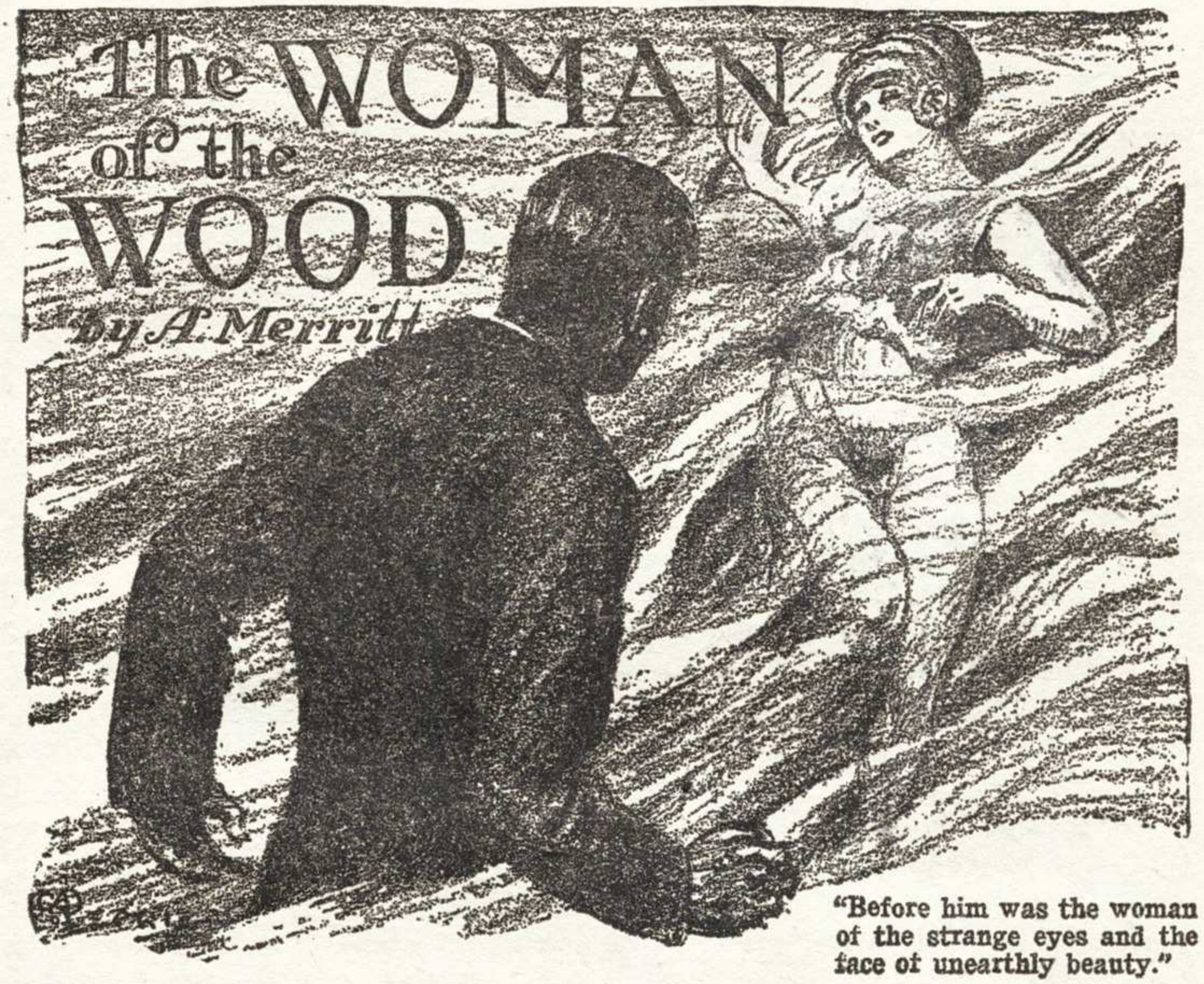
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The WOMAN of the WOOD

by A. Merritt



"Before him was the woman of the strange eyes and the face of unearthly beauty."

McKAY sat on the balcony of the little inn that squatted like a brown gnome among the pines that clothed the eastern shore of the lake.

It was a small and lonely lake high up on the Vosges; and yet the word "lonely" is not just the one to tag its spirit; rather was it aloof, withdrawn. The mountains came down on every side, making a vast tree-lined bowl that seemed filled, when McKay first saw it, with a still wine of peace.

McKay had worn the wings with honor in the World War. And as a bird loves the trees, so did McKay love them. They were to him not merely trunks and roots, branches and leaves; they were personalities. He was acutely aware of character differences even among the same species—that pine was jolly and benevolent; that one austere, monkish; there stood a swaggering bravo and there a sage wrapped in green meditation; that birch was a wanton—the one beside her virginal, still a-dream.

The war had sapped McKay, nerve, brain and soul. Through all the years that had passed the wound had kept open. But now, as he slid his car down the side of the great green bowl, he felt its peace reach out to him; caress and quiet him; promise him healing. He seemed to drift like a falling leaf through the cathedraled woods; to be cradled by the hands of the trees.

McKay had stopped at the little gnome of the inn; and there he had lingered, day after day, week after week.

The trees had nursed him; soft whisperings of the leaves, slow chant of the needled pines, had first deadened, then driven from him the reechoing clamor of the war and its sorrow. The open wound of his spirit had closed under their healing; had closed and become scars; and then even the scars had been covered and buried, as the scars on Earth's breast are covered and buried beneath the falling leaves of autumn. The trees had laid healing hands upon his eyes. He had sucked strength from the green breasts of the hills.

As that strength flowed back to him, McKay grew aware that the place was—troubled; that there was ferment of fear within it.

It was as though the trees had waited until he himself had become whole before they made their own unrest known to him. But now they were trying to tell him something; there was a shrillness as of apprehension, of anger, in the whispering of the leaves, the needled chanting of the pines.

And it was this that had kept McKay at the inn—a definite consciousness of appeal. He strained his ears to catch words in the rustling branches, words that trembled on the brink of his human understanding.

Never did they cross that brink.

Gradually he had focused himself, so he believed, to the point of the valley's unease.

On all the shores of the lake there were but two dwellings. One was the inn, and around the inn the trees clustered protectively; confidingly; friendly. It was as though they had not only accepted it, but had made it part of themselves.

Not so was it of the other habitation. Once it had been the hunting lodge of long-dead lords; now it was half-ruined, forlorn. It lay across the lake almost exactly opposite the inn and back upon the slope a half-mile from the shore. Once there had been fat fields around it and a fair orchard.

The forest had marched down upon fields and lodge. Here and there scattered pines and poplars stood like soldiers guarding some outpost; scouting parties of saplings lurked among the gaunt, broken fruit trees. But the forest had not had its way unchecked; ragged stumps showed where those who dwelt in the old house had cut down the invaders; blackened patches showed where they had fired the woods.

Here was the center of the conflict. Here the green folk of the forest were both menaced and menacing; at war.

The lodge was a fortress beleaguered by the trees, a fortress whose garrison sallied forth with ax and torch to take their toll of their besiegers.

Yet McKay sensed a slow, inexorable pressing on of the forest; he saw it as an army ever filling the gaps in its enclosing ranks, shooting its seeds into the cleared places, sending its roots out to sap them; and armed always with a crushing patience. He had the impression of constant regard, of watchfulness, as though night and day the forest kept myriads of eyes upon the lodge; inexorably, not to be swerved from its purpose. He had spoken of this impression to the innkeeper and his wife, and they had looked at him, oddly.

"Old Polleau does not love the trees, no," the old man had said. "No, nor do his two sons. They do not love the trees—and very certainly the trees do not love them."

BETWEEN the lodge and the shore, marching down to the verge of the lake was a singularly beautiful little coppice of silver birches and firs. This coppice stretched for perhaps a quarter of a mile; it was not more than a hundred feet or two in depth, and not alone the beauty of its trees but their curious grouping

vividly aroused McKay's interest. At each end were a dozen or more of the glistening, needled firs, not clustered but spread out as though in open marching order; at widely spaced intervals along its other two sides paced single firs. The birches, slender and delicate, grew within the guard of these sturdier trees, yet not so thickly as to crowd one another.

To McKay the silver birches were for all the world like some gay caravan of lovely demoiselles under the protection of debonair knights. With that odd other sense of his he saw the birches as delectable damsels, merry and laughing—the pines as lovers, troubadours in green-needled mail. And when the winds blew and the crests of the trees bent under them, it was as though dainty demoiselles picked up fluttering, leafy skirts, bent leafy hoods and danced while the knights of the firs drew closer round them, locked arms and danced with them to the roaring horns of the winds. At such times he almost heard sweet laughter from the birches, shoutings from the firs.

Of all the trees in that place McKay loved best this little wood. He had rowed across and rested in its shade, had dreamed there and, dreaming, had heard again echoes of the sweet elfin laughter. Eyes closed, he had heard mysterious whisperings and the sound of dancing feet light as falling leaves; had taken dream-draft of that gayety which was the soul of the little wood.

Two days ago he had seen Polleau and his two sons. McKay had lain dreaming in the coppice all that afternoon. As dusk began to fall he had reluctantly arisen and began to row back to the inn. When he had been a few hundred feet from shore three men had come out from the trees and had stood watching him—three grim powerful men taller than the average French peasant.

He had called a friendly greeting to them, but they had not answered it; had stood there, scowling. Then as he bent again to his oars, one of the sons had raised a hatchet and had driven it savagely into the trunk of a slim birch. McKay thought he heard a thin, wailing cry from the stricken tree, a sigh from all the little wood.

He had felt as though the keen edge had bitten into his own flesh.

"Stop that!" he had cried. "Stop it, damn you!"

For answer Polleau's son had struck again—and never had McKay seen hate etched so deep as on his face as he struck. Cursing, a killing rage in his heart, McKay had swung the boat around, raced back to shore. He had heard the hatchet strike again and again and, close now to shore, had heard a crackling and over it once more the thin, high wailing. He had turned to look.

The birch was tottering, was falling. Close beside it grew one of the firs, and, as the smaller tree crashed over, it dropped upon this fir like a fainting maid into the arms of her lover. And as it lay and trembled there, one of the branches of the other tree slipped from under it, whipped out and smote the hatchet-wielder a crushing blow upon the head, sending him to earth.

It had been, of course, only the chance blow of a bough, bent by pressure of the fallen trunk and then released as that had slipped down. Of course—yet there had been such suggestion of conscious action in the branch's recoil, so much of bitter anger in it; so much, in truth, had it been like a purposeful blow that McKay felt an eery prickling of his scalp; his heart had missed its beat.

For a moment Polleau and the standing son had stared at the sturdy fir with the silvery birch lying upon its green breast. Folded in and shielded by its needled boughs as though—again the swift impression came to McKay—as though it were a

wounded maid stretched on breast, in arms, of knightly lover. For a long moment father and son had stared.

Then, still wordless but with that same bitter hatred in both their faces, they had stooped and picked up the other and, with his arms around the neck of each, had borne him limply away.

McKay, sitting on the balcony of the inn that morning, went over and over that scene; realized more and more clearly the human aspect of fallen birch and clasping fir, and the conscious deliberateness of the latter's blow. During the two days that had elapsed since then, he had felt the unease of the trees increase, their whispering appeal become more urgent.

What were they trying to tell him? What did they want him to do?

Troubled, he stared across the lake, trying to pierce the mists that hung over it and hid the opposite shore. And suddenly it seemed that he heard the coppice calling him, felt it pull the point of his attention toward it irresistibly, as the lodestone swings and holds the compass needle.

The coppice called him; it bade him come.

McKay obeyed the command; he arose and walked down to the boat landing; he stepped into his skiff and began to row across the lake. As his oars touched the water his trouble fell from him. In its place flowed peace and a curious exaltation.

The mists were thick upon the lake. There was no breath of wind, yet the mists billowed and drifted, shook and curtained under the touch of unfelt airy hands.

They were alive—the mists; they formed themselves into fantastic palaces past whose opalescent façades he flew; they built themselves into hills and valleys and circled plains whose floors were rippling silk. Tiny rainbows gleamed out among them, and upon the water prismatic patches shone and spread like spilled wine of opals. He had the illusion of vast distances—the hillocks of mist were real mountains, the valleys between them were not illusory. He was a colossus cleaving through some elfin world. A trout broke, and it was like Leviathan leaping from the fathomless deep. Around the arc of the fish's body rainbows interlaced and then dissolved into rain of softly gleaming gems—diamonds in dance with sapphires, flame-hearted rubies, pearls with shimmering souls of rose. The fish vanished, diving cleanly without sound; the jeweled bows vanished with it; a tiny irised whirlpool swirled for an instant where trout and flashing arcs had been.

Nowhere was there sound. He let his oars drop and leaned forward, drifting. In the silence, before him and around him, he felt opening the gateways of an unknown world.

And suddenly he heard the sound of voices, many voices; faint at first and murmurous. Louder they became, swiftly; women's voices sweet and lilting and mingled with them the deeper tones of men. Voices that lifted and fell in a wild, gay chanting through whose *joyesse* ran undertones both of sorrow and of anger—as though faery weavers threaded through silk spun of sunbeams, somber strands dipped in the black of graves, and crimson strands stained in the red of wrathful sunsets.

He drifted on, scarce daring to breathe lest even that faint sound break the elfin song. Closer it rang and clearer; and now he became aware that the speed of his boat was increasing, that it was no longer drifting; as though the little waves on each side were pushing him ahead with soft and noiseless palms. His boat grounded, and as its keel rustled along over the smooth pebbles of the beach the song ceased.

McKay half arose and peered be-

fore him. The mists were thicker here but he could see the outlines of the coppice. It was like looking at it through many curtains of fine gauze, and its trees seemed shifting, ethereal, unreal. And moving among the trees were figures that threaded among the boles and flitted round them in rhythmic measures, like the shadows of leafy boughs swaying to some cadenced wind.

He stepped ashore. The mists dropped behind him, shutting off all sight of lake; and as they dropped McKay lost all sense of strangeness, all feeling of having entered some unfamiliar world. Rather was it as though he had returned to one he had once known well and that had been long lost to him.

The rhythmic flittings had ceased; there was now no movement as there was no sound among the trees—yet he felt the little wood full of watchful life. McKay tried to speak; there was a spell of silence on his mouth.

"You called me. I have come to listen to you—to help you if I can."

The words formed within his mind, but utter them he could not. Over and over he tried, desperately; the words seemed to die on his lips.

A pillar of mist whirled forward and halted, eddying half an arm-length away. Suddenly out of it peered a woman's face, eyes level with his own. A woman's face—yes; but McKay, staring into those strange eyes probing his, knew that, woman's though it seemed, it was that of no woman of human breed. They were without pupils, the irises deer-large and of the soft green of deep forest dells; within them sparkled tiny star-points of light like motes in a moonbeam. The eyes were wide and set far apart beneath a broad, low brow over which was piled braid upon braid of hair of palest gold, braids that seemed spun of shining ashes of gold. The nose was small and straight, the mouth scarlet and exquisite. The face was oval, tapering to a delicately pointed chin.

Beautiful was that face, but its beauty was an alien one; unearthly. For long moments the strange eyes thrust their gaze deep into his. Then out of the mist were thrust two slender white arms, the hands long, the fingers tapering. The tapering fingers touched his ears.

"He shall hear," whispered the red lips.

Immediately from all about him a cry arose; in it was the whispering and rustling of the leaves beneath the breath of the winds; the shrilling of the harpstrings of the boughs; the laughter of hidden brooks; the shoutings of waters flinging themselves down into deep and rocky pools—the voices of the forest made articulate.

"He shall hear!" they cried.

The long white fingers rested on his lips, and their touch was cool as bark of birch on cheek after some long upward climb through forest; cool and subtly sweet.

"He shall speak," whispered the scarlet lips of the wood woman.

"He shall speak!" answered the wood voices again, as though in litany.

"He shall see," whispered the woman, and the cool fingers touched his eyes.

"He shall see!" echoed the wood voices.

THE mists that had hidden the coppice from McKay wavered, thinned and were gone. In their place was a limpid, translucent, palely green *aether*, faintly luminous—as though he stood within some clear wan emerald. His feet pressed a golden moss spangled with tiny starry bluets. Fully revealed before him was the woman of the strange eyes and the face of unearthly beauty. He dwelt for a moment upon the slender shoulders, the firm, small, tip-tilted breasts, the willow litheness of her

body. From neck to knees a smock covered her, sheer and silken and delicate as spun cobwebs; through it her body gleamed as though fire of the young spring moon ran in her veins.

He looked beyond her. There upon the golden moss were other women like her, many of them; they stared at him with the same wide-set green eyes in which danced the sparkling moonbeam motes; like her they were crowned with glistening, pallidly golden hair; like hers, too, were their oval faces with the pointed chins and perilous alien beauty. Only where she stared at him gravely, measuring him, weighing him—there were those of these her sisters whose eyes were mocking; and those whose eyes called to him with a weirdly tingling allure, their mouths athirst; those whose eyes looked upon him with curiosity alone; those whose great eyes pleaded with him, prayed to him.

Within that pellucid, greenly luminous *aether* McKay was abruptly aware that the trees of the coppice still had a place. Only now they were spectral indeed. They were like white shadows cast athwart a glaucous screen; trunk and bough, twig and leaf they arose around him and they were as though etched in air by phantom craftsmen—thin and unsubstantial; they were ghost trees rooted in another space.

He was aware that there were men among the women; men whose eyes were set wide apart as were theirs, as strange and pupilless as were theirs, but with irises of brown and blue; men with pointed chins and oval faces, broad-shouldered and clad in kirtles of darkest green; swarthy-skinned men, muscular and strong, with that same lithe grace of the women—and like them of a beauty that was alien and elfin.

McKay heard a little wailing cry. He turned. Close beside him lay a girl clasped in the arms of one of the swarthy, green-clad men. She lay upon his breast. His eyes were filled with a black flame of wrath, and hers were misted, anguished. For an instant McKay had a glimpse of the birch that old Polleau's son had sent crashing down into the boughs of the fir. He saw birch and fir as immaterial outlines around this man and this girl. For an instant girl and man and birch and fir seemed to be one and the same.

The scarlet-lipped woman touched his shoulder.

"She withers," sighed the woman, and in her voice McKay heard a faint rustling as of mournful leaves. "Now is it not pitiful that she withers—our sister who was so young, so slender and so lovely?"

McKay looked again at the girl. The white skin seemed shrunken; the moon radiance that gleamed through the bodies of the others was still in hers but dim and pallid; her slim arms hung listlessly; her body drooped. Her mouth was wan and parched; her long and misted green eyes dull. The palely golden hair was lusterless, and dry. He looked on a slow death—a withering death.

"May the arm that struck her down wither!" said the green-clad man who held her, and in his voice McKay heard a savage strumming as of winter winds through bleak boughs: "May his heart wither and the sun blast him! May the rain and the waters deny him and the winds scourge him!"

"I thirst," whispered the girl.

There was a stirring among the watching women. One came forward holding a chalice that was like thin leaves turned to green crystal. She paused beside the trunk of one of the spectral trees, reached up and drew down to her a branch. A slim girl with half-frightened, half-resentful eyes glided to her side and threw her arms around the ghostly bole. The



"Sing, sisters," the girl cried shrilly. "Dance for me, sisters!"

woman cut the branch deep with what seemed an arrow-shaped flake of jade and held her chalice under it. From the cut a faintly opalescent liquid dripped into the cup. When it was filled the woman beside McKay stepped forward and pressed her own long hands around the bleeding branch. She stepped away and McKay saw that the stream had ceased to flow. She touched the trembling girl and unclasped her arms.

"It is healed," said the woman gently. "And it was your turn, little sister. The wound is healed. Soon you will have forgotten."

The woman with the chalice knelt and set it to the wan, dry lips of her who was—withering. She drank of it, thirstily, to the last drop. The misty eyes cleared; they sparkled; the lips that had been so parched and pale grew red, the white body gleamed as though the waning light within it had been fed with new.

"Sing, sisters," the girl cried, shrilly. "Dance for me, sisters!"

Again burst out that chant McKay had heard as he had floated through the mists upon the lake. Now, as then, despite his opened ears, he could distinguish no words, but clearly he understood its mingled themes—the joy of spring's awakening, rebirth, with green life streaming singing up through every bough, swelling the buds, burgeoning with tender leaves the branches; the dance of the trees in the scented winds of spring; the drums of the jubilant rain on leafy hoods; passion of summer sun pouring its golden flood down upon the trees; the moon passing with stately steps and slow, and green hands reaching up to her and drawing from her breast milk of silver fire; riot of wild gay winds with their mad pipings and strummings; soft interlacing of boughs; the kiss of amorous leaves—all these and more, much more that McKay could not understand since they dealt with hidden, secret things for which man has no images, were in that chanting.

And all these and more were in the rhythms of the dancing of those strange, green-eyed women and brown-skinned men; something in-

credibly ancient, yet young as the speeding moment; something of a world before and beyond man.

McKay listened; McKay watched, lost in wonder; his own world more than half forgotten.

The woman beside him touched his arm. She pointed to the girl.

"Yet she withers," she said. "And not all our life, if we poured it through her lips, could save her."

He saw that the red was draining slowly from the girl's lips; that the luminous life-tides were waning. The eyes that had been so bright were misting and growing dull once more. Suddenly a great pity and a great rage shook him. He knelt beside her, took her hands in his.

"Take them away! Take away your hands! They burn me!" she moaned.

"He tries to help you," whispered the green-clad man, gently. But he reached over and drew McKay's hands away.

"Not so can you help her or us," said the woman.

"What can I do?" McKay arose, looked helplessly from one to the other. "What can I do to help you?"

The chanting died, the dance stopped. A silence fell, and he felt upon him the eyes of all these strange people. They were tense—waiting. The woman took his hands. Their touch was cool and sent a strange sweetness sweeping through his veins.

"There are three men yonder," she said. "They hate us. Soon we shall all be as she is there—withering! They have sworn it, and as they have sworn so will they do. Unless——"

She paused. The moonbeam dancing motes in her eyes changed to tiny sparklings of red. They terrified him, those red sparklings.

"Three men?" In his clouded mind was dim memory of Polleau and his two strong sons. "Three men?" he repeated, stupidly. "But what are three men to you who are so many? What could three men do against those stalwart gallants of yours?"

"No," she shook her head. "No—there is nothing our—men—can do; nothing that we can do. Once, night and day, we were gay. Now we fear—night and day. They mean to destroy us. Our kin have warned us. And our kin can not help us. Those three are masters of blade and flame. Against blade and flame we are helpless."

"Blade and flame!" echoed the others. "Against blade and flame we are helpless."

"Surely will they destroy us," murmured the woman. "We shall wither—all of us. Like her there, or burn—unless——"

Suddenly she threw white arms around McKay's neck. She pressed her body close to him. Her scarlet mouth sought and found his lips and clung to them. Through all McKay's body ran swift, sweet flames, green fire of desire. His own arms went round her, crushed her to him.

"You shall not die!" he cried. "No—by God, you shall not!"

She drew back her head, looked deep into his eyes.

"They have sworn to destroy us," she said, "and soon. With blade and flame they will destroy us—those three—unless——"

"Unless?" he asked, fiercely.

"Unless you—slay them first!" she answered.

A cold shock ran through McKay, chilling the fires of his desire. He dropped his arm from around the woman; thrust her from him. For an instant she trembled before him.

"Slay!" he heard her whisper—and she was gone.

THE spectral trees wavered; their outlines thickened out of immateriality into substance. The green

translucence darkened. He had a swift vertiginous moment as though he swung between two worlds. He closed his eyes. The dizziness passed and he opened them, looked around him.

He stood on the lakeward skirts of the little coppice. There were no shadows flitting, no sign of white women nor of swarthy, green-clad men. His feet were on green moss. Gone was the soft golden carpet with its bluets. Birches and firs clustered solidly before him.

At his left was a sturdy fir in whose needled arms a broken birch tree lay withering. It was the birch that Polleau's son had so wantonly slashed down. For an instant he saw within the fir and birch the immaterial outlines of the green-clad man and the slim girl who withered! For that instant birch and fir and girl and man seemed one and the same. He stepped back, and his hands touched the smooth, cool bark of another birch that rose close at his right.

Upon his hands the touch of that bark was like—was like what? Curiously was it like the touch of the long slim hands of the woman of the scarlet lips!

McKay stood there, staring, wondering, like a man who has but half awakened from dream. And suddenly a little wind stirred the leaves of the rounded birch beside him. The leaves murmured, sighed. The wind grew stronger and the leaves whispered.

"Slay!" he heard them whisper—and again: "Slay! Help us! Slay!"

And the whisper was the voice of the woman of the scarlet lips!

Rage, swift and unreasoning, sprang up in McKay. He began to run up through the coppice, up to where he knew was the old lodge in which dwelt Polleau and his sons. And as he ran the wind blew stronger about him, and louder and louder grew the whispering of the trees.

"Slay!" they whispered. "Slay them! Save us! Slay!"

"I will slay! I will save you!" McKay, panting, hammer pulse beating in his ears, heard himself answering that ever more insistent command. And in his mind was but one desire—to clutch the throats of Polleau and his sons, to crack their necks. To stand by them then and watch them wither—wither like that slim girl in the arms of the green-clad man.

He came to the edge of the coppice and burst from it out into a flood of sunshine. For a hundred feet he ran, and then he was aware that the whispering command was stilled; that he heard no more that maddening rustling of wrathful leaves. A spell seemed to have been loosed from him; it was as though he had broken through some web of sorcery. McKay stopped, dropped upon the ground, buried his face in the grasses.

He lay there marshaling his thoughts into some order of sanity. What had he been about to do? To rush upon those three men who lived in the old lodge and—slay them! And for what? Because that unearthly, scarlet-lipped woman whose kisses he still could feel upon his mouth had bade him! Because the whispering trees of the little wood had maddened him with that same command!

For this he had been about to kill three men!

What were that woman and her sisters and the green-clad swarthy gallants of theirs? Illusions of some waking dream—phantoms born of the hypnosis of the swirling mists through which he had rowed and floated across the lake? Such things were not uncommon. McKay knew of those who by watching the shifting clouds could create and dwell for a time with wide-open eyes within some similar land of fantasy; knew

others who needed but to stare at smoothly falling water to set themselves within a world of waking dreams; there were those who could summon dreams by gazing into a ball of crystal, others who found dream-life in saucers of shining ink.

Might not the moving mists have laid those same fingers of hypnosis upon his own mind?—and his love for the trees, the sense of appeal that he had felt so long, his memory of the wanton slaughter of the slim birch have all combined to paint upon his drugged consciousness the fantasms he had beheld?

McKay arose to his feet, shakily enough. He looked back at the coppice. There was no wind now; the leaves were silent, motionless. Reason with himself as he might, something deep within him stubbornly asserted the reality of his experience. At any rate, he told himself, the little wood was far too beautiful to be despoiled.

THE old lodge was about a quarter of a mile away. A path led up to it through the ragged fields. McKay walked up the path, climbed rickety steps and paused, listening. He heard voices and knocked. The door was flung open and old Polleau stood there, peering at him through half-shut, suspicious eyes. One of the sons stood close behind him. They stared at McKay with grim, hostile faces.

He thought he heard a faint, far-off despairing whisper from the distant wood. And it was as though the pair in the doorway heard it too, for their gaze shifted from him to the coppice, and he saw hatred flicker swiftly across their grim faces. Their gaze swept back to him.

"What do you want?" demanded Polleau, curtly.

"I am a neighbor of yours, stopping at the inn——" began McKay, courteously.

"I know who you are," Polleau interrupted, bruskly, "but what is it that you want?"

"I find the air of this place good for me," McKay stifled a rising anger. "I am thinking of staying for a year or more until my health is fully recovered. I would like to buy some of your land and build me a lodge upon it."

"Yes, M'sieu?" There was acid politeness now in the old man's voice. "But is it permitted to ask why you do not remain at the inn? Its fare is excellent and you are well-liked there."

"I have desire to be alone," replied McKay. "I do not like people too close to me. I would have my own land, and sleep under my own roof."

"But why come to me?" asked Polleau. "There are many places upon the far side of the lake that you could secure. It is happy there, and this side is not happy, M'sieu. But tell me, what part of my land is it that you desire?"

"That little wood yonder," answered McKay, and pointed to the coppice.

"Ah! I thought so!" whispered Polleau, and between him and his son passed a look of somber understanding.

"That wood is not for sale, M'sieu," he said.

"I can afford to pay well for what I want," said McKay. "Name your price."

"It is not for sale," repeated Polleau, stolidly, "at any price."

"Oh, come," urged McKay, although his heart sank at the finality in that answer. "You have many acres and what is it but a few trees? I can afford to gratify my fancies. I will give you all the worth of your other land for it."

"You have asked what that place that you so desire is, and you have answered that it is but a few trees," said Polleau, slowly, and the tall son

behind him laughed, abruptly, maliciously. "But it is more than that, M'sieu—oh, much more than that. And you know it, else why should you pay such a price as you offer? Yes, you know it—since you know also that we are ready to destroy it, and you would save it. And who told you all that, M'sieu?" he snarled.

There was such malignance, such black hatred in the face thrust suddenly close to McKay's, eyes blazing, teeth bared by uplifted lip, that involuntarily he recoiled.

"Only a few trees!" snarled old Polleau. "Then who told him what we mean to do—eh, Pierre?"

Again the son laughed. And at that laughter McKay felt within him resurgence of his own blind hatred as he had fled through the whispering wood. He mastered himself, turned away; there was nothing he could do—now. Polleau halted him.

"M'sieu," he said, "enter. There is something I would tell you; something, too, I would show you."

He stood aside, bowing with a rough courtesy. McKay walked through the doorway. Polleau with his son followed him. He entered a large, dim room whose ceiling was spanned with smoke-blackened beams. From these beams hung onion strings and herbs and smoke-cured meats. On one side was a wide fireplace. Huddled beside it sat Polleau's other son. He glanced up as they entered and McKay saw that a bandage covered one side of his head, hiding his left eye. McKay recognized him as the one who had cut down the slim birch. The blow of the fir, he reflected with a certain satisfaction, had been no futile one.

Old Polleau strode over to that son.

"Look, M'sieu," he said, and lifted the bandage.

McKay saw, with a tremor of horror, a gaping blackened socket, red-rimmed and eyeless.

"Good God, Polleau!" he cried. "But this man needs medical attention. I know something of wounds. Let me go across the lake and bring back my kit. I will attend him."

Old Polleau shook his head, although his grim face for the first time softened. He drew the bandages back in place.

"It heals," he said. "We have some skill in such things. You saw what did it. You watched from your boat as the cursed tree struck him. The eye was crushed and lay upon his cheek. I cut it away. Now he heals. We do not need your aid, M'sieu."

"Yet he ought not have cut the birch," muttered McKay, more to himself than to be heard.

"Why not?" asked old Polleau, fiercely; "since it hated him."

McKay stared at him. What did this old peasant know? The words strengthened his deep stubborn conviction that what he had seen and heard in the coppice had been actuality—no dream. And still more did Polleau's next words strengthen that conviction.

"M'sieu," he said, "you come here as ambassador—of a sort. The wood has spoken to you. Well, as ambassador I shall speak to you. Four centuries my people have lived in this place. A century we have owned this land. M'sieu, in all those years there has been no moment that the trees have not hated us—nor we the trees.

"For all those hundred years there have been hatred and battle between us and the forest. My father, M'sieu, was crushed by a tree; my elder brother crippled by another. My father's father, woodsman that he was, was lost in the forest—he came back to us with mind gone, raving of wood-women who had bewitched and mocked him, luring him into swamp and fen and tangled thicket, tormenting him. In every generation the trees have taken their toll of us—

women as well as men—maiming or killing us."

"Accidents," interrupted McKay. "This is childish, Polleau. You can not blame the trees."

"In your heart you do not believe so," said Polleau. "Listen, the feud is an ancient one. Centuries ago it began when we were serfs, slaves of the nobles. To cook, to keep us warm in winter, they let us pick up the fagots, the dead branches and twigs that dropped from the trees. But if we cut down a tree to keep us warm, to keep our women and our children warm, yes, if we but tore down a branch—they hanged us, or threw us into dungeons to rot, or whipped us till our backs were red lattices.

"They had their broad fields, the nobles—but we must raise our food in the patches where the trees disdained to grow. And if they did thrust themselves into our poor patches, then, M'sieu, we must let them have their way—or be flogged, or be thrown into the dungeons, or be hanged.

"They pressed us in—the trees," the old man's voice grew sharp with fanatic hatred. "They stole our fields and they took the food from the mouths of our children; they dropped their fagots to us like dole to beggars; they tempted us to warmth when the cold struck to our bones—and they bore us as fruit a-swing at the end of the foresters' ropes if we yielded to their tempting.

"Yes, M'sieu—we died of cold that they might live! Our children died of hunger that their young might find root space! They despised us—the trees! We died that they might live—and we were men!

"Then, M'sieu, came the Revolution and the freedom. Ah, M'sieu, then we took our toll! Great logs roaring in the winter cold—no more huddling over the alms of fagots. Fields where the trees had been—no more starving of our children that theirs might live. Now the trees were the slaves and we the masters.

"And the trees knew, and they hated us!

"But blow for blow, a hundred of their lives for each life of ours—we have returned their hatred. With ax and torch we have fought them——

"The trees!" shrieked Polleau, suddenly, eyes blazing red rage, face writhing, foam at the corners of his mouth and gray hair clutched in rigid hands. "The cursed trees! Armies of the trees creeping—creeping—closer, ever closer—crushing us in! Stealing our fields as they did of old! Building their dungeon round us as they built of old the dungeons of stone! Creeping—creeping! Armies of trees! Legions of trees! The trees! The cursed trees!"

McKay listened, appalled. Here was crimson heart of hate. Madness! But what was at the root of it? Some deep inherited instinct, coming down from forefathers who had hated the forest as the symbol of their masters—forefathers whose tides of hatred had overflowed to the green life on which the nobles had laid their taboo, as one neglected child will hate the favorite on whom love and gifts are lavished? In such warped minds the crushing fall of a tree, the maiming sweep of a branch, might appear as deliberate; the natural growth of the forest seem the implacable advance of an enemy.

And yet—the blow of the fir as the cut birch fell *had* been deliberate! And there *had* been those women of the wood——!

"Patience," the standing son touched the old man's shoulder. "Patience! Soon we strike our blow."

Some of the frenzy died out of Polleau's face.

"Though we cut down a hundred," he whispered, "by the hundred they return! But one of us, when they strike—he does not return, no! They have numbers and they have—time.

We are now but three, and we have little time. They watch us as we go through the forest, alert to trip, to strike, to crush!

"But, M'sieu," he turned bloodshot eyes to McKay, "we strike our blow, even as Pierre has said. We strike at that coppice that you so desire. We strike there because it is the very heart of the forest. There the secret life of the forest runs at full tide. We know—and you know! Something that, destroyed, will take the heart out of the forest—will make it know us for its masters."

"The women!" The standing son's eyes glittered, malignantly. "I have seen the women there! The fair women with the shining skins who invite—and mock and vanish before hands can seize them."

"The fair women who peer into our windows in the night—and mock us!" muttered the eyeless son.

"They shall mock no more!" shouted old Polleau. "Soon they shall lie, dying! All of them—all of them! They die!"

He caught McKay by the shoulders shook him like a child.

"Go tell them that!" he shouted. "Say to them that this very day we destroy them. Say to them it is *we* who will laugh when winter comes and we watch their bodies blaze in this hearth of ours and warm us! Go —tell them that!"

He spun McKay around, pushed him to the door, opened it and flung him staggering down the steps. He heard the tall son laugh, the door close. Blind with rage he rushed up the steps and hurled himself against the door. Again the tall son laughed. McKay beat at the door with clenched fists, cursing. The three within paid no heed. Despair began to dull his rage. Could the trees help him—counsel him? He turned and walked slowly down the field path to the little wood.

SLOWLY and ever more slowly he went as he neared it. He had failed. He was a messenger bearing a warrant of death. The birches were motionless; their leaves hung listlessly. It was as though they knew he had failed. He paused at the edge of the coppice. He looked at his watch,



"He tripped and fell backward, McKay upon him."

noted with faint surprize that already it was high noon. Short shrift enough had the little wood. The work of destruction would not be long delayed.

McKay squared his shoulders and passed in between the trees. It was strangely silent in the coppice. And it was mournful. He had a sense of life brooding around him, withdrawn into itself; sorrowing. He passed through the silent, mournful wood until he reached the spot where the rounded, gleaming-barked tree stood close to the fir that held the withering birch. Still there was no sound, no movement. He laid his hands upon the cool bark of the rounded tree.

"Let me see again!" he whispered. "Let me hear! Speak to me!"

There was no answer. Again and again he called. The coppice was silent. He wandered through it, whispering, calling. The slim birches stood, passive, with limbs and leaves adroop like listless arms and hands of captive maids awaiting in dull wo the will of conquerors. The firs seemed to crouch like hopeless men with heads in hands. His heart ached to the wo that filled the little wood, this hopeless submission of the trees.

When, he wondered, would Polleau strike? He looked at his watch again; an hour had gone by. How long would Polleau wait? He dropped to the moss, back against a smooth bole.

And suddenly it seeemed to McKay that he was a madman—as mad as Polleau and his sons. Calmly, he went over the old peasant's indictment of the forest; recalled the face and eyes filled with fanatic hate. They were all mad. After all, the trees were—only trees. Polleau and his sons—so he reasoned—had transferred to them the bitter hatred their forefathers had felt for those old lords who had enslaved them; had laid upon them too all the bitterness of their own struggle to exist in this high forest land. When they struck at the trees, it was the ghosts of those forefathers striking at the nobles who had oppressed them; it was themselves striking against their own destiny. The trees were but symbols. It was the warped minds of Polleau and his sons that clothed them in false semblance of conscious life, blindly striving to wreak vengeance against the ancient masters and the destiny that had made their lives one hard and unceasing battle against nature. The nobles were long dead, destiny can be brought to grips by no man. But the trees were here and alive. Clothed in mirage, through them the driving lust for vengeance could be sated. So much for Polleau and his sons.

And he, McKay: was it not his own deep love and sympathy for the trees that similarly had clothed them in that false semblance of conscious life? Had he not built his own mirage? The trees did not really mourn, could not suffer, could not—know. It was his own sorrow that he had transferred to them; only his own sorrow, that he felt echoing back to him from them. The trees were—only trees.

Instantly, upon the heels of that thought, as though it were an answer, he was aware that the trunk against which he leaned was trembling; that the whole coppice was trembling; that all the little leaves were shaking, tremulously.

McKay, bewildered, leaped to his feet. Reason told him that it was the wind—yet there was no wind!

And as he stood there, a sighing arose as though a mournful breeze were blowing through the trees—and again there was no wind!

Louder grew the sighing and within it now faint wailings.

"They come! They come! Farewell, sisters! Sisters—farewell!"

Clearly he heard the mournful whispers.

McKay began to run through the trees to the trail that led out to the fields of the old lodge. And as he ran the wood darkened as though clear shadows gathered in it, as though vast unseen wings hovered over it. The trembling of the coppice increased; bough touched bough, clung to each other; and louder became the sorrowful crying: "Farewell, sister! Sister—farewell!"

McKay burst out into the open. Half-way between him and the lodge were Polleau and his sons. They saw him; they pointed and lifted mockingly to him their bright axes. He crouched, waiting for them to come close, all fine-spun theories gone, and rising within him that same rage which hours before had sent him out to slay.

So crouching, he heard from the forested hills a roaring clamor. From every quarter it came, wrathful, menacing; like the voices of legions of great trees bellowing through the horns of tempest. The clamor maddened McKay; fanned the flame of rage to white heat.

If the three men heard it, they gave no sign. They came on steadily, jeering at him, waving their blades. He ran to meet them.

"Go back!" he shouted. "Go back, Polleau! I warn you!"

"He warns us!" jeered Polleau. "He—Pierre, Jean—he warns us!"

The old peasant's arm shot out and his hand caught McKay's shoulder with a grip that pinched to the bone. The arm flexed and hurled him against the unmaimed son. The son caught him, twisted him about and whirled him headlong a dozen yards, crashing through the brush at the skirt of the wood.

McKay sprang to his feet howling like a wolf. The clamor of the forest had grown stronger.

"Kill!" it roared. "Kill!"

The unmaimed son had raised his ax. He brought it down upon the trunk of a birch, half splitting it with one blow. McKay heard a wail go up from the little wood. Before the ax could be withdrawn he had crashed a fist in the ax-wielder's face. The head of Polleau's son rocked back; he yelped, and before McKay could strike again had wrapped strong arms around him, crushing breath from him. McKay relaxed, went limp, and the son loosened his grip. Instantly McKay slipped out of it and struck again, springing aside to avoid the rib-breaking clasp. Polleau's son was quicker than he, the long arm caught him. But as the arms tightened there was the sound of sharp splintering and the birch into which the ax had bitten toppled. It struck the ground directly behind the wrestling men. Its branches seemed to reach out and clutch at the feet of Polleau's son.

He tripped and fell backward, McKay upon him. The shock of the fall broke his grip and again McKay writhed free. Again he was upon his feet, and again Polleau's strong son, quick as he, faced him. Twice McKay's blows found their mark beneath his heart before once more the long arms trapped him. But the grip was weaker; McKay felt that now their strength was equal.

Round and round they rocked, McKay straining to break away. They fell, and over they rolled and over, arms and legs locked, each striving to free a hand to grip the other's throat. Around them ran Polleau and the one-eyed son, shouting encouragement to Pierre, yet neither daring to strike at McKay lest the blow miss and be taken by the other.

And all that time McKay heard the little wood shouting. Gone from it now was all mournfulness, all passive resignation. The wood was alive and raging. He saw the trees shake and

bend as though torn by a tempest. Dimly he realized that the others could hear none of this, see none of it; as dimly wondered why this should be.

"Kill!" shouted the coppice—and ever over its tumult he was aware of the roar of the great forest.

"Kill! Kill!"

He saw two shadowy shapes—shadowy shapes of swarthy green-clad men, that pressed close to him as he rolled and fought.

"Kill!" they whispered. "Let his blood flow. Kill."

He tore a wrist free. Instantly he felt within his hand the hilt of a knife.

"Kill!" whispered the shadowy men.

"Kill!" shrieked the coppice.

"Kill!" roared the forest.

McKay's free arm swept up and plunged the knife into the throat of Polleau's son! He heard a choking sob; heard Polleau shriek; felt the hot blood spurt in face and over hand; smelt its salt and faintly acrid odor. The encircling arms dropped from him; he reeled to his feet.

As though the blood had been a bridge, the shadowy men leaped into materiality. One threw himself upon the man McKay had stabbed; the other hurled upon old Polleau. The maimed son turned and fled, howling with terror. A white woman sprang out from the shadow, threw herself at his feet, clutched them and brought him down. Another woman and another dropped upon him. The note of his shrieking changed from fear to agony; then died abruptly into silence.

And now McKay could see none of the trees, neither old Polleau nor his sons, for green-clad men and white women covered them!

He stood stupidly, staring at his red hands. The roar of the forest had changed to a deep triumphal chanting. The coppice was mad with joy. The trees had become thin phantoms etched in emerald translucent air as they had been when first the green sorcery had meshed him. And all around him wove and danced the slim, gleaming women of the wood.

They ringed him, their song bird-sweet and shrill; jubilant. Beyond them he saw gliding toward him the woman of the misty pillar whose kisses had poured the sweet green fire into his veins. Her arms were outstretched to him, her strange wide eyes were rapt on his, her white body gleamed with the moon radiance, her red lips were parted and smiling, a scarlet chalice filled with the promise of undreamed ecstasies. The dancing circle, chanting, broke to let her through.

Abruptly, a horror filled McKay. Not of this fair woman, not of her jubilant sisters—but of himself.

He had killed! And the wound the war had left in his soul, the wound he thought had healed, had opened.

He rushed through the broken circle, thrust the shining woman aside with his blood-stained hands and ran, weeping, toward the lake shore. The singing ceased. He heard little cries; tender, appealing little cries of pity; soft voices calling on him to stop, to return. Behind him was the sound of little racing feet, light as the fall of leaves upon the moss.

McKay ran on. The coppice lightened, the beach was before him. He heard the fair woman call him, felt the touch of her hand upon his shoulder. He did not heed her. He ran across the narrow strip of beach, thrust his boat out into the water and wading through the shallows threw himself into it.

He lay there for a moment, sobbing; then drew himself up and

caught at the oars. He looked back at the shore now a score of feet away. At the edge of the coppice stood the woman, staring at him with pitying, wise eyes. Behind her clustered the white faces of her sisters, the swarthy faces of the green-clad men.

"Come back!" the woman whispered, and held out to him slender arms.

McKay hesitated, his horror lessening in that clear, wise gaze. He half swung the boat around. But his eyes fell again upon his blood-stained hands and again the hysteria gripped him. One thought only was in his mind now—to get far away from where Polleau's son lay with his throat ripped open, to put the lake between him and that haunted shore. He dipped his oars deep, flung the boat forward. Once more the woman called to him and once again. He paid no heed. She threw out her arms in a gesture of passionate farewell. Then a mist dropped like a swift curtain between him and her and all the folk of the little wood.

McKay rowed on, desperately. After a while he slipped oars, and leaning over the boat's side he washed away the red on his hands and arms. His coat was torn and blood-stained; his shirt too. The latter he took off, wrapped it around the stone that was the boat's rude anchor and dropped it into the depths. His coat he dipped into the water, rubbing at the accusing marks. When he had lightened them all he could, he took up his oars.

His panic had gone from him. Upon its ebb came a rising tide of regret; clear before his eyes arose the vision of the shining woman, beckoning him, calling him . . . he swung the boat around to return. And instantly as he did so the mists between him and the farther shore thickened; around him they lightened as though they had withdrawn to make of themselves a barrier to him, and something deep within him whispered that it was too late.

He saw that he was close to the landing of the little inn. There was no one about; and none saw him as he fastened the skiff and slipped to his room. He locked the door, started to undress. Sudden sleep swept over him like a wave; drew him helplessly down into ocean depths of sleep.

A KNOCKING at his door awakened McKay, and the innkeeper's voice summoning him to dinner. Sleepily he answered, and as the old man's footsteps died away he roused himself. His eyes fell upon his coat, dry now, and the illy erased blood-stains splotching it. Puzzled, he stared at them for a moment—then full memory clicked back into place.

He walked to the window. It was dusk. A wind was blowing and the trees were singing, all the little leaves dancing; the forest hummed its cheerful vespers. Gone was all the unease, all the inarticulate trouble and the fear. The woods were tranquil and happy.

He sought the coppice through the gathering twilight. Its demoiselles were dancing lightly in the wind, leafy hoods dipping, leafy skirts a-blow. Beside them marched their green troubadours, carefree, waving their needled arms. Gay was the little wood, gay as when its beauty had first lured him to it.

McKay hid the stained coat shrewdly in his traveling trunk, bathed and put on a fresh outfit and sauntered down to dinner. He ate excellently. Wonder now and then crossed his mind that he felt no regret, no sorrow even for the man he had killed. Half he was inclined to believe it had all been only a dream—so little of any emotion did he feel. He had even ceased to think of what discovery might mean.

His mind was quiet; he heard the forest chanting to him that there was nothing he need fear; and when he sat for a time that night upon the balcony a peace that was half an ecstasy stole in upon him from the murmuring woods and enfolded him. Cradled by it he slept dreamlessly.

McKay did not go far from the inn that day. The little wood danced gaily and beckoned him, but he paid no heed. Something whispered to wait, to keep the lake between him and it until word came of what lay or had lain there. And the peace still was on him.

Only the old innkeeper seemed to grow uneasy as the hours went by. He went often to the landing, scanning the farther shore.

"It is strange," he said at last to McKay as the sun was dipping behind the summits. "Polleau was to see me here today. He never breaks his word, or if he could not come he would have sent one of his sons."

McKay nodded, carelessly.

"There is another thing I do not understand," went on the old man. "I have seen no smoke from the lodge all day. It is as though they were not there."

"Where could they be?" asked McKay indifferently.

"I do not know," the voice was more perturbed. "It all troubles me, M'sieu. Polleau is hard, yes; but he is my neighbor. Perhaps an accident——"

"They would let you know soon enough if there was anything wrong," McKay said.

"Perhaps, but——" the old man hesitated. "If he does not come tomorrow and again I see no smoke, I will go to him," he ended.

McKay felt a little shock run through him—tomorrow then he would know, definitely, what it was that had happened in the little wood.

"I would if I were you," he said. "I'd not wait too long, either."

"Will you go with me, M'sieu?" asked the old man.

"No!" whispered the warning voice within McKay. "No! Do not go!"

"Sorry," he said, aloud. "But I've some writing to do. If you should need me send back your man; I'll come."

And all that night he slept, again dreamlessly, while the crooning forest cradled him.

THE morning passed without sign from the opposite shore. An hour after noon he watched the old innkeeper and his man row across the lake. And suddenly McKay's composure was shaken, his serene certainty wavered. He unstrapped his field glasses and kept them on the pair until they had beached the boat and entered the coppice. His heart was beating uncomfortably, his hands felt hot and his lips dry. How long had they been in the wood? It must have been an hour! What were they doing there? What had they found? He looked at his watch, incredulously. Less than five minutes had passed.

Slowly the seconds ticked by. And it was all of an hour indeed before he saw them come out upon the shore and drag their boat into the water. McKay, throat curiously dry, deafening pulse within his ears, steadied himself; forced himself to stroll leisurely down to the landing.

"Everything all right?" he called as they were near. They did not answer; but as the skiff warped against the landing they looked up at him and on their faces were stamped horror and a great wonder.

"They are dead, M'sieu," whispered the innkeeper. "Polleau and his two sons—all dead!"

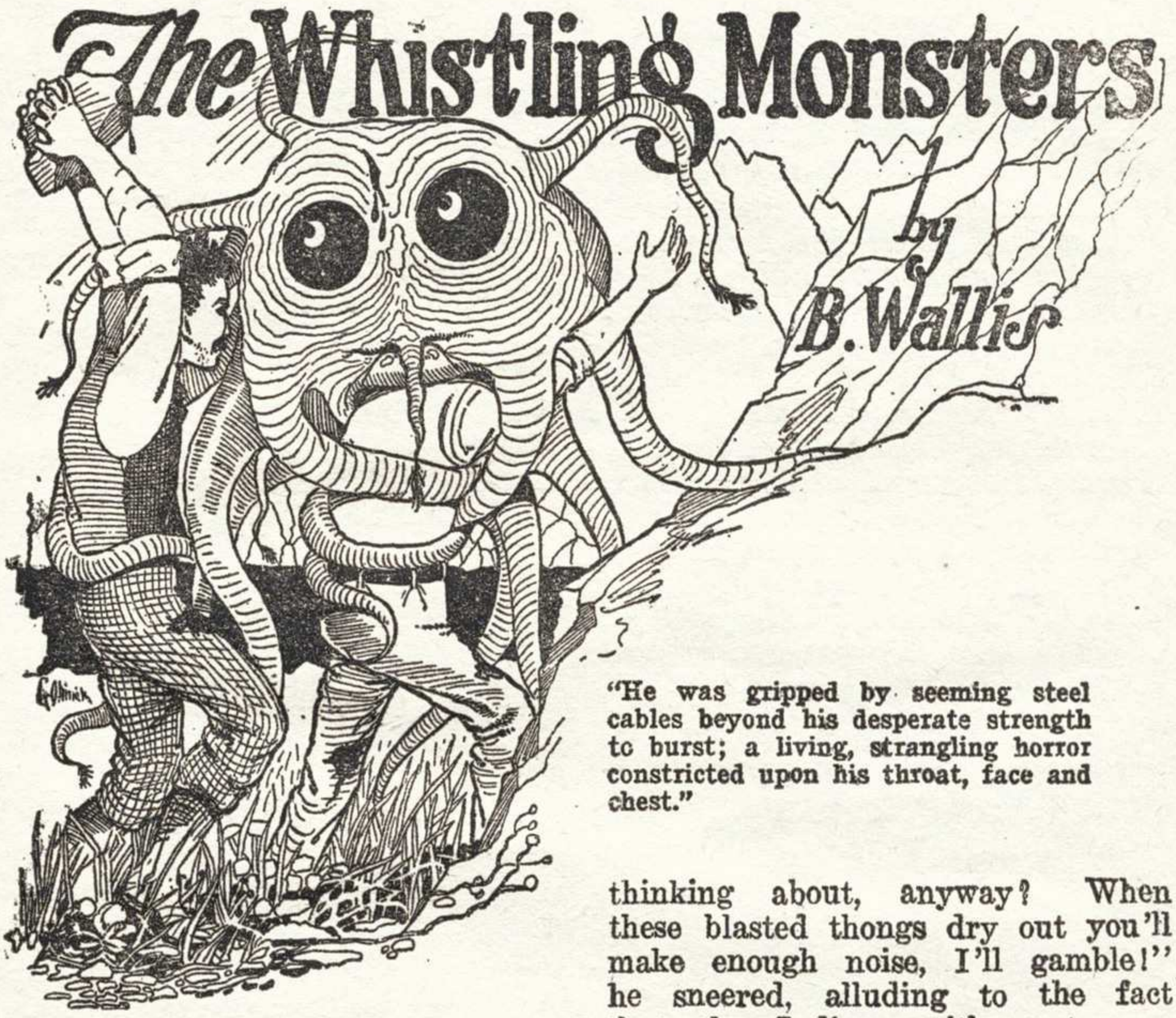
McKay's heart gave a great leap, a swift faintness took him.

"Dead!" he cried. "What killed them?"

(Continued on page 284)

The Whistling Monsters

by B. Wallis



"He was gripped by seeming steel cables beyond his desperate strength to burst; a living, strangling horror constricted upon his throat, face and chest."

DEEGAN groaned. He lay tightly trussed on the narrow strip of shingle beach that stretched from the placid, somber pool to the great cliff here thrusting its vast bulk across the chasm, which hereafter continued simply as a gloomy, narrow cleft riven possibly by some Cyclopean convulsion of bygone eons.

The man by his side made no response and continued to stare at the opposite wall with increasing intensity, as though oblivious to the tight-drawn rawhide thongs which bound them both. With a scowl of irritation, Deegan painfully twitched his grizzled head to one side and succeeded in catching a fleeting glimpse of Vance, his partner.

"Well, what are you so quiet about?" he snarled. "What are you thinking about, anyway? When these blasted thongs dry out you'll make enough noise, I'll gamble!" he sneered, alluding to the fact that the Indians with customary cruelty had soaked the lashings, previous to the trussing, so that their captives might taste the tortures of hell for many fearful hours before death released them. Indeed, now and again a slight twist of lip or quiver of muscle already indicated that the thongs were contracting, and no more than an hour had passed since the two men had been brutally flung on the sharp-edged rubble.

"Thinking about? Well, what would I be thinking about—grand opera or Einstein?" replied Vance with no effort to conceal the contempt which for some while had been simmering within him; in so many ways had his partner fallen short of the clean-cut standard the college-bred man held as the unquestionable creed of good fellowship.

"Reckoned you was sayin' your

prayers, or maybe worryin' over having no pajamas,'' sneered Deegan with ponderous sarcasm, inwardly assured that the young fellow was flushing with resentment.

Curiously these two had come together and joined fortunes in this wild crude country. Barely a month before, a few drinks in a garish saloon had afforded the only introduction the etiquette of the Guianas demanded. For six months Dick Vance had manfully wrestled with the appalling accounts of a certain branch bank to which the influence and indifference of a wealthy uncle had banished him when the crash following upon his father's sudden demise exposed the flimsy structure upon which the departed parent had built his reputation for probity and solidity. Straight from Harvard to this dreary slavery could have but one ending for such a spirited, athletic young fellow, and the inevitable happened. Moreover, Deegan required the five hundred which constituted Vance's sole legacy from a father who had often thrown away more than this upon a single night's entertainment. Had it not been Deegan, then certainly some other and possibly more unsavory adventurer would have pulled the trigger which shot Vance from his desk into the savage wilds of the interior.

From the first day's strenuous upstream paddling the partnership had proved far from amicable, close association discovering a diversity of habit and temperament neither could bridge. The college man of cleanly habits and sensitive breeding held no point of kindred amity with the grizzled illiterate partner who had doggedly held his own since early boyhood in bitter warfare with the roughest of his kind and the rawest of implacable nature.

In a hundred trifling daily details each jarred on the other and aroused his enmity, and indeed, had it not been that mutual welfare demanded the protection and aid of each other, their partnership would have been brief. However, this was impossible; possessed of strong wills, neither had the slightest intention of abandoning the search for the gold, of whose presence in the distant range Deegan affirmed he had reliable testimony. And it was this range for which they were heading when disaster overtook them. Therefore, though entirely against their liking, they held together.

To such a length had this intolerance of each other carried them that on every occasion when divergence of opinion was possible a set course was adopted only after a prolonged wrangle; and twenty-four hours back, on arriving at an outlying spur of their objective, they had decided to encamp and reconnoiter for a day or so. Even on such slight provocation they came into conflict, Vance preferring a space of almost clear and level ground backed by a bluff and affording unbroken observation on all other sides, a practical and commonsense suggestion Deegan would naturally have adopted had Vance not unfortunately voiced his approval. Immediately Deegan had proffered bitter opposition, and in such matters the weight of years and experience prevailed against youth and inexperience. And it came about that their camp lay close to a strip of dense jungle sweeping from the level ground far up a steep slope between two outflung ridges. As dawn broke the disaster occurred; rushed by the wild Amaripas—a little known and implacable savage people of the upper Guiana—the two men were quickly overpowered before they had time to snap a trigger.

Expecting at the best an instant and bloody ending, the captives were surprized to find themselves picked up quietly and borne shoulder-high by some half a dozen stalwart sav-

ages. An hour or so later they had been silently flung on the shingle beach, and after a hasty but very efficient tightening of the bonds their captors had departed with barely a dozen words spoken. And in truth Vance had noted that they appeared ill at ease and eyed the spot with alert glances of apprehension.

From where Vance lay, he failed to note any reason for the Indians' apparent dread of the place. True, it was wild and forbidding like all canyons, though lower down he had noticed many sections where the walls on each side receded and gave place to steep slopes of broken hillside running to the base of distant bluffs. But here at the journey's end the walls drew in and towered aloft in vast frowning heights, and the canyon terminated, or at any rate continued only at a higher level, for the shallow creek through which the two men had often splashed now fell from a great height into the wide black pool they lay beside. Certainly it was a wild, cheerless spot, and the walls were grimly black, and stained by weather and age, and dank with a pervading seepage from the surrounding hills; only coarse ferns and pendulous giant mosses clinging to clefts and niches to hint that life could still survive even in this grim sterility. Yet beyond the inborn antipathy of the human species to gloom and solitude Vance failed to note any reason for their marked distaste of the spot.

"Deegan, you're a blithering fool, and a blind one, too," asserted Vance dispassionately, and the deliberate insult of his tone pierced the tough armor of its target.

"You—you blasted pup!" was all the enraged Deegan could retort.

"Suppose we cut out this stuff," suggested Vance in a bored and weary tone. "I merely intended to draw your attention to the fact that the rubble across this pool is, I presume, a fair sample of the beach under us, and if you note closer to the wall the fragments are larger and, being higher up, not waterworn. Now it seems to me that possibly by a distressing effort we might reach this jagged stuff, and—well, perseverance and friction have been known to have a deteriorating effect on many substances," he added meditatively.

"Curse your highbrow junk! What in thunder are you——?" And then abruptly Deegan's wrathful growl subsided and a sudden surprize and fierce hope swept into his eyes.

"Huh! That's so—well, what of it? We ain't there," he said grudgingly, yet commencing to strain and contract his muscles in an effort to roll on his side and verify Vance's surmise.

About the same second both succeeded in facing the bluff. Hardly a dozen feet distant it towered upward for at least two hundred feet, and for the first fifty feet it presented a face almost as smooth as a vast sheet of plate glass, black, vitreous and sheer. Plainly an intrusive stratum of igneous origin, for across the pool also lay this forbidding face; while above and to each side of its thirty-foot width the enclosing bluff was badly shattered, a jumbled mass of deep fissures, broad ledges, and receding terraces where grew a matted miniature jungle of stunted shrubs, rank creepers and giant mosses fed by the seepage from many a mile of surrounding range and here coalescing into tiny rivulets that ceaselessly dripped as a transparent veil down the bare lowermost wall. Age, extreme age, was indelibly stamped on this somber chasm, and the grim walls were touched by vanished eons when the new-born world scarce had been released from the labors of its birth.

But for the two fettered men there lay but one absorbing problem—the dozen feet of sloping rubble which

stood between them and the more recent droppings of larger sharp-edged fragments which lined the base of the bluff. How could that space be traversed? For only by the most strenuous effort and a more than Spartan stoicism had the little matter of a mere turning where they lay been effected, already their drying rawhide fetters had drawn so taut.

Deegan was the first to break the silence. "I dunno," he said thoughtfully. "But I'll try." And for the first time in many days his voice had lost the jeering, overbearing note which had so angered his partner. "Say, Vance, are you game to help? It'll be hell, but we got to win, and I ain't sure I can stay with it alone." And as if the acknowledgment exposed a flaw in his manhood, his voice betrayed a shy hesitancy almost ludicrous in one of his self-reliant, assertive nature.

"Go ahead, Deegan, I'll do my best," said Vance simply. As before he had been the nearer to the pool, so now he was the farther from their goal, though barely by a pace.

"Well, it's this way. I got it doped out I'm going to roll up this blasted slope, but if I ain't got a stopper behind I'll roll back sure. If you could hitch around to grab my pants in your teeth I reckon between us we might make shift to wedge you T-shape agin' my middle and you'd act as a stopper for my next turn uphill. It'll hurt like hell, partner," Deegan added gravely and apologetically.

"What if it does? If you can stick it, that goes with me," Vance replied stubbornly, though not ill-naturedly.

And without further parley they commenced as frightful and gruelling a contest as ever was waged; for from the first moment it required indomitable will to endure the excruciating agony which racked every inch of their swollen, tortured flesh—a trial of endurance and fortitude in which neither of the contestants would admit a better man than himself, and each would rather have died of agony and exhaustion than suffer defeat.

Inch by inch they wormed their way across the sloping rubble, and with every inch some stiffening thong cut even more deeply in the sunken furrows where the flesh had burst and the thong vanished. Sweat and blood bathed them in mingled streams, clotted and dried as it welled through their garments, so that soon they caked and rasped the flesh beneath, wearing it into broad raw weals where the exposed nerves ceaselessly writhed in torment.

Life had resolved into a mere sensation—a frightful nightmare of pain—and an obsession which dominated it: the obsession that no torture hell could conjure would compel either to slacken for a single second and acknowledge himself the lesser man. Alone, or with a kindred spirit, then the thing would have been impossible—simple flesh and blood could never have endured it, and life itself would have been gladly surrendered to sink into the Nirvana of surcease.

How long the passage of that dozen feet encompassed they never knew. Time had ceased, swallowed up in the greater dimension of sensation, and alone was marked by the inches of the gory trail they had come. And at last they scaled that slope.

"Done, by heaven!" croaked Deegan raucously.

And Vance simply laughed a harsh, choking cachinnation more animal than human; then for a little both lay still and silent.

"Got to get moving—scrapes stiffen soon," muttered Deegan, and the thick utterance issued from his cracked lips as though dragged forth by rack or fire.

"I know—keep moving," mumbled Vance in response to some hazy train of reasoning. And at once his muscles responded to the suggestion and commenced to work and strain

against the hellish bite of his fetters.

A little fumbling and squirming and Deegan found a sharp-edged fragment firmly lodged, and successfully wedging himself in a position which brought his bound wrists in contact with it he commenced a ceaseless sawing movement that only his iron muscles and indomitable will could have sustained. Between his fettered wrists, where he essayed by this primitive tool to fray the thongs, the space would scarce have housed a knife-blade, and quickly the jagged stone had rasped the flesh from his wrists and hands as each slight motion backed by the weight of his bulk drove the rough edge deeper between them. But moment after moment, without pause, the clocklike pulsing of muscle held on, and ever his upturned rugged face was set as grim and passionless as the rock beneath him. Then suddenly Deegan rolled on his side and a deep groan broke from his blood-stained lips, and in the same breath there followed a whispered curse.

"Hell's curses on the scum!" he said with intense bitterness.

"You're free!" exclaimed Vance harshly.

"I got the use of my arms—but the blasted things seem made of red-hot stone," growled Deegan as he strove to recover their mobility. And in a little his arms, moving in curious mechanical jerks, obeyed his will. "I'm boss of you, anyway!" he muttered, savagely eyeing with morose vindictiveness the offending members. Then picking up a sharp-edged splinter of the black rock, he turned his efforts upon his legs, and shortly the last thong had been severed.

"Blast you!" he cried, and picking up a handful of the crimson-painted lengths he cast them savagely into the pool below; and scarcely had they alighted with a loud swish and a flutter of spray when a deep-noted, resonant whistle rang out, echoed from wall to wall and died away in a trembling whisper.

THE slightest movement now was for Vance unspeakable torture, yet with a single convulsive heave he turned on the instant to face the apparent source of that astounding sound, some twenty feet up the opposite dank bluff where at the lower end of the pool the black ledge gave place to the fissured, friable country rock. Deegan had jerked unsteadily to his feet and stood staring blankly across the pool.

"What in thunder was that?" he cried in a hushed voice as the echoes ceased.

"How should I know?" replied Vance in a hoarse whisper. "A whistle! But who would whistle here? And where is he?"

"But it *was* a whistle!" asserted Deegan irritably. "And it came from up there," he added, pointing to the spot both had instantly identified as its source. Yet it was plain that there no human being could have escaped immediate detection; for though the rock was badly fractured and fissured, and rank growths of giant mosses and broad-leaved creepers lay in dense covering, it was obvious that no cover existed for anything approaching the bulk of the human species.

As their gaze swept searchingly the grim and aged wall, that clear, shrill, single note was again repeated, but now in a higher key and rising to a penetrating clarity of volume at its abrupt cessation; and now it seemed located at the extreme limit of the canyon where a transverse rent gaped mistily through the veil of spray into which the little creek in its final leap had dissolved before reuniting in the somber pool.

"But what is it?" exclaimed the elder man in a hushed tone of great bewilderment as he leaned forward and peered frowning at the partly

opaque veil of saturated vapor through which loomed but mistily the fissure, thereafter passing behind an outflung buttress which seemed to conceal some slight recession of the wall at that spot.

"Say, Deegan, it might be as well to cut me loose," said Vance impatiently; for unable to view this fresh location his pangs with avid savagery renewed their torture.

"Sure! Anyway, the quicker we beat it the better. There's something mighty queer around here," replied Deegan as he straightway dropped to his knees and, selecting a sharp-edged splinter of rock, rolled his partner quickly, though not ungently, face downward and commenced to saw vigorously at the thongs about his wrists. For all his thick fingers and stiffened muscles he wrought so skilfully that he barely grazed the swollen flesh that almost hid the taut lashings. And as he worked, the astounding whistle several times burst out afresh in new and widely separated locations, yet never for a second did he relax his toil until the numbed arms fell apart and the agony of liquid fire coursed through Vance's quickened veins.

"Keep your arms moving, no matter how it hurts," counseled Deegan tersely as he turned to the other fetters, apparently oblivious of the increasing numbers and volume of the vibrant metallic chirpings, each succeeding its predecessor so rapidly that it seemed as though some signal was being transmitted from one to another of their unguessable sources.

Then the last thong had been severed and Vance was free; and though for the succeeding few moments his release afforded him no greater freedom of movement and his sufferings were no less, yet the clamor had abruptly increased so obviously that his gaze flitted in startled surprize from point to point, seeking some tangible source of the momentarily increasing din.

"Look there! I saw the brush move up there!" exclaimed Vance as he extended jerkily a stiff and swollen arm, pointing to a spot within the narrowed radius of vision from his prone position; here a wide V-shaped crack came to an apex almost at the canyon floor a little below the lower end of the pool, and so densely massed were the dwarfed rank growths therein that the least move amid it could not help but sway a wide area above.

"Yes, I get it! There's more above—must be a crowd, whatever it is," asserted the older man, staring intently at the spot which from his erect position he could discern much more extensively and distinctly. And the movement swaying the vegetation was at once perceptible to him.

Then Vance, who had not ceased his efforts to regain control of his limbs, succeeded in struggling to a sitting posture. Now another angle of the canyon was thrust upon him, and his field of view embraced their own side of the water. High up the towering wall where the grim igneous strata dipping at a sharp angle sank below the enclosing broken bluffs, a bold boss of weathered surface exposed its smooth nudity. Here a something, neither shrub nor creeper, had caught his eye.

"Deegan, what's that?" he cried in an urgent whisper, and his partner, wheeling sharply, glimpsed for a second the moving thing before it vanished with a soundless flowing swiftness.

"Like a snake," declared Deegan, pondering. "But it wasn't a snake," he added with conviction. And then just beside them a little fragment of stone hit with a harsh clatter and bounced to the rubble slope below, in a fraction of a second spanning the space they had blazed with their blood and an hour of frightful agony.

"What the devil now!" exclaimed Deegan as he jerked back his thick muscular neck and stared up at the black height above them.

At the same second they both saw it.

"Hullo!" cried Vance.

"Hell!" growled Deegan.

For a moment they gazed in wonder at the clear-cut crest, fully fifty feet above where the crumbling, riven rock had sloughed away and left a broad, sharp-edged shelf.

"Say, this gets on my nerves! We'd better get a move on; can you make it?" cried Deegan with anxious solicitude.

"In a fashion—once I get moving I guess I'll be all right," replied Vance doubtfully. And as they spoke both men remained staring intently at the queer, dull yellow blotch that lay balanced and motionless in unnatural poise partly overhanging the edge of the shelf.

This thing was unlike anything they had ever seen, or dreamt of. It seemed such an indescribable, structureless mass for a living creature to possess; yet no doubt of its living nature had lain upon them from the first glimpse. But what was it?

Unconsciously groping for some base of familiar similarity by which to mend their abruptly shattered certitude, they utterly failed to grasp a single point of resemblance to any form of terrestrial life within their knowledge. In some dim fashion there lay a suggestion of remote kinship to those lingerers of a long bygone age, the marine octopi, this thing having an indefinite number of long tapering tentacles and an oval central mass maintaining an erect posture, gourdlike in shape, and a sickly yellow hue which tinged every inch of its many folds and ridges. But here resemblance ceased, for the snaky limbs arose from a wide, thick membrane fully three feet in diameter, which radiated from the central protuberance, of which it was plainly an extension that dwindled to a mere parchment webbing between the repulsive tentacles at their base. Two smooth grisly lengths were drooping down the wall and obviously gripping tightly to some slight prominence, for their great sinews rose like steel cables far into the flaccid membrane. It was the nameless thing of a nightmare; so bizarre and inexplicable that for a moment the two men stared in blank amazement—stared until an undulating movement swayed the thick membrane and another tentacle came rapidly writhing down the smooth black rock, swinging gently from side to side, touching lightly and searchingly here and there until some feet below it had reached its full extension and there it remained tapping softly at the glassy surface as if seeking to discern a second point of hold. Then from the motionless mass above broke a deep, clear, metallic whistle; and as if the note conveyed some intelligible message the neighbor chorus that had somewhat diminished now burst out afresh from a score of varied points.

"There must be dozens of these uglies!" exclaimed Deegan in surprize.

"Here, Vance, I don't cotton to these freaks—what in tarnation they are beats me! Let's clear out of this—can you make it?" he queried uneasily as he stared frowning about the canyon.

"I'll do it somehow—this din seems to be getting closer. Give me a hand," said Vance in a low voice as he stiffly stretched out a swollen arm.

As Vance arose to unsteady balance by the aid of his partner's arm, a dark shadow swept above them across the rubble slope and drove with a loud splash into the pool and vanished amid the flying foam.

"What's that?" exclaimed the two startled men as with one voice, whip-

ping around to eye the agitated waters where rings of speeding ripples sped to the shore; yet nothing but these broke the somber expanse of water. Whatever had dropped had vanished. With unity of thought they wheeled around to stare again at the queer thing perched above—it too had vanished!

"Why, it must have been that brute leaping!" cried Vance.

"Beats me—never saw the mate of it!" asserted the older man as both once more turned to gaze at the still heaving waters. But the pool was no longer untenanted, for gently rising and falling with the slight ripples there floated the bulbous dome and yellow drapery of the queer thing they had wondered at. Now they could discern the monster in more detail, and it was quite clear that this bizarre structure was as interested in them as they were in it. The two large circular spots they had glimpsed were undeniable eyes which with unwinking stare observed their least move intently. Coal-black, glassy, oval, lidless, they yet contained that indefinable something that the intelligent eye alone has command of. And the seamed and wrinkled dome in which they were set vastly emphasized the impression that a cold, calculating entity was coolly scheming some malignant move. Too, they perceived that this creature was provided with formidable mandibles, dull white hornlike prongs which rested crossed just beneath the implacable eyes; sharp, curved and tapering, they looked capable of inflicting a terrible wound, though the puffed and puckering surface behind them appeared repulsively flaccid. All around this queer nodding dome floated the thick membrane from which long tentacles, half-submerged, sprang at close intervals. For a moment the men regarded this inexplicable thing in blank amazement.

"I don't like the cut of that thing—it ain't noway scared," said Deegan in a low voice. "It's giving us the once-over before starting something."

"Looks like it—by George, yes! It's on the move!" cried Vance, eyeing it uneasily. And with reason, for of a sudden the heavy, wide membrane had moved, contracted rearward, and apparently impelled by the rapid thrust the creature shot forward with the undulating ease and celerity of a fish. Again the movement was repeated, bringing it closer to the bank on which they stood, and it was coming with deadly earnestness straight for them. Yet the whole extraordinary creature was so obviously of such a flaccid, unstable texture that one could not view its approach with serious concern—and yet the brute was heading straight for them!

"Sheer off, you blasted abortion!" exclaimed Deegan somewhat contemptuously as he snatched up a couple of small rocks and sent them whizzing viciously at the nearing thing. Thud! the first stone had struck it between the great saucer eyes, appeared to sink deep into the conical creased surface, then fell aside with a distinct rebound as though impelled by something akin to the elasticity of rubber. The second missile flew skidding across the streaming membrane. Instantly its progress was arrested, and long, thin, snaky tentacles arose from the water and lashed with savage whippings, churning the vicinity into a miniature vortex of swirling foam.

Something in the sight seemed to quicken a dormant ferocity within them, and in a flash the two men were snatching at the rubble and raining stone after stone upon the wounded brute, insensate rage warming and limbering their powerful muscles. Though Vance was yet unsteady on his feet, at such short range the fusillade would have felled a steer; in a moment the flailing arms lashed but

feebly, then subsided to a mere convulsive twitching on the surface, though in such confusion of half-submerged tangled loops and knots that it was impossible to descry any particular effect of the bombardment. It had drifted close to the beach, yet neither man seemed eager to view more closely the mangled mass.

They stared for a little in silence, then Vance said slowly, "What's happened to its mates?" And for the first time it came to them that the weird whistling had ceased and not a whisper of sound echoed from the grim walls. Yet the silence was as the soundless vibrations of alert watching things saturating the air with the intensity of their desire.

"Hanged if I know," said Deegan; then with sudden decision: "I ain't stuck on this layout—let's beat it. Can you make it?" he queried. "Come on, I'll give you a hand till you limber up," he added impatiently as he caught the younger man by the elbow and pulled him, not ungently, in the direction they had come.

"One second—there's something I want," said Vance quietly as he freed himself and in a couple of rapid, unsteady strides reached the dripping black face of the forbidding ledge. Quickly snatching up a large jagged fragment he struck a few heavy blows where a wandering vein of rougher surface, though of similar hue, ran diagonally upward.

Looking closely, one might note that numerous similar thin streaks meandered across the wall. Something, two small fragments no larger than a pigeon's egg and curiously oval in their cleavage, dropped into his waiting hand. These he slipped into a hip pocket as he swung around and regained his open-eyed partner.

"What're you doing? I'll gamble there ain't a grain of yellow in the whole caboodle," cried Deegan, contemptuously impatient.

"Likely—but it's interesting," said Vance shortly; and Deegan, flicking upon the black wall a shrewd glance of disapproval that but confirmed the indifference with which he had from the first viewed its somber nakedness, again caught his partner by the arm, and straightway they hurried toward the neck-shaped outlet of the canyon.

THEY had gone but a few steps when the whistling broke out anew, with a clamor far exceeding its former volume. Every crack, fissure and niche appeared to add its vociferous quota to the harshly vibrant chorus. And each note was now louder, shriller, and more vehement, as if expelled by the stress of maddened craving and diabolic rage at the retreat of the two men. It needed no fine sensitiveness to grasp that these invisible things were utterly inimical and malignant.

"By God!" exclaimed Deegan, startled; "these things are watching us—they mean to rush us!" And in his tone lay no trace of its former contempt.

"Looks that way," assented Vance. "Hullo!" he cried, and the two men suddenly halted as first one, then quickly following it a second dark mass shot from the opposite cliff out of the broken face above the alien ledge. Broad blotches of shadow flung across the speckless fading blue roof of sky as they came with the planing swoop of a waterfowl clear over the pool and alighted with soft thuds on the beach at the water's edge—alighted on a fringe of drooping tentacles which for a foot from the outspread membrane were so rigidly tensed that they acted as a cushion for the landing.

Before the staring men could move a hand the strange things were on the move and coming straight for them with a rapid gliding motion, their tentacles in swift ever-changing

movement darting ahead in apparent confusion, while other writhing lengths in the rear with lightning change of rigidity held the bulk of the things above the ground. Each movement was so rapidly executed that no pause or hesitation could be discerned, and the result was an odious, undulating progress. Abruptly a sense of impending awful peril came upon the watching men, and snatching at the sole weapons remaining to them they shot a hail of jagged rubble crashing into the repulsive brutes. At such short range, no more than half a dozen paces, every shot struck with terrific force, and in an instant the loathsome things were halted and beaten to the ground, where with wildly lashing tentacles they savagely strove to combat the hail of biting missiles which were tearing and gashing deep pits and long ragged furrows, wounds exuding ghastly entrails and revolting yellow-tinted slime in abominable squirming tangles and hideous gushings.

Eviscerated, almost cut to ribbons, their tenacity of life was amazing, the great mutilated membranes throbbing and heaving incessantly while even the severed tentacles writhed and lashed out viciously. Yet it had been a simple matter to overcome these extraordinary brutes.

"Settled their hash quick enough, anyway!" cried Deegan exultantly. "But what are they?" he added, viewing the horrible welter with a puzzled scowl.

"I never even dreamt such things existed," said Vance; and the two men stepped forward a pace from their line of march alongside the face of the bluff, to view the remains more closely.

In that second it happened! Neither actually saw, though likely each sensed, the noiseless dropping of the deadly thing. Something clammy and soft, yet weighty, fell full upon Vance, covering his head and shoulders with a slimy, clingling darkness. No mere inert blotting out of vision, but a living, strangling horror constricting upon his throat, face and chest with an unrelenting pressure that every moment grew more deadly and agonizing. Around his arms and chest gripped seeming steel cables beyond his desperate strength to burst, holding him helpless while he suffocated in the black unknown.

For the first second or so he heard a faint shouting as if coming from an immense distance; then it ceased as the buzzing in his head grew to a roaring that engulfed every other sound. Only he knew that something caught him up and leapt far in one swift motion. Then he was prone on the rubble and jarred by a rain of racking blows. But ever that frightful embrace of death was closing in tighter and tighter upon him, invading ears, eyes, mouth, nostrils. His head was bursting with the clamor of blood-engorged veins, and stabs of awful pain swept flames of crimson through black nothingness.

Then suddenly the terrible pressure ceased and the horrible mask was torn away; blurred daylight drenched his eyes and his heaving lungs were rapturously gulping honest air, though through a viscous, filthy-tasting slime that lay around his lips and in his eyes. His face was being rubbed roughly, and in a moment he saw again the glorious sky and rocks and the rugged, anxious face of Deegan peering close to his and calling over and over, "Don't move, Vance! Don't move!"

Though still dazed, he recognized that he lay stretched close alongside the grim black bluff where a concave face almost roofed them. A pace or so away throbbed and writhed a fearful mangled thing of squirming tentacles and a great, flat mass with revolting, dragging entrails crawling from a gaping ragged wound that had slit the thing from rim to center.

At the sight a violent nausea came upon him.

"That's it, get rid of the poison! I had to cut the damned thing in two before it would loosen up," said Deegan with apologetic approval.

"It leapt on me?" queried Vance with a shiver as the sickness passed and his strength returned.

"Sure! And if another had jumped me we'd both be dead meat by now. Though they ain't too tough to carve," asserted his partner grimly. "But this ain't only the start, there's hell a-coming—half a dozen flopped into the pool while I was busy. They ain't doing nothing yet, just watching—going to rush us for sure," he growled, angrily nodding toward the water.

"Half a dozen!" exclaimed Vance hoarsely, as he leaned forward, and at the sight of the strange floating masses he involuntarily shrank back against the wall. There was no gainsaying his partner's estimate, for a space many yards in diameter was covered with the repulsive yellow membranes, each surmounted by the globular headlike excrescence, their great flat eyes turned intently upon the men. Silent and motionless they stared as if but awaiting some decisive second, though as Vance moved a slight stir pulsed through the entire mass.

"Yes, and by their music I reckon there's six hundred more to come. They're killers—a couple could strangle a buffalo," he added, eyeing the floating things appraisingly. "I tell you these ain't no garden bugs, and we got to get. Hullo! here's another bunch of the joy-birds," he cried in grim irony as fully a dozen of the brutes shot from the opposite cliff and in a planing dive dropped beside their fellows, where after the momentary commotion of their arrival they rested quietly.

"I don't figure what they're aiming at," said Deegan in a low voice. "But there's no mistaking they've got us in a tight corner—if we quit this for the open they'll jump us from above. Yet if they come for us we can't hold them off—not a bunch like that. Say, Vance, take a squint up the way, maybe there's a chance of pulling out that way. I'll watch—by God! Quick! They're on the move!" he cried excitedly, with a sudden tense note.

AS VANCE, with nausea vanished and pain-stiffened muscles abruptly supple, wheeled to scan the cliff, in that fraction of a second he glimpsed the ghastly welter of weird things awake to vigorous movement and come in a solid mass through a swath of foam straight for the beach at their feet. Noiseless, swift, and direct, there could be no doubt of their deadly intention.

Then came the whirr and hiss of heavy missiles as Deegan desperately sought to stay their advance for but a few fateful seconds. With eager searching eye Vance scanned the naked wall in which the canyon ended. In an instant he grasped the fact that the heights here were not entirely hopeless, for everywhere lay great seams, gaping cavities and projecting ledges, where the dying throes of some titanic convulsion had plucked asunder this vast chasm. Behind the veil of falling spray loomed the dark blur of a huge rent that swept upward from the quiet pool until a sharp turn of the canyon—obviously some shallow offshoot and cul-de-sac—hid its higher flight. Steep it certainly was, but not impassable; and so deep and high-roofed a fissure that one within need hardly stoop as he clambered. Still higher the bluffs were badly shattered and the whole cliff-face fell back in a series of vast irregular steps whose every rung would likely harbor a miniature plateau where a man could rest in perfect safety. Yet it was entirely a

gamble; ascent might become impossible at a score of points: but they were desperate men and instantly his mind was made up.

"Listen, Deegan!" he cried quickly. "It's just a bare chance—there's a crack behind the fall, big enough to stand in—goes away up, lots of foothold above—looks as if we might make it. What do you say? It's a chance!"

"Sure!" like a whip-crack came the voice of Deegan. "Quick! sling the dope—these blasted things are landing!" he gasped between the delivery of a storm of missiles.

"Hug the bluff to the end, then jump for the pool, clear through the fall—lower end of the crack this side. Say when!" cried Vance.

"All set! Go ahead!" And as he shouted he whirled around, and brushing the cliff-face, tore madly to the canyon end. And in that second the hidden swarming life of that dreadful place forsook concealment and came hurtling, from a score of gaping fissures and deep shelves, through the heavy stagnant air. Dark masses of inconceivable frightfulness of outline passed above the racing men and landed splashing in the pool, at its brink, or thudded horribly on the rubble beach. In a moment both the pool and the beach behind them were seething with a solid mass of hideous, writhing life; yet as if their trussed helpless prey had earlier drawn the things to an invisible migration, but an odd one or two dropped abreast of them, and the bulk were concentrated many paces in the rear, a mischance that they instantly sought to remedy. On they came in a crested rushing wave of lashing and fighting tentacles, striving to clamber and expedite advance upon one another's bodies. But now the two men were abreast the fall, and without a second's hesitation had wildly leapt across the rubble and hurled themselves clear through the liquid veil. Emerging from the green depths they had but to stretch forth a hand to grip the upward sloping shelf. A scramble, and both stood safe upon it, in the twilight of the space held void and dry by the roof above. To their relief the shelf proved wide and none too steep for ascent, though greasy with slime and oily weed. The thought of that frightful onrushing wave of malignant monsters spurred their muscles to the utmost limit.

"Watch yourself!" cried Deegan as he took the rise with an agility amazing in one of his years and bulk.

In a moment they had passed from the sheltering curtain and were clambering ever steeper heights. The rent narrowed as it swept upward and followed the turn of the shallow offshoot, and now they had to grip with hand and foot most precariously. Then some twenty feet above the summit of the odd intrusive stratum the passage dwindled to a mere thread utterly untenable. But luck was now as friendly an ally as before it had been obdurate, and not ten feet below lay a little plateau; a few feet of flat smooth rock, the first of the innumerable rungs in semblance of giant steps which reached to the distant summit.

Lithe and silent at once both men dropped, and breathing hard they stood side by side with fierce eyes minutely scanning the neighboring fantastic crags. In a hundred spots amid this chaos of riven, seamed, cluttered rock hideous death might lurk unseen and almost brushing them. That these horrible things could scale such heights was indisputable, and that very second they might be noiselessly clambering to them amid the jagged surrounding crags.

Motionless and tense the two men listened, but never a whisper broke the deathly silence; even the melancholy note of the fall was here by some acoustic freak unheard, and the

now invisible pit from which they had ascended might well never have existed for all the proof that came to them of its loathsome occupants. Those few tense moments of escape had seemingly obliterated the horror that preceded them. Yet in the suspense of dread waiting they experienced even more fully the peril of their position.

"Vance," said Deegan in a gruff whisper, "this cursed place has got my goat! We've got to get a move on or dark will be on us—and night here——"

"Dark! Night!" echoed Vance with a shiver of horror. "Not here—anything but that! You lead, you're a better man than I am here," he added simply.

"Come on!" said Deegan, swinging round and making inward, where a steep slide of huge fragments debouched to the little plateau.

As he moved, a dark, ragged mass hurtled above Vance, passed indeed so close that the wind of its descent stirred his wide-brimmed headgear, and struck something with a sickening squelch, and there was Deegan staggering and fighting desperately, tearing at long, sinuous tentacles that implacably gripped at the flailing arms and in a second had bound them with a score of grisly twining coils; while the thick raging voice was abruptly quenched and usurped by abominable inarticulate mumblings and inhuman whisperings. Vance gazed with benumbed horror at a headless trunk which swayed with grotesque stumbling and pointless motions. From feet to start of the massive chest it was Deegan; above, coil upon coil of rigid tentacle hid and held his arms immovable, and a great formless sprawling mass—yellow, oily, wrinkled—completely covered every inch above like a ghastly hood—a hood that with loathsome contractions and undulations was fitting itself as a mask into every contour of shoulders, throat and head.

Vance was no weakling, and never a drop of craven blood coursed through his veins, yet only the stimulus of desperation nerved his muscles to the deed as he hurled himself upon the frightful thing and with bare hands tore frantically at the tough, viscous cables. Not by a fraction of an inch could his fiercest efforts loose their steel embrace, but from the smooth and oily lengths his fingers slid impotently away. Indeed, so tremendous was their contractile strength that the coils were almost buried in the victim's body, and in many places the sole evidence of their existence were the swollen ridges on each side. Instantly Vance realized that the ghastly pressure of those frightful coils must have expelled the breath from Deegan's lungs even as the impervious hood was closing hermetically upon him. Assuredly this creature was the most horrible engine of death the world had yet engendered, it was appalling beyond imagination! And the horror of the thing reached its culmination in the utter soundlessness of the killing; coldly, implacably, noiselessly the brute was strangling its victim, and never a whisper of his death agony now pierced the deadly hood, only the jarring clash of rock and Deegan's iron-shod boots broke the shroud of silence which encompassed them.

There was no time to search for a weapon such as Deegan found to hand on the rubble below, around lay naught but clean-swept, unbroken surfaces; farther on, a rock slide debouched upon the little plateau where doubtless search would discover some crude weapon, but meanwhile the precious seconds spilled the sands of ebbing life.

Madness, a vast overwhelming volcanic rage swept upon him; with a hoarse scream of insane wrath and hate he leapt straight at his partner

and bore him crashing to the smooth floor, and without a second's pause thrust his face savagely into the heavy viscous folds where the hood had contracted in the depression below its victim's jaw. The lance-pointed, horny mandibles opened wide and snapped fiercely with a click as the brute writhed violently to meet this unexpected attack, but the strong jaws and teeth of the attacker were buried deep in the glutinous thing and held with bulldog grip; yet never a tentacle released its frightful grasp.

Worrying the thing like a starving wolf, by main force he tore loose a strip of the foul stuff, a strip which came away in long, clinging, ragged strands which stretched with rubber-like elasticity and parted recoiling to his face in sticky tenacity. In a flash his teeth had closed again deep in the gaping wound. For the moment he was an elemental caveman, born of ancestors barely emerged from inarticulate bestiality, who craved to tear his foe in shreds with the only weapons nature had given him. Now whipping tentacles assaulted him, strove with vicious might to enwrap him in their grasp, but the greater number still gripped tight their prey, and every second the strong white teeth were tearing, burrowing, rending silently deeper and deeper into the clammy slime and glutinous stringiness. Foul clots of greasy filth and gushes of heavy, stinking liquid filled his nostrils, eyes, and mouth. Yet the brain of the caveman was wide-awake, and a savage triumph pulsed through it as with terrific force he hurled assailant and victim crashing against the wall from which they had dropped, at the same second by a mighty heave twirling the living missile so that the full force of the impact was taken by the central globular mass. With a vile squelch the thing burst asunder into a dozen ragged segments, and a shower of warm greasy slime spattered his face and hung in clots and a drapery of adhesive, sluggish, dripping entrails. At once the binding tentacles lost their rigidity. In a flash he was tearing them apart, heedless of their savage death throes; one supreme effort and he had wrenched the thing from its anchorage, swung it on high and whirled it crashing many feet away, where with convulsive flailings it lay an indescribably hideous sight.

In terror he gazed at the silent figure of Deegan. The thought that after all death might be the victor and he be left solitary in that frightful wilderness was a thought too appalling to endure. It came to him that the rough, unlettered Deegan was indeed a tower of strength and security; and in that moment the scales of prejudice and petty class distinction dropped forever from his inner vision.

But as he bent to listen for the beat of that staunch heart Deegan's eyelids trembled, then slowly opened. In a flash Vance had loosed his partner's throat-band, and using his hat he fanned gusts of reviving air upon him. As the massive chest drank ever deeper of the craved elixir, soon life flamed up again unimpaired. Weakly he raised his head, and at once his gaze was rooted in horror on the mangled, palpitating thing that had so nearly wrought his destruction.

"That thing! It fell on me!" he muttered hoarsely. "That thing!" he repeated dully as though stupefied by horror.

"It strangled me—and I was helpless in that awful choking darkness. Oh my God!"

"I know—a nightmare of hell!" said Vance, and his voice shook. "But Deegan, we've got to get through right away—dark will be on us soon. That crowd down there will scent us for sure if we stay here—I reckon this brute was just an odd loafer hanging around. Anyway we can't

stop here," he urged impatiently, for Deegan, though evidently greatly recovered, still remained motionless, staring like one hypnotized by the squirming of the loathsome thing. Then suddenly he became aware that Vance was watching him.

"All right—give a man a chance to get his wind back," he growled sullenly. "But you're right—it is near sundown," he added, rising quickly to his feet with such obvious agitation that it was plain the mere thought of approaching night had aroused in him an almost frenzied terror.

"All right, this looks as good a chance as any other," said Vance shortly, and now his voice was cool and firm as he swung into the lead, while Deegan, closely following, did not notice the order of their going.

DEEGAN sat on the park bench stolidly smoking, just as he had sat for nearly two hours, and just as Vance had left him. That very morning, penniless and wofully dilapidated, they had landed in exotic Georgetown, and dumped two very efficient though unlovely rifles alongside their meager baggage in the stuffy compartment assigned them by the half-caste proprietor, who with a single shrewd glance apportioned to a day the tenure justified by such slender assets. Thereafter, unable to endure the fusty poverty of their apartment, they had gravitated to the trimly beautiful Botanical Gardens—at this hour virtually deserted—and here had entered into a desultory discussion of the ways and means of alleviating their indigency. Deegan, save for the labor of his hands, had no solution to offer; and Vance shortly sinking into an apathetic self-commune and betraying but the most ephemeral interest in the subject, naturally the discussion languished.

Abruptly Vance had risen and casually observed, "Say, Deegan, there's a man I know hangs out in this burg—I'm going to look him up. He may know of something—wait here for me." And then immediately he made off at a brisk pace, leaving his partner open-mouthed but uncomplaining to his solitary vigil.

That was nearly two hours back: and the great-thewed, rough-hewn Deegan, whose daily life for forgotten years had been an almost monotonous repetition of desperate risks lightly accepted and miraculously survived, became at once a hesitating, even timorous, intruder amid such alien environment. Visions of unguessable accidents, or fateful, youth-enticing allurements, assaulted his imagination more and more persistently as the moments sped.

Yet never a twinge of doubt had sobered him when with Vance, in the gray of dawn, like a living tornado the two men had burst upon the slumbering savages, yelling roaring curses as they laid about them with rough-fashioned clubs; in a twinkling they had swept their despoilers into a panic-stricken rout, never doubting but their assailants were the loosed diabolical spirits of defunct men thirsting to wreak vengeance upon the guilty; a rout that lost nothing of its frenzied haste when the crashing reports of two retrieved rifles added to the din and left the demoniac visitants with undisputed leisure to the salvaging of their pilfered packs. Then came toil-filled weeks of unavailing search for the yellow lucre, defeat, and the wearisome return.

"Hullo, Deegan! Longer than I reckoned," hailed a cheerful voice, and Deegan awoke from his gloomy revery. "About time we had some eats," added Vance with decision.

"Eat? Yes, we got to eat—I reckon there's nothing for it but to slough the guns; lucky if we raise ten bucks apiece—and I hate like hell to do it," was the grudging assent of the seated man.

"Guns? Not this trip. See here!"

And pausing, Vance lugged from his hip pocket a little wad of bills, and peeling off several, thrust them into his partner's thick fingers, saying: "A hundred apiece—that should keep us going till we pull out."

"Pull out? What you talking about?" said Deegan blankly as he stared in wonder at the notes.

"Well, here's the short of it—just a hunch, fool luck, you can't beat it! Likely you remember I pocketed some bits of rock from that queer ledge, also maybe you noticed now and again a chunk you fired into that awful bunch was heavy as lead?" queried Vance tersely.

"That's so, even then the heft of some of it worried me," said Deegan thoughtfully. "But just junk—not a color to a ton, I'll take my oath," he added with conviction.

"Right, there wasn't; but it lay in veins all over and black as the ledge itself—lying trussed, I was closer than you and couldn't help marking them, then somehow it got rubbed into me that some of the rubble had an odd shape—all curves and round lumps like small plums sticking out. Just now I've come from a man who used to do business with the bank I was in, got to be quite friendly with me. Likely you've heard of him, Cameron, mining expert and manager of the Arequipa mines. Took a chance on his being straight or throwing me out; well, he's a white man—'nough said. Just took a squint at the chips I dumped on the table, promptly shut the door and said: 'Young man, spit it out!'

"When I'd got it off he studied a while then observed quietly, 'I don't know if you two went crazy or had a nightmare, but I'm going to chance it. I'll stake you both, though I want you to get a hustle on, beat it back to that crazy canyon and stake the whole country. Your partner is wise to the outfit necessary—go to Ramon's, tell him to bill me. Leave those stones with me, too risky toting them around; and mind, not a drop of booze until the stakes are in. By the way, we go fifty-fifty—that suit you?'

"I nodded.

"'All right, see me before you leave,' he said. 'Good day.'

"'But what is it?' I asked, staggered by all this.

"'What is it! My suffering aunt! He asks what is it!' said he, glaring at me. 'Well, you young lucky ass, it's about the richest samples of pitchblende, the radium ore, I ever clapped eyes on; worth heaven only knows how much. Which reminds me likely you haven't got any too much now—here, I'll 'phone the bank to cash this.' And he was scrawling a check as he spoke.

"Before I knew what had happened he'd shooed me out. That's all there was to it. Now let's eat; we can chew the rag over a decent meal."

"Well, I reckon luck's your middle name, and even chances he's white—but you're the whitest guy I ever struck, which is aces high with me," said Deegan slowly. "Yes, we'll eat—and after that we'll raise the dust on the trail back to blow that nest of devil-spewings to the hell they came from," he added in fierce triumph, as, rising, the two adventurers swung off to town and hard-earned success.



The Tsantsa of Professor Von Rothapfel

by

Alanson Skinner



"I was startled by a touch on my arm, and turning, I beheld an armed Jivaro, naked, and hideous in his brilliant war-paint."

THE members of the Wanderer's Club leaned back from the table at the conclusion of the last speech, and soon the air was blue with tobacco smoke. Everyone was talking with the guest of the evening, a distinguished English explorer, fresh from the interior of Borneo, and full of tales of hair-breadth escapes among the head-hunting Dyaks. He was an intelligent and close observer, a *rara avis* indeed, as the anthropologist said afterward, who could give an accurate answer to the most searching question.

"I have been told," said the explorer, "that there are head-hunters of sorts in the South American wilds who disport themselves in the same jolly way that the Dyaks do—head-hunting, blow-guns, poisoned arrows and all that. Can any of you gentlemen tell me whether it is true or not?"

The anthropologist lit his corn-cob pipe with deliberation. "Yes," he answered, puffing a white cloud into the general mist, "to a certain extent that is correct. My traveling in South America has been limited—but I have had some experience with the head-hunters, and the blow-gun peoples, too. Ran across them in several places, in fact. But nothing anywhere like the Jivaros. When it comes to collecting human heads, they are the real Mackaye, and no mistake. Nearly got mine, too."

"Oh I say, old chap, spin the yarn for us, wont you? I'm a bit fed up with my own stuff, you know," pled the guest of the evening.

"All right, then," said the anthropologist, cocking his feet up on the table. "I'm game, though when I'm through, I don't expect even one of you to believe me.

"I had been knocking round the Talamanaca Valley that extends through the mountains of southern Costa Rica for a few months, collecting specimens from the Bri-bri Indians and some of the other tribes of that region, and was just about heartily sick of my own company and the tropics, and ready to head for the North again, when I received a letter of instructions. I had a powerful hunch that they would be disagreeable, and I was right. The letter was an order from headquarters to pull out for Panama, across the Isthmus, and take the first ship that was not in too great a hurry to stop at every little dinky port, for Ecuador. There I was to proceed eastward to

the province of Oriente where I was to visit the wild Jivaros, and to stay with them long enough to make a close study of their life and customs, with special orders to learn how they prepared their famous war-trophies—human heads, which they take "on the hoof," so to speak, and then shrink by some secret process to less than the size of a man's fist, and yet succeed in retaining the features in recognizable form. *Tsantsas*, they call them in their own tongue.

"Well, I wont bother you with details as to how I slipped out of Central America and down the coast until I reached Ecuador. Every trip along the coast of South America in a sailing ship is about the same. Anyway, I got there in due course, and then made my way overland without much trouble to Oriente, where the Jivaros make their home. This province lies on the eastern or Atlantic side of the high Andean peaks, where the Amazon takes its rise, and the Jivaros live in the virgin forest of the headwaters of the rivers Pastaza, Morona, Upano-Santiago, and their tributaries. They are one of the most numerous tribes (or rather group of tribes, for there are no less than nine separate divisions of them) in all South America. They are supposed to number between fifteen and twenty thousand souls, and are the most warlike people on the continent. Not only are they continually fighting among themselves, but they are dangerous to outsiders. Way back in 1599 they rose against the Spaniards who had settled in their territory and virtually exterminated them, and since that time the governments of Ecuador and Peru, in whose territories the Jivaros are found, have found it best to leave them pretty much alone.

"It didn't take me long to get in touch with the Indians. I started in by stopping for a time with one of the white traders settled near their boundaries. There I tried to hire some of the Indians who came out to trade to take me in to their interior villages. This they readily agreed to do; but good Lord! how worried the white natives were when they found out what I was up to! They begged me, in the name of the Mother of God and at least one hundred and seven saints not to go, saying with one voice: *'Que barbaridad, Señor! Los Jivaros son diablos todos, y por seguro le sacaran la cabeza!'* To which I replied piously, 'As God wills, friends,' and went.

"Of course, I did not go wholly unprepared for stormy weather. I did not, it is true, take my rifle with any intention or expectation of using it on the Jivaros. As a matter of fact, up to that time I had always found that it was a great protection to any man to go among 'savages' unarmed for defense; that, in a way, put them on their honor, and honor is a thing that they value more highly than many of us, I am afraid. However, this time I took an old pet of mine, a 45-90 Winchester that I am attached to in spite of its weight, because it has the great virtue of holding true and knocking down whatever it hits. It's not such a sweet shooting gun as some of the lesser calibers, but its smashing power is tremendous, and I fancied that there might be jaguars and pumas where I was going.

"My only real precaution will make you smile. I had never seen any Jivaros before, but I did know other Indians, and so I shaved my scalp as bald as an onion, and kept it so. You see, the northern Indians, who took scalps, were not interested in short-haired enemies who yielded no trophies when slain. I have personally heard old-time Sioux warriors complain about the lack of sportsmanship on the part of the Great White Father at Washington for sending out negro troops against them. 'Buffalo Soldiers' they contemptuously called

them, because of their color and their woolly heads, and added that they were *'lila sicha'* or very much no good, because their scalps were not worth taking, after they, the Sioux, had gone to all the trouble of killing them. A bald-headed man would make a poor trophy for a Jivaro, thought I. But at that time I did not realize that some of the Jivaro warriors were real connoisseurs in heads, and that my shining pate was really a great temptation.

"Well, I made the interior villages all right, and at first got along beautifully. The Jivaros don't live in villages like the other South American Indians of my acquaintance, but in great houses, occupied by several closely related families, built on the summit of a high hill or in an easily defended bend of some river, where the inhabitants are always hidden from anyone passing along the main lines of travel.

"They sow the surrounding jungle with a horrid lot of man-traps, sharp stakes in the bottom of pits, and spring-poles that they set in trails, where an unwary marauder may set off a bent sapling by tripping over a vine, and the sapling springs back and drives a set of long jagged palm-wood spikes through his vitals!

"When I was there things seemed peaceful enough for the time being. The Jivaros were not in the least agricultural, and lived by hunting, in which I often joined them. They had their long bows and arrows, and also the blow-guns which we were just talking about. The blow-gun is usually an eight or ten foot hollow tube, made of cane or some pithy wood which they split. The core is removed, and then the tube is carefully glued together again. Through this glorified putty-blower tiny darts were propelled with force, by means of the breath alone. All things considered, the distance and accuracy with which these darts could be driven was unbelievable for anyone who has never seen it done by an expert. And let me tell you, every Jivaro male from twelve years up is an expert. The wounds inflicted by the tiny arrows would be insignificant but for the fact that the Jivaros have the unpleasant custom of dipping their tips in *curare*—a blackish, resinous extract of *Strychnos toxifera*, a plant that flourishes in those parts, the juice of which, as prepared by the Indians, is one of the quickest and most deadly poisons known to science. But it is deadly only when taken through the skin, as in a wound, when it paralyzes the motor nerves and kills through suffocation. It is perfectly possible to eat the flesh of, say, a monkey shot by a poisoned dart, as I well know, through experience. The Jivaros say that salt taken immediately is an antidote; and when they wish to save a monkey alive they hasten to put salt in its mouth. Otherwise the animal dies in two or three minutes. A man may last for five. But, strange as it may seem, the Jivaros absolutely refuse to use the blow-gun and its poisoned darts for war. Maybe there is some religious taboo about it, or maybe they think it's not quite sporting. Anyway, what they really love to use in fighting is a spear with a big, ugly, keen steel head, that will disembowel a man like a stroke of lightning. No Jivaro warrior feels dressed up without one, and the small round shield of wood or tapir hide that is carried to parry thrusts with.

"I found the natives to be a fine, handsome, clear-eyed people, and, like most of the genuine warrior tribes that I have had the fortune to be thrown in with, frank and open to their friends, and affable at all times. On the other hand, they were treacherous and underhanded in their dealings with their enemies. Neither sex was over-burdened with clothing ex-

cept on ceremonial occasions, the ordinary business suit for a man being a breech-cloth of beaten bark and a few feathers and beads, while the women covered themselves more thoroughly with a coarse woven cotton robe. This habit of going about unhampered by dress was largely responsible for the easy grace of their movements. Their limbs were beautifully proportioned.

"In Jivaria, as the country of the Jivaros is called, a man's social standing is determined by the size of his family, and so every girl of marriageable age (and in the tropics that time is reached very early) is greatly sought after. Of course the old warriors, with their prestige and collections of shrunken heads, are the ones who are regarded as the best catches, and they manage to snap up all the young girls of the home village, at least, and that would leave the younger men disconsolate, if it were not for the custom which prevails there of 'Let him take who has the power, and let him keep who can.' In other words, a young lover can do better by going out and killing the husband of the girl of his choice, annexing the girl, and, incidentally, the other supernumerary wives of the dead man, and of course, taking home his enemy's head for addition to his collection of souvenirs. Certainly, one does not steal sheep at home, so the young aspirant always goes to some other encampment, or invades the territory of some other tribe to commit his depredations. In spite of all this, or, maybe, because of it, the Jivaros are exceedingly jealous of their wives, and I might repeat here an axiom which all of you probably know, but which can not be too prominently borne in mind away from home, among all native peoples, all over the world, 'If you want to live long and eventually die in bed, *leave the women alone.*'

"Well, I hung around and made notes for a good half-year. I managed to get into the confidence of the chiefs and the priests, and was hail-fellow-well-met with the warriors. My experience with the North American tribes stood me in good stead, except that I finally forgot, in my enthusiasm, that in North America we deal with Indians of a very high mental type, barbarians as distinguished from savages. These Jivaros were several steps lower in the social scale —real savages, who, when it came to a show-down, didn't care much whose heads they took, nor how.

"Things went along, as I have said, with a good degree of progress until I was reasonably well informed on everything connected with Jivaro life save the very thing that I had come down to study, the mysterious preparation of those shrunken heads. There was some sort of sacred mystery connected with that process, something that our Northern Indians would call 'Medicine.' Though several raids were made, and heads taken while I was in Jivaria, up to date I had been politely but firmly 'shooed' away from the secret spot of preparation by armed Jivaro fighting men.

"ONE day, as I was preparing to take my regular daily dose of quinine to mitigate my regular daily dose of malarial fever, I heard a considerable commotion at the edge of the settlement, and strolling over to the spot, I was astonished to see a small cavalcade of mules, the leading one topped by a white man, enter the clearing. To make a long story short, the newcomer was no less a person than the renowned German Professor Herr Doktor Ludwig Von Rothapfel, curator of anthropology at the Berlin Museum, personal friend of the Kaiser—oh yes, this was before the war—equal in social rank to a Prussian general, and what not. He did tell me all about it, it is true, within the first five minutes, but I

was so much more interested in the elaborate equipment he was carrying —servants, arsenal, bathtub, and the good Lord knows what else—that I didn't pay all the attention that I should have to his pompous recital. All that got to me at the time was that the mystery of the shrunken heads was about to be solved for the glory of the Kaiser, Germany, science, Herr Professor Doktor Von Rothapfel, and Gott, and I was a bit peeved.

"However, the burly old squarehead was not such a bad scout to those whom he considered his equals; and, as he had read a little squib of mine concerning the life of the polar Eskimos, we got along famously. He was pleased to call me his colleague, and I offered him the hospitality of my palm-thatched shack, where I lived with a couple of wild bachelor Jivaros. But he much preferred to have a large hut built with state near the group of Jivaro house-forts—it was a mistake to build it so much bigger and better than the chief's lodge though—and there he dwelt in some magnificence, attended by quite a retinue of servants. One of them, I remember, was a German, held some rank in the old country corresponding to a sergeant in our army, I guess, and he was supplied with all manner of luxuries, such as wine.

"His methods of dealing with the natives were very different from mine. Even the chief, who was a pretty sensible and a brave fellow, he regarded as a specimen, or a sort of an insect, and he treated all the rest like so many dogs and didn't hesitate to cuff 'em or kick 'em around when he was feeling a bit off. Of course he treated his own servants, the German and all, in the same way, but then, they *were* servants, and they were paid to endure it. The Jivaros were wild men and savages, it is true, but they were free, and I scented trouble.

"'Dot iss der trouble mit you American anthropologists,' said the Herr Doktor to me when I mildly suggested other means. 'You always go to gread extremes to protect der feelings of der inferior peobles, when they are nodding bud somewhat higher exambles of der lower animals. Bah, feelings such as animade der being of der civilized man dey haf nod, und id iss by eggspressing my superiority dot I shall in time der segret brocess obtain, which you have so signally failed to get by democradic methods.'

"Well, as time rocked on it certainly did seem as if his means were at least as efficacious as mine. He bullied his way into ceremonies which it had taken me long weeks of persuasion to edge into by favor of the Indians, and he did it in a few hours. It is true that the warriors did not throng his camp of an evening as they had thronged mine—up to the time that the Herr Professor had put a damper on the cordiality of all our relations with the little Red Brothers—but still he seemed to be making out famously. And then he 'spilled the beans'.

"'Mine freund!' said Herr Professor Doktor Von Rothapfel to me one evening, 'der Bible have said dot id iss nod good for man to lif alone, so I haf daken unto mineself eine wife.'

"Naturally I supposed that he had arranged a satisfactory union with some wealthy German lady in the old country—a duchess, or something of the kind, whatever would be considered suitable for his exalted station by his superior officers at the Museum in Berlin, or whoever regulated that part of his existence. I started to say something intended to be polite, but the Herr Professor stopped me with a wave of his hand.

'Ach nein, mine freund! Id is nod as serious as you suppose. Id iss nodding bud what der French call a '*mariage de convenance*,' eh? How

do you like dot French accent? I haf taken dot leedle *mädchen* dot iss de youngest wife of der chief, yes? You vill remember, der preddy one mid der large dark eyes?'

"You could have knocked me over with a feather. 'Hell's bells, man!' I managed to blurt out, 'I wouldn't be in your shoes for all the gold in the Andes! Start a collection of pet corral-snakes if you must, but for the love of heaven, *let the women alone!*'

"Herr Professor Doktor Von Rothapfel laughed, and said: 'Ven in Rome do as der Romans do,' and let it go at that. Me, I started back for my hut, called Casimiro and Innocente, my pet Jivaros, and began to pack up my specimens. I can manage to see through a knothole when my eye is jammed up against it. But, even when I was packed up, there were insurmountable difficulties about getting away. I had to send back to the nearest trading post to get mules to transport the boxes and what not, to meet me at the end of canoe navigation, so the upshot of it all was that several days elapsed, and nothing happened. Probably the main reason was that the chief was off on a man-hunt at the time when the Herr Professor helped himself to the girl, and, when it came down to brass tacks, it was the chief's business, and no one's else.

"'You will see dot ven he does come back, he vill noddings do,' said the Herr Professor to me. 'Und, moreofer, if der chief so much as lifts der hand, Hans, mine orderly, hass orders to shood him on der spot, und shood to kill.'

"THAT afternoon passed without remark or happening, except that, as I was returning from a tramp down the river, I saw a Jivaro standing on the trail. I knew the man, and was surprized, because I thought he had gone on the raiding party with the chief. I wanted to talk to him about it, and started toward him, when a movement in the brush caught my eye, and when I looked back, the man had vanished.

"Toward evening, however, just as I had finished my after-supper pipe, a shadow glided out of the jungle and stood before me. It was the warrior that I had seen in the jungle that afternoon, and now he was fully equipped with war-paint, shield, and lance. He stood still a minute, and then spoke to me in the curious pidgin Spanish, which is peculiar, so far as I know, to the Jivaros, who use the participial forms of the verbs, and make an ordinary conversation sound like a Sunday school recitation in singsong. He said something like this:

"*'Capitan Americano—mi jefe Indio volviendo—cabezas sacando—mujeres teniendo—aqui estando—usted deseando—el ceremonio de las tsantsas mirando!'*

"All of which you might translate as follows: 'American captain—my Indian chief returning—heads taking—women having—here being—you desiring—the ceremony of the shrunken heads seeing!' Which I took to be an invitation to see the rite of the head-shrinking. It was the big moment which I had so long sought! Did I go? Would a duck swim? Caution went to the winds right there and then. I didn't even stop to take my rifle. As a matter of fact, it was well for me that I didn't. All that I could think of was the chagrin that the old beast of a Herr Professor was going to feel when he heard that I had beaten him to it, and by the means which he had so despised.

"Outside my hut were lounging several particularly ferocious-looking Jivaros, armed with trade muskets, spears, and wicked-looking machetes—yes, every darned one of those machetes was made here in Connecticut, a famous brand of elongated butcher's cleaver that everybody, white, red or black, carries in the

tropics, to hew away the lianas and bushes when traveling in the jungles. The warriors grinned sweetly at me, picked up their weapons, closed in about me, and we jogged off into the underbrush.

"It was quite a distance to the place where the returning war-party had camped to prepare the heads, according to custom, and, though we kept up a swift dog-trot for the entire distance, it was nearly dark when we entered the clearing where they had their fire burning. But you can imagine how dumfounded and disgusted I was when I glanced about the company and saw Herr Professor Doktor Von Rothapfel seated with great pomp and circumstance on a large rock in the center of them all, with no less a person than the Jivaro chief squatting at his feet. Evidently Prussian force was still running neck and neck with American tact.

"Well, gentlemen, I won't bore you with the details of the ceremony, with its long-drawn-out dances and songs of victory. Nor yet with much account of the preparation of the three captured heads, since that has all burst out into print long since. Suffice it to say that a cut is made in each head through the scalp from the crown downward, and then the scalp and the skin of the face are carefully flayed from the skull, and immersed in boiling water, while the skull itself is thrown away. The skin and the flesh of the face and head which adheres to it are dipped in the juice of the huito fruit, which stains them black, and probably serves as a preservative. The shrinking is mainly accomplished by first inserting hot stones, and then hot sand, after which the trophy is slowly turned with the hands, until the sand has come in contact with every part of the inner surface of the head. This is a performance that is kept up for days, sometimes weeks, and is kept up by the warriors taking turns, as they tire. Meantime the features are carefully molded with the hands to retain their shape. At length the ghastly object has been reduced in size to a bulk no greater than your fist. Then small wooden pins are passed through its lips, and cotton cords wound around them, so that the lips of the slain warrior are sealed, and he may not curse his captors. Curiously enough, after the ceremonies are over, the Jivaro warrior is free to dispose of the head as he will, and so many have been taken out and sold, and the demand for them among traders to sell to tourists is so great, that both Ecuador and Peru have passed laws against the practise. But who is going to enforce these laws among the Jivaros?

"Day after day we watched the ceremony of the shrinking, and learned the weird ritual of songs, prayers, and mystic formulæ used to pacify the ghosts of the slain. And all this time we were virtually prisoners, the Herr Professor and I, for at our sides stalked armed Jivaros, who watched us as a jaguar watches a deer, so that escape or resistance were alike hopeless. But, if we were guarded, we were well treated, so far. Still, although the Herr Professor laughed heartily, and said that the Jivaros dared not injure us, and ascribed the close scrutiny of our Jivaro guards to their fear that we might violate the canons of Jivaro propriety by visiting the great house and talking to the people at large during the ceremony, something that the Indians themselves dared not do, I felt mighty uneasy. I couldn't forget the chief's young wife whom the Herr Professor had so callously appropriated.

"It was with some relief that I received the chief in my shelter one afternoon, and learned that the ceremony would end that night. My hut was apart from the Herr Professor's, and though the chief fre-

quently visited me, he apparently never dropped in on the big German. Tonight the Indian was particularly friendly and communicative, and detailed to me in his own language much about Jivaro customs.

"'Tomorrow you are going away,' said he, 'and the hearts of the Jivaros will be empty. I will tell you one more thing before you go, and maybe that you will not believe. We Jivaros are descended from the Sun, and we are a pure people. Never has our blood been defiled by admixture with that of any alien. Yet there was a prophecy that it should one day be so. Yes, a prophecy made in the days of my grandfather's grandfather, that one day a Jivaro woman should disgrace her tribe by marriage with a person not an Indian. Many times have the Spanish rubber hunters stolen our women, and as many times those women killed themselves before they would be theirs, and always the man has died also, for we Jivaros be men and warriors, and we do not forget. Now lately, they say, one of our women has allowed herself to be taken to wife by a man of a foreign people. We Jivaros take wives from other men of our own blood by right of conquest. That does not pollute our blood. But this woman has defiled us, and tonight I have heard the big *tunduys*, the log drums that hang in our encampments, talking over the forest. They say that she is dead. But the man who took her, he has made one mistake that we Jivaros do not make. He did not kill her husband, and that is well, for now no one will ever boast that he brought impurity into the race of the Children of the Sun.'

"That was all that the chief said, and, though his tone was as pleasant and conversational as ever, I vaguely sensed a bitter threat. But Von Rothapfel only laughed as hard as ever when I told him about it.

"'Ach, I haf them cowed already! They dare not hurt me! Am I nod a German citizen, and a represendatif of a superior race?'

"It seemed to me that the Kaiser and his avenging armies were a long way off from Jivaria in Oriente, but it did look as though the Herr Professor was right. Neither by sign nor word was there any hint that either Von Rothapfel or I was unwelcome among the Jivaros. The ceremonies were concluded in due form that night, and, before dawn, the chief entered my *casa ambulante*, or traveling hut of leaves, to tell me that the canoes to carry me up to the Oriente trading posts were loaded with all my packets. I was surprized, of course, though not a little relieved to find myself freed so unexpectedly, and all the drudgery accomplished for me, but I took it all as a matter of Jivaro courtesy to a departing guest, and strolled over to the Herr Professor's camp to bid him farewell. The hut was empty, but a grinning Jivaro informed me that he had risen still earlier and left before me, 'On a long journey going—no words leaving.'

"Annoyed at the lack of courtesy displayed by the burly Teuton, and feeling in my heart that he was racing to the outside world to be the first to startle science with his account of the head-shrinking secrets, I went to my canoes, and found everything ready. The chief came down to see me off, and presented me with his own spear, shield, and machete for remembrance, adding that he had once killed a woman with them, and that they were now unpleasant to his sight.

"'*Señor Capitan Americano,*' he addressed me, 'you will go to the settlements by another route, not our houses passing. Deaths there occurring, people mourning for many dying. I, chief of the Jivaros, not for-

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The Terrible Old Man

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

IT WAS the design of Angelo Ricci and Joe Czanek and Manuel Silva to call on the Terrible Old Man. This old man dwells all alone in a very ancient house in Water Street near the sea, and is reputed to be both exceedingly rich and exceedingly feeble; which forms a situation very attractive to men of the profession of Messrs. Ricci, Czanek and Silva, for that profession was nothing less dignified than robbery.

The inhabitants of Kingsport say and think many things about the Terrible Old Man which generally keep him safe from the attentions of gentlemen like Mr. Ricci and his colleagues, despite the almost certain fact that he hides a fortune of indefinite magnitude somewhere about his musty and venerable abode. He is, in truth, a very strange person, believed to have been a captain of East India clipper ships in his day; so old that no one can remember when he was young, and so taciturn that few know his real name. Among the gnarled trees in the front yard of his aged and neglected place he maintains a strange collection of large stones, oddly grouped and painted so that they resemble the idols in some obscure Eastern temple. This collection frightens away most of the small boys who love to taunt the Terrible Old Man about his long white hair and beard, or to break the small-paned windows of his dwelling with wicked missiles; but there are other things which frighten the older and more curious folk who sometimes steal up to the house to peer in through the dusty panes. These folk say that on a table in a bare room on the ground floor are many peculiar bottles, in each a small piece of lead suspended pendulum-wise from a string. And they say that the Terrible Old Man talks to these bottles, addressing them by such names as Jack, Scar-Face, Long Tom, Spanish Joe, Peters and Mate Ellis, and that whenever he speaks to a bottle the little lead pendulum within makes certain definite vibrations as if in answer. Those who have watched the tall, lean, Terrible Old Man in these peculiar conversations do not watch him again. But Angelo Ricci and Joe Czanek and Manuel Silva were not of Kingsport blood; they were of that new and heterogeneous alien stock which lies outside the charmed circle of New England life and traditions, and they saw in the Terrible Old Man merely a tottering, almost helpless graybeard, who could not walk without the aid of his knotted cane and whose thin, weak hands shook pitifully. They were really quite sorry in their way for the lonely, unpopular old fellow, whom everybody shunned, and at whom all the dogs barked singularly. But business is business, and to a robber whose soul is in his profession, there is a lure and a challenge about a very old and very feeble man who has no account at the bank, and who pays for his few necessities at the village store with Spanish gold and silver minted two centuries ago.

Messrs. Ricci, Czanek and Silva selected the night of April eleventh for their call. Mr. Ricci and Mr. Silva were to interview the poor old gentleman, whilst Mr. Czanek waited for them and their presumably metallic burden with a covered motor car in Ship Street, by the gate in the tall

rear wall of their host's grounds. Desire to avoid needless explanations in case of unexpected police intrusions prompted these plans for a quiet and unostentatious departure.

As prearranged, the three adventurers started out separately in order to prevent any evil-minded suspicions afterward. Messrs. Ricci and Silva met in Water Street by the old man's front gate, and although they did not like the way the moon shone down upon the painted stones through the budding branches of the gnarled trees, they had more important things to think about than mere idle superstition. They feared it might be unpleasant work making the Terrible Old Man loquacious concerning his hoarded gold and silver, for aged sea-captains are notably stubborn and perverse. Still, he was very old and very feeble, and there were two visitors. Messrs Ricci and Silva were experienced in the art of making unwilling persons voluble, and the screams of a weak and exceptionally venerable man can be easily muffled. So they moved up to the one lighted window and heard the Terrible Old Man talking childishly to his bottles with pendulums. Then they donned masks and knocked politely at the weather-stained oaken door.

WAITING seemed very long to Mr. Czanek as he fidgeted restlessly in the covered motor car by the Terrible Old Man's back gate in Ship Street. He was more than ordinarily tender-hearted, and he did not like the hideous screams he had heard in the ancient house just after the hour appointed for the deed. Had he not told his colleagues to be as gentle as possible with the pathetic old sea-captain? Very nervously he watched that narrow oaken gate in the high and ivy-clad stone wall. Frequently he consulted his watch, and wondered at the delay. Had the old man died before revealing where his treasure was hidden, and had a thorough search become necessary? Mr. Czanek did not like to wait so long in the dark in such a place. Then he sensed a soft tread or tapping on the walk inside the gate, heard a gentle fumbling at the rusty latch, and saw the narrow, heavy door swing inward. And in the pallid glow of the single dim street lamp he strained his eyes to see what his colleagues had brought out of that sinister house which loomed so close behind. But when he looked, he did not see what he had expected; for his colleagues were not there at all, but only the Terrible Old Man leaning quietly on his knotted cane and smiling hideously. Mr. Czanek had never before noticed the color of that man's eyes; now he saw that they were yellow.

Little things make considerable excitement in little towns, which is the reason that Kingsport people talked all that spring and summer about the three unidentifiable bodies, horribly slashed as with many cutlasses, and horribly mangled as by the tread of many cruel boot-heels, which the tide washed in. And some people even spoke of things as trivial as the deserted motor car found in Ship Street, or certain especially inhuman cries, probably of a stray animal or migratory bird, heard in the night by wakeful citizens. But in this idle village gossip the Terrible Old Man took no interest at all. He was by nature reserved, and when one is aged and feeble one's reserve is doubly strong. Besides, so ancient a sea-captain must have witnessed scores of things much more stirring in the far-off days of his unremembered youth.

THE DOOR OF HELL



by

Emma-Lindsay Squier

"The contorted face of the Butcher leered at him, then flung itself against the barrier of purple light."

IT WAS not often that Terry McGinnis and his chum, Bob Lazelle, quarreled with each other seriously. So it was a surprize to me to see them facing each other over "Lazy's" desk at the *Chronicle;* each young face wearing a curiously strained expression. They turned toward me simultaneously as I got out of the elevator on the editorial floor and walked over to them.

"You're as crazy as a bedbug," I heard Terry saying with determined emphasis; "I tell you the man's dead!"

"And I tell you——" Bob Lazelle was retorting when they saw me coming toward them.

"I'll leave it up to 'Nick the Dick' if you aren't crazy," Terry broke in upon him. "Listen, Nicholas, prince of police sleuths, my young comrade here is suffering from a diet of too many tamales at the 'Greasy Spoon'. Relieve his mind, will you, and tell him once for all that 'The Three-Finger Butcher' is dead; executed; hanged by the nape of his neck; in other words, totally extinct!"

I smiled slightly at Terry's vehemence. He is red-headed, and Irish, and can't bear to have an opinion or a belief contradicted. When he is grown up, he'll be the best feature writer the *Chronicle* ever had, because of his quick imagination, his careless and colorful way of handling words, and his almost 'fey' intuitions —a gift of the Gaelic land which gave his parents birth.

"Terry's right for once," I grinned at them; "The Three-Fingered Butcher paid the penalty for his many crimes—let me see; when was it? I believe he was hanged on the twentieth of last February; what's the argument about, boys?"

Bob Lazelle did not smile. His brown eyes were puckered in that same strained way, and he looked at me with a mixture of appeal and defiance.

"But I saw him!" he said abruptly, and Terry shouted again.

"By golly, that's his story and he sticks to it," he cried, punching Lazy in the ribs.

Bob Lazelle shook him off angrily.

"I certainly do stick to it," he said sharply. "I'm not blind; and I'm not crazy. I didn't cover night police for six months without seeing something of that bird, in the cell, the courtroom, and the deathhouse at the prison. I know that he was *supposed* to be executed on the twentieth of last February. But I tell you that last night I saw him—or his ghost—at Sixteenth and Broadway—and furthermore, he saw me."

I looked at the boy for a moment without speaking. He did not possess the hair-trigger imagination of his chum, Terry. He was a good re-

porter, because he held to facts and facts alone. I could see that he had been badly shaken. That was why Terry's boisterous joviality had jarred his nerves.

"What makes you think you saw him?" I asked Lazy quietly.

"What makes me think that I see *you?*" he retorted. "Because you're standing there, looking at me, and I can describe the clothes you have on, the way you have your hands in your pockets, the expression on your face. Well, that's the way I saw him. Last night, coming back to the office from an assignment, I came face to face with him. It wasn't dark there on that corner, so I had a chance to notice everything about him.

"My God, Nick, I nearly bumped into him before I saw who it was. There he was, with his right hand—the one that had the two fingers shot off—fumbling with his coat lapel the way he always did when he was on the witness stand, and with that horrible smile on his face, his lips twisted up so I could see the hole in the upper jaw where his teeth were missing.

"I wasn't asleep, and I hadn't been hitting the pipe in Chinatown. Either the Butcher wasn't executed, or else I saw his ghost. *But I did see him!* I'll swear to that with my dying breath."

Terry's face had lost its bantering expression. It was strangely sober for him, and he met my eyes with a puzzled frown.

"By golly, Lazy sounds plausible," he said with a slight grin. "Maybe the prison records would bear looking into; what say, Nick? The Butcher had quite a following, such as they were. Could the body have been exhumed, do you think, or——"

"Good Lord, no!" I snorted at them. "You kids talk like a dime novel. Believe me, when the prison doctor pronounces a criminal dead, he's dead! The Butcher probably has a double, or——"

There came a shout from the office boy, who was leaning out of the telephone booth near by.

"Paging Nick the Dick! Detective Nicholas Brunna wanted on the *Chronicle's* high-powered telephone!"

"I told them I'd be over here in case of emergency," I explained to the boys, and stepped inside the booth. It was the chief at the other end of the wire. And the terse sentences that he flung at me made a queer tingling sensation noticeable at the roots of my hair.

"Get over here as soon as possible. Roscoe McKenna, millionaire oil operator, has been murdered. It looks like the work of the late Three-Finger Butcher. Probably one of his gang. Get busy on it right away, will you?"

And he hung up.

THERE is usually very little excitement at central headquarters about anything that happens. "A murder a day keeps the blues away," as Terry McGinnis phrased the situation. We don't get any more excited over a fancy crime than you do over the things that happen in the routine of your day's business. It's a steady grind for us, quite different from the melodramatic guff that's written about it in novels.

But on this particular day, I could see that there was a suppressed tension in the air. Two of the operators were arguing hotly as I passed through the main office, and their conversation reminded me strongly of the one I had overheard in the *Chronicle's* office.

"D'you mean to tell me I'm so blind that I can't tell who I'm looking at? I tell you I saw him, yes sir, right in front of me."

"Well, it was his double, then, because that guy was croaked at the pen last May."

I paused for an instant, alert to the peculiarity of the situation.

"Arguing about the Three-Finger

Butcher?" I asked them, innocently enough.

Paddy White, who looks like a minister, and who is the keenest go-getter on the force, shook his head.

"Naw, this poor simp here," with a jerk of his thumb toward Eddie Nugent, a typical 'flatfoot', "swears that he saw Dago Tito last night. And you know as well as I do that the Dago was hanged last May for his share in that Black Hand argument down in Little Italy."

I stared at them absolutely nonplussed. Was it possible that, as Terry had suggested, these criminals had not been executed after all? With my mind considerably upset, I went into the chief's office.

He looked up at me and nodded. He was a man of the fewest possible words, so I was not surprized when he merely pushed forward a starched shirt-front, evidently torn out of the garment, smeared in three places with ink. I saw readily that the smears were made purposely, by the thumb and first two fingers of the right hand. I had seen that sinister sign before. It was characteristic of the Three-Finger Butcher's audacious methods.

"Recognize it?" the chief asked tersely.

"Yes, it seems to be the Butcher's seal. Where did it come from?"

There was an instant of silence.

"That shirt was worn by Roscoe McKenna, who was killed last night."

I stared down at the inky fingerprints without speaking. The chief was evidently following the mental processes of my mind.

"It does one of two things," he said presently. "It either disproves the theory that no two fingerprints in the world are alike, or else the Three-Finger Butcher is alive. I've had the impressions experted and they are his prints."

He handed over the fingerprint cards for me to examine.

"The crime itself is sensational enough, because, as far as we know, McKenna had no active enemies. There was no robbery connected with it and no tangible clues except this one. Get busy on this thing from all angles, get hold of the prison board, have the body exhumed if necessary, and identified. In the meantime, keep the reporters off this Butcher angle. It's going to be a ticklish affair to handle, and I'd rather they'd play it up as an ordinary murder mystery. Suggest old grudges to them, or something of that sort. Keep this other under your hat."

Just then the telephone bell tinkled, and the chief picked up the receiver. His face, usually as blank as a wall, took on a puzzled, almost angry expression.

"Hello—yes, chief speaking. Tito Moroni at large? Impossible; the man's dead; hanged last May——. It's his double then——"

He clicked the receiver down and turned in his swivel chair.

"Another mystery murder up," he observed. "Rufus Armstrong of the Armstrong chain of groceries, killed in bed this morning. No clues except a name, 'Tito,' traced in ink on the sheet, and a thumbprint."

He leaned forward to press a button.

"I'll put Paddy White on this," he said.

As I went out of the main office, I found Terry waiting at the door. His red hair was fairly standing up around his ears from excitement.

"The High Egg is going to let me cover the McKenna murder," he shouted joyously. "Are you going up there now? If so, I'm with."

The "High Egg," I might remark in passing, was the disrespectful title given to the managing editor of the *Chronicle* by the reporters.

I grunted, as noncommittally as I could. Orders are orders; but I had a hunch that Terry wouldn't be long

in nosing out the very angle that the chief had warned me about keeping under my hat.

And so it proved. Even in the police car, speeding out to the expensive suburb where Roscoe McKenna had lived, Terry unburdened himself of a variety of theories and guesses.

"Look here, Nick," he exploded, "I don't believe that Lazy was so bughouse after all. What I mean is, I'll bet he did see the Three-Finger Butcher. I think that bird's at large, and I think furthermore that this murder is one of his pieces of work."

"What makes you think so?" I asked with a slight smile.

Terry was silent for a moment, thinking deeply.

"Well, I don't exactly know, only I've got a hunch about it. From the dope I got on this from the police blotter, there was no robbery. It was short and sweet and brutal. Revenge for some old business deal, perhaps. Well, the Butcher was once an oil-driller on the same farm in Oklahoma where McKenna struck it rich."

I turned sharply to the boy. I wondered if he knew about the finger-prints on the torn shirt-front. But he evidently did not.

"Now, look here, young fellow," I said gruffly, "don't go off half-cocked with any wild stories, or I'll have the High Egg can you from the police beat. Stick to facts, and leave the detective work to the fellows who make a business of it. If it will relieve your mind any, I'll tell you that I got the warden of the state penitentiary on long distance just now. He says that they destroy the bodies of the executed criminals with quicklime. The Butcher is as extinct as a dinosaur. And don't you go bringing him to life."

Terry eyed me gloomily and sank back into the seat.

"Just the same, it would make a whale of a story," he sighed dismally.

I DO not intend to go into the details of the McKenna murder mystery. Astounding as it was, it became only one of a series of startling and untraceable crimes that very nearly wrecked the morale of both police and detective forces.

The Armstrong murder, which had occurred on the morning that I have just described, was another crime which threatened to go into the "Unsolved" pigeonhole at headquarters. There seemed to be a complete lack of motive, an entire absence of clues, and no logical way for the murderer to have gotten in and out of the house without being seen. In addition to these baffling elements, there was the defiant inky scrawl on the sheets: "*Tito*". The handwriting, as identified secretly at headquarters, was that of "Dago" Tito Moroni. The thumbprint was undeniably his. And Tito Moroni, the infamous Black Hand murderer, was dead!

In spite of all our precautions it was impossible to keep some of the facts from leaking out. Policemen and detectives are only human. They have wives, and wives have intimate friends. Soon it became known in a guarded, underground way, that a nameless terror was abroad. Queer things, baffling things, commenced to happen. People were assaulted viciously, murderously, at night, and could give no description of their assailants. Fires started mysteriously from untraced sources; there was an orgy of wanton destruction that the papers called, for want of a better term, a "crime wave."

I found it best to take the newspaper boys into my confidence, warning them against the effects of playing up these unsolved crimes. And they responded, as I have always found they will, when put upon their honor, by going as easy on the gruesomeness and mystery as they humanly could.

But even so, a vague panic had seized upon the public mind. In three

months, no less than six purposeless and traceless murders had been committed in the city. Three of the victims were men of prominence. Their families clamored hysterically for us to do something about it. Arrests were made by the score, and more than one innocent person spent a wretched night going through the third degree. We combed the underworld with a thoroughness that would have caught a vagabond flea. But we were met on all sides by unassailable alibis that refused to be broken down. Theories and clues all led into blank walls. We discovered absolutely nothing.

Then one day a wild-eyed little man with a mop of distraught hair came bursting into the police reporters' room and stood there looking about as if bewildered. The boys were playing black-jack at a long table, and I was arguing with Terry and Lazy about something or other, I've forgotten what.

The little man suddenly rushed over to me and demanded, "Are you a policeman?"

"Detective," I corrected him; "this is the police reporters' room. Police department next door."

He spread out his hands in a helpless sort of way.

"I want to give myself up," he said in a thin strangled voice; "I am responsible for the murders that have been committed recently."

Now, perhaps you will think that his announcement should have created a tremendous sensation among the assembled police reporters. It didn't. True, they stopped their game, and strolled over tc us, with the bored, cynical disbelief of the typical newspaper man who is familiar with "crime". Any police reporter knows that for every murder that is committed, there are three or four unbalanced people ready to swear that they are guilty. A peculiar mental psychology is responsible for it, sometimes induced by dope, sometimes by brooding over the details as printed in the papers. Once in a great while, a guilty man really does confess. But it is usually a man who has committed such an obvious, unpremeditated crime that his guilt would soon be fastened upon him anyway.

It took only one look at the undersized, pale-faced man to know that he was incapable of having committed any of the brutal murders of the past three months. Nevertheless, I questioned him as a matter of routine.

"Your name?"

"I am Dr. Francis Wedgerow," he said in a scarcely audible voice. His blue, near-sighted eyes began to stray about the room, apparently becoming conscious of the ring of curious, slightly smiling faces about him.

The name meant nothing to any of us, except to Terry, who had a phenomenal memory.

"Dr. Wedgerow who developed the Antheum ray?" he asked briskly.

"Yes, yes," he said nervously, and looked about him again.

"Anything you say will be used against you," I said formally. "I'll take you in to the chief."

He peered up at me wildly, like a trapped animal.

"You don't understand," he jerked out; "I am not confessing to any of these murders—I never killed anyone in my life. I—I——"

I took him by the arm and steered him into the detective board room. The police reporters looked after us, shrugged their shoulders, and most of them went back to their game of black-jack. One or two of them questioned Terry, who was staring after us with what Lazy calls the "big idea look."

"He's an American doctor who has studied in England and Germany," Terry told them; "gone in strong for various rays. He's been trying to discover cold light, and he worked out a

ray called the Antheum, which is beneficial for smallpox patients. Don't you guys ever read *Who's Who?*"

Some of the reporters made a note of Terry's brief statement. Most of them only jotted down the name. There was an understanding between us that no suspects or "nuts" should be played up unless there was sufficient evidence to warrant it.

"Been hitting the pipe," was how they dismissed the incident.

I WAS steering the little doctor to the chief's desk, when he tugged back at my arm. I saw that the frightened, almost insane look was gone from his eyes, and it occurred to me that he just realized the seriousness of his overwrought actions.

"They won't arrest me, will they?" he said in a low, agitated voice.

"Not if you aren't guilty," I told him.

"No, no, no!" he cried with the same low-voiced vehemence; "I am not a murderer! My whole scientific knowledge has been devoted to the preservation of life, not its destruction; I came here for help today—I mean—oh, how can I explain? Only they won't arrest me! It would be fatal!"

"How do you mean, fatal?" I asked him quietly. I noticed that Bob Lazelle was trailing us. And I thought with an inner smile that Terry McGinnis had something on his mind besides his red hair. If he had come into the board room, every reporter would have been at his heels. For it was acknowledged that Terry had the hair-trigger mind of the whole crew. But he was noisily playing black-jack. He had commissioned his chum, Lazy, to follow us up.

"I mean"—he hesitated—"I have been working very hard—I am somewhat unstrung—these terrible things that have happened—they haunt me and make me feel afraid——"

That was all that we got out of him. He was questioned rather closely, principally as to why he made his "confession". But nothing of a suspicious nature developed from his answers. We had no record of him as having been connected with any crimes, we were satisfied that he had had no dealings with any of the murdered men, and that he was out of town when two of them were killed.

It seemed a plain case of that peculiar psychology I mentioned before. We released him after a couple of hours, and Lazy and I strolled back into the reporters' room, where the game was still going on.

"Anything doing?" they asked me.

"No," I said, "the doctor's a little woozy in the bean, that's all. I think he's been eating Antheum rays off the back of his hand."

I saw Terry's intent blue eyes fixed upon my face.

"Do you really believe that?" he asked me out of the side of his mouth. I shrugged my shoulders for answer. But a moment later I signaled him to follow me out of the reporters' room.

"I'd like to have you interview the Doc about his Antheum rays—or anything you like," I told him. "Get as much of an idea of him as you can, but don't print anything about him. Give me the dope as soon as possible."

Terry's face took on that ecstatic look of happiness which it always wears when there is an unusual story in the offing.

"Can I take Lazy with me?" he asked eagerly.

"This is lone-wolf stuff," I answered; "you'll work better alone."

His face fell a little. "Oh, very well," he said obediently, and pocketed the address which I gave him.

I WAS gone for about an hour working on a faint theory I had evolved covering the McKenna murder. I pulled a blank, and when I

got back to the station, it was to find the place seething with excitement. I collided with Paddy White, whose face was pasty and perspiring. There was a look of baffled rage in his usually sleepy blue eyes.

"Eddie Nugent's been brought into the receiving hospital," he jerked out. "Shot! I don't think he'll live."

"Shot!" I echoed, dismayed. "Who did it?"

Paddy White hesitated. Then he brushed past me and went into my office. He sank down on a chair and put his head between his hands.

"Nick, I guess this monkey business of the past three months is getting under my skin. I didn't think I had any 'nerves', but this thing that happened to Eddie"—he looked up at me with strained, perspiring face —"the guy that shot him was—Tito Moroni!"

I stared back at him, realizing that I, too, knew the feeling of "nerves".

"Can that stuff," I said at last; "you know he's dead."

He shook his head dazedly.

"I don't know it," he said lifelessly; "I don't know anything except that I'm about ready to take a rest cure in a sanitarium. I'm not exactly a babe in arms, Nick, and I know the ropes of this crime game as well as the next fellow. But these cases I've been working on—why, it's been like beating my head on a stone wall. They have all looked like the work of two men—the Butcher, and Dago Tito. And those two men—*we think*—are dead. Eddie Nugent swore that he saw Tito—remember the argument we had here in the station that day? And I thought he was crazy. Even when the Armstrong murder pointed to only one person, I figured it as a pretty obvious imitation of Tito's methods by some crook who knew his stuff. Even the thumbprint might have been a copy. But now—I don't know. I've got wheels in my head instead of brains."

"What happened?" I asked as quietly as I could.

"Eddie and I met by accident on the corner of Thirty-eighth and Union," he said dully. "We stood and talked for a few minutes, and I was turning away, when I heard him gasp. I looked around, just in time to see his hand go back to his gat in his hip pocket, and just in time to see the flash of a gun from across the street. Then Eddie pitched forward, and I ran to him, getting out my own gat. I fired at the man who was standing over there, and Nick—for a minute he didn't run. He stood there, grinning at me. I'd swear on my oath that it was Tito Moroni. Or else it was his double. He stepped back into a doorway, and when I got there, not two seconds later, he was gone. Just utterly vanished. Of course, I combed the house, but there wasn't a trace of him. The woman swore that the door hadn't opened at all, that it couldn't have opened, because there was a spring lock on it."

"Did you arrest her?" I asked.

"Sure; but she doesn't know anything—I'm satisfied of that. And the worst of it is, Nick"—he hesitated again—"I took a look at the wall where my bullet struck. That bullet, as near as I can figure, *should have gone straight through the guy who was standing there!* But either my eyes have gone on the blink, or else I'm just plain crazy."

The telephone on my desk rang sharply. I jumped, and so did Paddy White. There was no disguising our "nerves". We both had a week-end supply of them. The voice that came to me through the instrument was Terry's voice, strained, breathless, as if he had been running, and almost incoherent.

"Nick, tell the chief to get out the reserves; police everything. Wire the governor to put the town under martial law; it's going to need it."

"What's up?" I shot into the

'phone. "Give me something definite. I can't hand the chief a lot of hysteria that might——"

I heard Terry make a sound that was almost a snarl.

"For God's sake, Nick, don't stand on formalities now! I tell you hell's going to be let loose—I don't think he can hold them—it's a losing fight ——"

"Terry!" I shouted; "pull yourself together. What's going to happen——?"

There was a crash, and the sound as of a terrific explosion. I shook the telephone hook frantically. There came only a dull clicking that told me the line was dead.

I finally got to my feet. Paddy White was watching me with eyes that bulged. Briefly I told him what Terry had said.

"Report it to the chief," I said, trying to speak naturally. "I think the kid's in trouble. I'm going to run out there in the police car."

As I swung out of the office, Bob Lazelle seized my arm.

"Where's Terry?" he demanded. There was such a peculiar sympathy between them that it was not strange he had received a "trouble" wireless.

"The last I saw of him he was going out to interview Dr. Wedgerow," I told him, "and I have an idea that he's somewhere in that neighborhood now."

I went over to the police desk.

"Any report of an explosion?" I asked.

"Just in," answered the man at the switchboard, "explosion wrecked house at 3581 Allen Street. I haven't had time to find the name yet."

I consulted my memorandum book.

"Dr. Francis Wedgerow," I told him; "I'll go out with the ambulance. And it might be just as well for the 'Black Maria' to make the run, too."

We made that run in record time, Lazy and I sitting with the driver, the siren shrieking its warning to motorists and pedestrians, and the patrol wagon, or "Black Maria," clanging its bell behind us.

We found Allen Street swarming with startled people. The wreck of a plain white house, set well back on a lawn, was attracting crowds that reminded me of ants circling about a wounded spider.

We pushed our way unceremoniously through the throng, in time to see two men lifting an inert body from underneath a pile of timbers.

"Terry!" I heard Lazy cry out. And running forward, he took the limp body in his own arms.

I helped him carry the boy to the stretcher, and we eased him carefully into the ambulance. The face was deathly white, except for a streak of red that smeared his cheek and forehead. With practised nonchalance, the intern bent over him and made a swift examination.

"Alive—just," he announced succinctly. "He was probably caught under some falling posts that protected him from the full weight of the rest."

I signed to Lazy to remain with his chum. He would have stayed anyway. That was one time when a story had completely lost its value to him. I went over and looked down at the wreckage of the house. There were plenty of people to tell me about the explosion—it had rocked the entire neighborhood. But no one could tell me of its cause. The timbers suddenly flamed up into a stiff tongue of fire, and I telephoned for the fire department.

It was hours later that they pulled from the burned ruins the unrecognizable body of a man. But I knew from the size, that it was Dr. Wedgerow. He had died with his curious secret locked within him; unless Terry had fathomed it; and Terry recovered con-

sciousness only to go into a long and terrible fever, in which he cried out, "The Butcher! The Butcher!" and "Keep them out, doctor, for God's sake—shut the door!"

It was two days later that Terry opened his eyes from a drugged sleep, and stared wanly at Lazy and me.

"Hello, old kid," said Lazy with unsteady voice; "how's tricks?"

Then I saw Terry's face contract painfully, and he tried to sit up.

"Is — is — everything—all right?" he whispered.

"Right as a fox," I said soothingly, and we pressed him gently back against the pillows. "Town's running smoothly as could be expected with two crooks loose like Lazy and me."

He sighed sleepily, and his pale lips twisted into a smile.

"He got it shut in time, then," he murmured, and went back to a sleep that was natural, and prolonged.

"Got *what* shut in time?" said Lazy, in a puzzled tone, after he had assured himself that Terry was sleeping.

"I don't know," I said with a shrug of my shoulders. "Nobody knows except Terry. I gather that the little doctor knew, but he'll never tell anybody."

NEARLY a week passed before Terry was permitted to talk to us at length. And even then his eyes had a haunted look in them as if he had looked upon some horrible thing that would leave a lasting memory.

"Nick," he said to me as Lazy and I sat by his bed, "I'm trusting to you to square me with the chief of police if he tries to get me canned for turning in a false alarm. I know darned well he'd never believe this story, but I think you will. And Nick, I'm telling you straight, if the explosion hadn't come—well, the police reserves and the militia would have been as useless as guns without bullets. Poor old Doc Wedgerow! He was a game guy. He paid the price, and paid it like a gentleman."

Naturally, this was all Greek to us, and we said so, as vehemently as one can to an invalid.

"I know, I know," the boy said, waving a weak hand at us, but it's hard to tell about it. It's the biggest story of my life—and I can't write it. No one would believe me, and the High Egg would give me the gate or send me to an insane asylum. But here it is, and you can take it or leave it:

"You remember, Nick, I left you that day to interview Dr. Wedgerow. Well, I found his house, and rang the bell—and waited. I rang again, and no one came. So, just to be sure that nobody was home, I turned the knob gently, and the door opened. Still silence. So I took a chance, and went down the hall past the telephone to where there was another closed door. As I stood there, just ready to knock, I heard a voice—the doctor's voice, pleading with someone. I couldn't help hearing what he said:

"'No — no — don't come in—you must not—*you must not*——'

"Of course, I thought for the moment that he was talking to me. But I hadn't knocked, and I was fairly sure that he hadn't heard me at the outside door. As I stood there, wondering what to do, I heard—well, I hardly know how to describe it; a sort of whispering, a subdued noise that a big crowd of people might make pushing forward on a carpet.

"I don't know why I opened the door just then. I didn't mean to do it, but somehow my hand acted automatically. I saw——"

He twisted in the bed and put his hands up to his face uncertainly.

"Go on!" whispered Lazy tensely.

"You won't believe me," Terry said faintly, then he straightened up defiantly, "but this is the truth. The room was the doctor's laboratory.

The windows were curtained closely. But there was a light that came from a metal standard with racks of long light tubes. It was a queer, misty purple light. And silhouetted against it, the doctor was standing with his back toward me.

"At first I thought he was alone in the room. Then as I stood there, in a dazed, unthinking way, I saw that the patch of misty purple light looked like a great door. And I saw that within the light, something moved. It was like phosphorus in the water, moving ceaselessly, formlessly. I stared at it, fascinated. It was from there that the curious, whispering noise came. Then I began to distinguish forms—shadowy, dissolving, changing forms. And as the light seemed to grow brighter, I could catch a glimpse of faces that seemed to be pressed against a closed window.

"The doctor threw out his hands, as if warding something off.

"'No—no!' he cried out again; 'you must not come in! There is enough evil—too much has already been done——'

"Then he turned and saw me. He gave a queer, animal-like kind of a moan, and fell back against one of the long tables covered with test-tubes.

"'Go away,' he whispered, 'go away before it is too late.' I can't keep them out much longer—I can't turn off the rays—the stronger the light gets the easier it will be for them to enter—go—quickly——"

"But I didn't go. I just stood there, gaping at him, and at the swirl of that misty purple light that seemed to grow brighter and brighter. That sibilant, pushing noise seemed louder—closer——

"'What have you done?' I asked him at last. I don't know why I said that—perhaps to keep my own sanity. He covered his face with his hands.

"'I have brought destruction into the world!' he said in his queer, shaking voice. 'I, who wanted to be mankind's benefactor, but I have done—this!' He flung out his hand at the door of purple light. 'I have for long been trying to establish the connecting link between the world of the living and the dead. For years I have been experimenting on a light ray that would make a door, a pathway, between the world of material things and the astral world of unknown substance. And'—his voice was a tortured groan—'I succeeded. Look! *There is the door into the other world!* See how they crowd about it, peering in! But what I did not predict, what I could not foresee, was that my doorway would be of most use to the earthbound entities; the spirits who are held here by lust for revenge or desire for low and evil things. How could I know that they would be so strong? The others go—on! But these entities, craving the things that made up their earthly lives—ah! they are overwhelming me! When the first disembodied spirit came through that doorway, I was overjoyed. The first—and the second!—How was I to know?'

"I felt my face grow hot with horror.

"'The Butcher—and Tito?' I managed to ask him.

"'Yes, yes, those two!' he gasped out. 'Dead—yet alive! Keeping still their horrible traits, their unquenched desires for vengeance and wanton slaughter! Dealing out destruction in the world of living men! When I saw what I had done, I tried to quench the ray. But I failed. It is a link between the known and the unknown. It feeds upon the vibration of that outside substance. I succeeded only in reducing it as far as it was connected with the material world. I blocked the passage for a little while. But I have created something that I can not kill. I know nothing that will——'

"He suddenly stopped, and ran his hands through his hair.

"'Yes, yes,' I heard him mutter; 'that might do it—it is barely possible——'

"'But the Butcher, and Tito!' I said to him, half whispering; 'are they still at large—here?'

"He turned on me the face of a man suffering in hell.

"'In—in—there!' he said, pointing at that quivering, pulsing, whispering patch of light, 'they have to go back for renewed strength—it is like a swimmer who must come to land when he is exhausted—but they will come out again—they will all come out! Do you know what that means? It means that the world will be flooded with evil—with terror—with horrible destruction! I can not prevent them, unless——'

"I tried to speak, but failed. The swirling light was growing brighter. An eddying whirl of faces—evil, sinister faces—groping hands that flattened themselves against the light—horrible crooked fingers that tried to find a crack—bodies that pressed themselves closer—closer—— The light was like a transparent curtain of strong, tenuous material which was yielding, little by little, to the strong, insistent pressure from behind.

"In front of that horrible crowding swarm of evil figures I saw the contorted face of the Butcher—peering through—he leered at me—he flung himself against the barrier of purple light——

"Again I heard the doctor's voice, raised to a scream.

"'No—no—you must not come—you must not, I tell you——'

I saw him reach for a chemical bottle. Then I turned and sprang for the 'phone. I don't know what I said—I guess I was almost crazy. And when I was talking, I heard a crash. I tried to run, but the explosion came and something hit me. That's the last I knew."

WE STARED at each other without speaking. Terry sank back against the pillows, weak and exhausted. I could think of nothing to say. I couldn't scoff, and yet I could not bring myself to utter a word of belief. The thing was too outrageous, too preposterous.

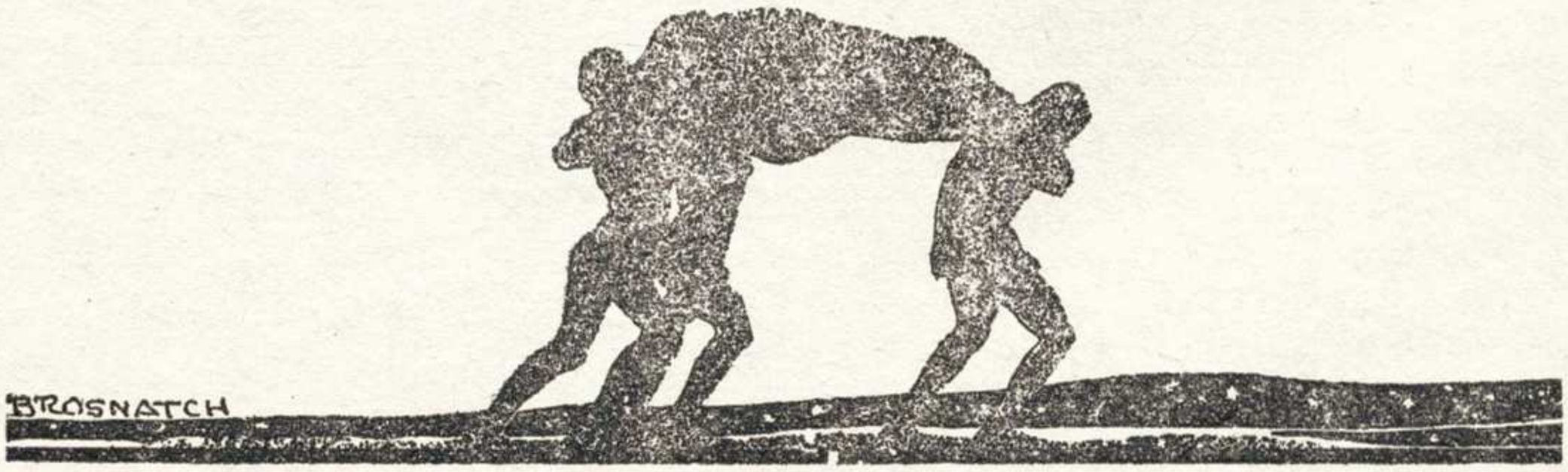
But Lazy's faith in Terry was unshaken. His eyes were shining excitedly.

"Doggone!" he exploded at last; "what a bear-cat of a story!"

Terry turned on him a tired, grateful look.

"You've said it, boy," he remarked with some of his old-time jauntiness, "and like all the biggest and best stories of the world it will never see the light of print!"

But in that he was wrong. For I, Nicholas Brunna, took my pen—and my reputation—in hand, and have written it. There is no proof for it except Terry's word—and the fact of immeasurable relief that the Three-Finger Butcher and Tito Moroni were never seen again.



A Five-Minute Story of Black Magic

The Devil's Pay

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

THE gondola thudded against the dock and a man jumped out. He drew his cloak about him, and the rings on his fingers flashed in the moonlight as he turned to the gondolier.

"I shall be gone perhaps for hours, Messer."

"No matter, Magnificent. I am at your command. I shall wait if need be until the dawn of the second day."

"Then wait."

He turned and plunged into the shadows, which seemed to reach out to engulf him. He walked swiftly, surely. His face was heavily veiled and his long black cloak reached to his ankles. The few pedestrians who passed him turned and stared for a moment but went on, failing to comprehend his mutterings. The path was none too smooth, and more than once the man from the gondola stumbled over the cobblestones. At length he modified his pace and began to scrutinize the houses about him. He stopped before a low structure squatting before him like an ugly, repulsive denizen of darkness. He raised his hand to rap upon the panel of the door, but before he could do so, it swung inward.

"Come," a voice bade him from the darkness, and he entered. At the farther end of the long hall he could discern a feeble light issuing from beneath the folds of a heavy curtain.

"Follow," came the voice again, and he felt his way along the wall to where the curtain was, and when he reached it, it was swept aside and the light fell upon him and enveloped him. He stepped into the room that was thus disclosed, and the curtain fell again into place. Facing him was a man as repellent as the dwelling in which he lived. He was a short man, and his beady eyes flashed venomously at the visitor. He attempted to smile, but his sensual lips curled into a sneer which mocked the attempt. He slowly lowered the flambeau in the sconce which he had held at arm's length to the table behind him, and he endeavored to pierce the veil which covered his visitor's face.

The Duke of Venice raised the veil and moved forward.

"Messer Duca!" gasped the magician, and his face paled a trifle. "What is the cause for this honor, if I may so much as ask, Magnificent?"

The duke sank into a chair and gazed meditatively at the wizard before him.

"I have an enemy, Messer Gamani ——." He glanced meaningly at his host.

"Ah, Excellency. Poisons? Or perhaps a keen stiletto," he answered, quick at comprehension.

"No. Neither will do. They avail me nought. I have used them. I have had my enemy set upon, but he turned and slaughtered my men and escaped without so much as a scratch. *Diavolo!* I have sent him wines diluted with the best of poisons, but they have gone into the canals of Venice. I have sent him a gorgeous gown saturated with a deadly poison, but he allowed a lackey to wear it and

discovered my plan, for, of course, the lackey died. I have sent him an opal with the curse of hell upon it, but he ground it and returned it to me. But need I go on? I have come to you as a last resort. He must die!"

"I see but one way, Excellency. Would you"—he stopped as if to reconsider, but resumed almost at once at the gesture of impatience manifested by his visitor—"would you enlist the powers of darkness?"

The duke nodded silently and shrugged his shoulders eloquently.

"You are aware, Messer Duca, that man must pay for consort with Satan?"

"I am aware. I care not for the consequences."

"It is a rash act, Magnificent."

"It remains that my enemy must die," returned the duke coldly.

Messer Gamani shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands in a gesture of helplessness.

"Since you are determined, Excellency——."

"I am."

"Perchance you have a portrait of your enemy?"

The duke cast something upon the table and the magician's hand closed over it, and he peered at it intently.

"It bears a strong resemblance to the Borgia."

"Cesare? It is not he; it is not a Borgia, much as it may seem."

Messer Gamani remained silent. He moved to the fireplace and added fuel to the flames.

"Care you to watch my preparation, Excellency? I shall have completed the first part of the task in the space of a glass of sand. If you care not you may retire to my library and amuse yourself among my books."

"That I shall do, Messer Gamani."

A panel in the stone wall near the fireplace swung away and the duke passed into the wizard's library.

THE sands in the hour-glass dribbled slowly to a heap, and as the last grains slipped through, Messer Gamani opened the panel in the wall and allowed the duke to enter.

The magician held a wax image in his hand, and he showed it to the duke, who exclaimed sharply: "It resembles him, my enemy, Messer Gamani!"

"It was modeled from the miniature portrait."

"What do you propose to do with it?"

"The image must be burned. It will take another glass of sand, but it can not be hastened."

"But when does my enemy succumb?"

"As the flame from the wax dies, so your enemy dies."

An expression of skepticism crossed the face of the duke.

"I very much doubt."

"Satan does not fail his followers, Magnificent."

"It remains to be seen."

He seated himself and watched the wizard ignite the taper of the wax figure. The incantations of the magician over it drew his attention for a space, and he watched the wax figure dwindle slowly before his eyes. The head was gone, the main body, and the flame sputtered over the legs of the fantastic little mold. As the flame expired over the wax remnants Messer Gamani turned to the duke.

"He is dead, Excellency. At the hour, seven glasses of sand since the setting of the sun."

The duke threw a purse of ducats upon the table, but Messer Gamani made no move to take it.

"Beware, Messer Gamani, if your efforts fail, if you have sported." He indicated the purse. "Take this gold."

"The gold is *my* pay. But there is more——."

"More gold?"

"More pay. Satan must yet exact the penalty."

The duke was walking through the hall, the wizard at his heels. At the door they paused.

"The Devil may have a casket of gold," laughed the duke, "if my enemy is dead."

"Have you heard, Magnificent? The Devil loves nought so much as a soul."

His leering face vanished in the darkness, and the duke relished the vision of the magician's squat head on the end of a pike-pole as he picked his way back to where his gondola awaited him.

He stepped from his gondola to the dock before his magnificent palace and stood there a space watching the gondola recede in the distance. He looked up at the moon and wondered about his enemy. If he were not dead the vision of the wizard's head on a pike-pole would no longer be a vision, but a reality.

He was about to turn to ascend the steps to his palace when he heard the swishing of poles in the water. The gondola was coming at a swift rate, he judged. He did not err, for it hove into sight and came directly to the dock upon which he was standing.

"Messer Duca," came a muffled voice from the gondola.

The duke started; he recognized the voice of his watch in the house of his enemy.

"Ho, Messer Marcquo. Come you from the residence of the duke?"

"So I do, and I must haste to return, for my absence will be suspected. I have great news."

"The duke——?"

"Is dead."

"Excellent."

"At the end of the sixth hour after sunset he was seized with a most violent pain throughout his body. He screamed that he was burning; that he had been poisoned. But he had not been poisoned, for his food-tasters still live unaffected. At the end of the seventh hour he succumbed in horrible pain, delivering a curse upon you."

"It is well, Messer Marcquo. You shall be rewarded amply for this. You have not been followed?"

"I trow not, Magnificent."

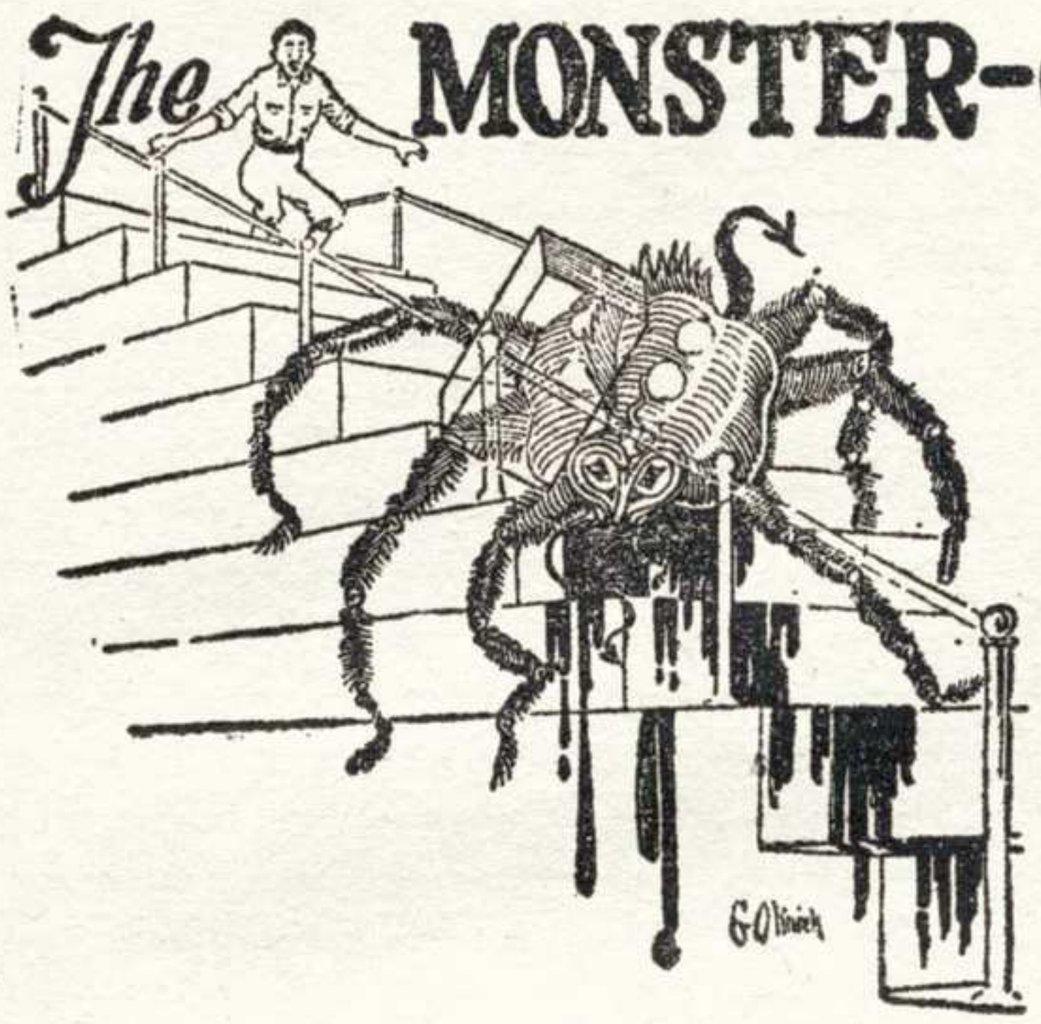
"Then haste and return; it would not do to have someone suspect you as my envoy."

The boat moved away, and the duke exultantly leaped up the steps and into the palace. He ascended to his chamber, threw off his cloak and donned a luxurious gown. His enemy was dead! Now he would no longer be hampered in his nefarious designs by his enemy! His chief councilor must know. He would go to him, now, and inform him of the incident. The Devil could come and take a casket of gold—ten caskets, for that matter, for his enemy was dead.

He started down the stairway as swiftly as his burdensome robe would allow. But half-way down his gown tangled in his legs and he tripped and fell headlong down the stone steps.

A lackey found him next morning. He was dead; his neck was broken.

The MONSTER-GOD of MAMURTH



by

Edmond Hamilton

"I had not killed the thing, but had chained it down by the block that held it prisoner."

IT WAS out of the desert night that he came to us, stumbling into our little circle of firelight and collapsing at once. Mitchell and I sprang to our feet with startled exclamations, for men who travel alone and on foot are a strange sight in the deserts of North Africa.

For the first few minutes that we worked over him, I thought he would die at once, but gradually we brought him back to consciousness. While Mitchell held a cup of water to his cracked lips, I looked him over and saw that he was too far gone to live much longer. His clothes were in rags, and his hands and knees literally flayed, from crawling over the sands, I judged.

So when he motioned feebly for more water, I gave it to him, knowing that in any case his time was short. Soon he could talk, in a dead, croaking voice.

"I'm alone," he told us, in answer to our first question; "no more out there to look for. What are you two —traders? I thought so. No, I'm an archeologist. A digger-up of the past." His voice broke for a moment. "It's not always good to dig up dead secrets. There are some things the past should be allowed to hide."

He caught the look that passed between Mitchell and me. "No, I'm not mad," he said. "You will hear, I'll tell you the whole thing. But listen to me, you two," and in his earnestness he raised himself to a sitting position, "keep out of Igidi Desert. Remember that I told you that. I had a warning, too, but I disregarded it. And I went into hell—into hell. But there, I will tell you from the beginning.

"My name—that doesn't matter now. I left Mogador more than a year ago, and came through the foothills of the Atlas ranges, striking out into the desert in hopes of finding some of the Carthaginian ruins the North African deserts are known to hold.

"I spent months in the search, traveling among the squalid Arab villages, now near an oasis and now far into the blank, untracked desert. And as I went farther into that savage country, I found more and more of the ruins I sought, crumbled remnants of temples and fortresses, relics, almost destroyed, of the age when Carthage meant empire and ruled all of North Africa from her walled city. And then, on the side of a massive block of stone, I found that which turned me toward Igidi.

"It was an inscription in the garbled Phenician of the traders of Carthage, short enough that I remembered it and can repeat it word for word. It read, literally, as follows:

" 'Merchants, go not into the city of Mamurth, which lies beyond the

mountain pass. For I, San-Drabat of Carthage, entering the city with four companions in the month of Esch-moun, to trade, on the third night of our stay came priests and seized my fellows, I escaping by hiding. My companions they sacrificed to the evil god of the city, who has dwelt there from the beginning of time, and for whom the wise men of Mamurth have built a great temple the like of which is not on earth elsewhere, where the people of Mamurth worship their god. I escaped from the city and set this warning here that others may not turn their steps to Mamurth and to death.'

"Perhaps you can imagine the effect that inscription had on me. It was the last trace of a city unknown to the memory of men, a last floating spar of a civilization sunken in the sea of time. That there could have been such a city at all seemed to me quite probable. What do we know of Carthage even, but a few names? No city, no civilization was ever so completely blotted off the earth as Carthage, when Roman Scipio ground its temples and palaces into the very dust, and plowed up the ground with salt, and the eagles of conquering Rome flew across a desert where a metropolis had been.

"It was on the outskirts of one of those wretched little Arab villages that I had found the block, and its inscription, and I tried to find someone in the village to accompany me, but none would do so. I could plainly see the mountain pass, a mere crack between towering blue cliffs. In reality it was miles and miles away, but the deceptive optical qualities of the desert light made it seem very near. My maps placed that mountain range all right, as a lower branch of the Atlas, and the expanse behind the mountains was marked as 'Igidi Desert', but that was all I got from them. All that I could reckon on as certain was that it was desert that lay on the other side of the pass, and I must carry enough supplies to meet it.

"But the Arabs knew more! Though I offered what must have been fabulous riches to those poor devils, not one would come with me when I let them know what place I was heading for. None had ever been there, they would not even ride far into the desert in that direction; but all had very definite ideas of the place beyond the mountains as a nest of devils, a haunt of evil Jinns.

"Knowing how firmly superstition is implanted in their kind, I tried no longer to persuade them, and started alone, with two scrawny camels carrying my water and supplies. So for three days I forged across the desert under a broiling sun, and on the morning of the fourth I reached the pass.

"It was only a narrow crevice to begin with, and great boulders were strewn so thickly on its floor that it was a long, hard job getting through. And the cliffs on each side towered to such a height that the space between was a place of shadows and whispers and semi-darkness. It was late in the afternoon that I finally came through, and for a moment I stood motionless, for from that side of the pass the desert sloped down into a vast basin, and at the basin's center, perhaps two miles from where I stood, gleamed the white ruins of Mamurth.

"I remember that I was very calm as I covered the two miles between myself and the ruins. I had taken the existence of the city as a fact, so much so that if the ruins had not been there I should have been vastly more surprized than at finding them.

"From the pass I had seen only a tangled mass of white fragments, but as I drew nearer, some of these began to take outline as crumbling blocks, and walls, and columns. The sand had drifted, too, and the ruins

were completely buried in some sections, while nearly all were half covered.

"And then it was that I made a curious discovery. I had stopped to examine the material of the ruins, a smooth, veinless stone, much like an artificial marble or a superfine concrete. And while I looked about me, intent on this, I noticed that on almost every shaft and block, on broken cornice and column, was carved the same symbol—if it was a symbol. It was a rough picture of a queer, outlandish creature, much like an octopus, with a round, almost shapeless body, and several long tentacles or arms branching out from the body, not supple and boneless, like those of an octopus, but seemingly stiff and jointed, like a spider's legs. In fact, the thing might have been intended to represent a spider, I thought, though some of the details were wrong. I speculated for a moment on the profusion of these creatures carved on the ruins all around me, then gave it up as an enigma that was unsolvable.

"And the riddle of the city about me seemed unsolvable also. What could I find in this half-buried mass of stone fragments to throw light on the past? I could not even superficially explore the place, for the scantiness of my supplies and water would not permit a long stay. It was with a discouraged heart that I went back to the camels and, leading them to an open spot in the ruins, made my camp for the night. And when night had fallen, and I sat beside my little fire, the vast, brooding silence of this place of death was awful. There were no laughing human voices, or cries of animals, or even cries of bird or insect. Nothing but the darkness and silence that crowded around me, flowed down upon me, beat sullenly against the glowing spears of light my little fire threw out.

"As I sat there musing, I was startled by a slight sound behind me. I turned to see its cause, and then stiffened. As I have mentioned, the space directly around my camp was clear sand, smoothed level by the winds. Well, as I stared at that flat expanse of sand, a hole several inches across suddenly appeared in its surface, yards from where I stood, but clearly visible in the firelight.

"There was nothing whatever to be seen there, not even a shadow, but there it was, one moment the level surface of the sand, the next moment a hole appearing in it, accompanied by a soft, crunching sound. As I stood gazing at it in wonder, that sound was repeated, and simultaneously another hole appeared in the sand's surface, only five or six feet nearer to me than the other.

"When I saw that, ice-tipped arrows of fear seemed to shoot through me, and then, yielding to a mad impulse, I snatched a blazing piece of fuel from the fire and hurled it, a comet of red flame, at the place where the holes had appeared. There was a slight sound of scurrying and shuffling, and I felt that whatever thing had made those marks had retreated, if a living thing had made them at all. What it had been, I could not imagine, for there had been absolutely nothing in sight, one track and then another appearing magically in the clear sand, if indeed they were really tracks at all.

"The mystery of the thing haunted me. Even in sleep I found no rest, for evil dreams seemed to flow into my brain from the dead city around me. All the dusty sins of ages past, in this forgotten place, seemed to be focused on me in the dreams I had. Strange shapes walked through them, unearthly as the spawn of a distant star, half-seen and vanishing again. It was little enough sleep I got that night, but when the sun finally came, with its first golden rays my fears and oppressions dropped from me like

a cloak. No wonder the early peoples were sun-worshipers!

"And with my renewed strength and courage, a new thought struck me. In the inscription I have quoted to you, that long-dead merchant-adventurer had mentioned the great temple of the city and dwelt on its grandeur. Where, then, were its ruins, I wondered. I decided that what time I had would be better spent in investigating the ruins of this temple, which should be prominent, if that ancient Carthaginian had been correct as to its size.

"I ASCENDED a near-by hillock and looked about me in all directions, and though I could not perceive any vast pile of ruins that might have been the temple's, I did see for the first time, far away, two great figures of stone that stood out black against the rosy flame of the sunrise. It was a discovery that filled me with excitement, and I broke camp at once, starting in the direction of those two shapes.

"They were on the very edge of the farther side of the city, and it was noon before I finally stood before them. And now I saw clearly their nature. Two great, sitting figures, carved of black stone, all of fifty feet in height, and almost that far apart, both facing toward the city and toward me. They were of human shape and dressed in a queer, scaled armor, but the faces I can not describe, for they were unhuman. The features were human, well-proportioned, even, but the face, the expression, suggested no kinship whatever with humanity as we know it. Were they carved from life? I wondered. If so, it must have been a strange sort of people who had lived in this city and set up these two statues.

"And now I tore my gaze away from them, and looked around. On each side of those shapes, the remains of what must once have been a mighty wall branched out, a long pile of crumbling ruins. But there had been no wall between the statues, that being evidently the gateway through the barrier. I wondered why the two guardians of the gate had survived, apparently entirely unharmed, while the wall and the city behind me had fallen into ruins. They were of a different material, I could see, but what was that material?

"And now I noticed for the first time the long avenue that began on the other side of the statues and stretched away into the desert for a half-mile or more. The sides of this avenue were two rows of smaller stone figures that ran in parallel lines away from the two figures. So I started down that avenue, passing between the two great shapes that stood at its head. And as I went between them, I noticed for the first time the inscription graven on the inner side of each.

"On the pedestal of each figure, four or five feet from the ground, was a raised tablet of the same material, perhaps a yard square, and covered with strange symbols—characters, no doubt, of a lost language, undecipherable, at least to me. One symbol, though, that was especially prominent in the inscription, was not new to me. It was the carven picture of the spider, or octopus, which I have mentioned that I had found everywhere on the ruins of the city. And here it was scattered thickly among the symbols that made up the inscription. The tablet on the other statue was a replica of the first, and I could learn no more from it. So I started down the avenue, turning over in my mind the riddle of that omnipresent symbol, and then forgetting it, as I observed the things about me.

"That long street was like the avenue of sphinxes at Karnak, down which Pharaoh swung in his litter, borne to his temple on the necks of men. But the statues that made up

its sides were not sphinx-shaped. They were carved in strange forms, shapes of animals unknown to us, as far removed from anything we can imagine as the beasts of another world. I can not describe them, any more than you could describe a dragon to a man who had been blind all his life. Yet they were of evil, reptilian shapes; they tore at my nerves as I looked at them.

"Down between the two rows of them I went, until I came to the end of the avenue. Standing there between the last two figures, I could see nothing before me but the yellow sands of the desert, as far as the eye could reach. I was puzzled. What had been the object of all the pains that had been taken, the wall, the two great statues, and this long avenue, if it but led into the desert?

"Gradually I began to see that there was something queer about the part of the desert that lay directly before me. It was *flat*. For an area, seemingly round in shape, that must have covered several acres, the surface of the desert seemed absolutely level. It was as though the sands within that great circle had been packed down with tremendous force, leaving not even the littlest ridge of dune on its surface. Beyond this flat area, and all around it, the desert was broken up by small hills and valleys, and traversed by whirling sand-clouds, but nothing stirred on the flat surface of the circle.

"Interested at once, I strode forward to the edge of the circle, only a few yards away. I had just reached that edge when an invisible hand seemed to strike me a great blow on the face and chest, knocking me backward in the sand.

"It was minutes before I advanced again, but I did advance, for all my curiosity was now aroused. I crawled toward the circle's edge, holding my pistol before me, pushing slowly forward.

"When the automatic in my outstretched hand reached the line of the circle, it struck against something hard, and I could push it no farther. It was exactly as if it had struck against the side of a wall, but no wall or anything else was to be seen. Reaching out my hand, I touched the same hard barrier, and in a moment I was on my feet.

"For I knew now that it was solid matter I had run into, not force. When I thrust out my hands, the edge of the circle was as far as they would go, for there they met a smooth wall, totally invisible, yet at the same time quite material. And the phenomenon was one which even I could partly understand. Somehow, in the dead past, the scientists of the city behind me, the 'wise men' mentioned in the inscription, had discovered the secret of making solid matter invisible, and had applied it to the work that I was now examining. Such a thing was far from impossible. Even our own scientists can make matter partly invisible, with the X-ray. Evidently these people had known the whole process, a secret that had been lost in the succeeding ages, like the secret of hard gold, and malleable glass, and others that we find mentioned in ancient writings. Yet I wondered how they had done this, so that, ages after those who had built the thing were wind-driven dust, it remained as invisible as ever.

I stood back and threw pebbles into the air, toward the circle. No matter how high I threw them, when they reached the line of the circle's edge, they rebounded with a clinking sound, so I knew that the wall must tower to a great height above me. I was on fire to get inside the wall and examine the place from the inside, but how to do it? There must be an entrance, but where? And I suddenly remembered the two guardian statues at the head of the great avenue, with their carven tablets, and wondered what

connection they had with this place.

"Suddenly the strangeness of the whole thing struck me like a blow. The great, unseen wall before me, the circle of sand, flat and unchanging, and myself, standing there and wondering, wondering. A voice from out the dead city behind me seemed to sound in my heart, bidding me to turn and flee, to get away. I remembered the warning of the inscription, 'Go not to Mamurth.' And as I thought of the inscription, I had no doubt that this was the great temple described by San-Drabat. Surely he was right: the like of it was not on earth elsewhere.

"But I would not go, I could not go, until I had examined the wall from the inside. Calmly reasoning the matter, I decided that the logical place for the gateway through the wall would be at the end of the avenue, so that those who came down the street could pass directly through the wall. And my reasoning was good, for it was at that spot that I found the entrance. An opening in the barrier, several yards wide, and running higher than I could reach, how high I had no means of telling.

"I FELT my way through the gate, and stepped at once upon a floor of hard material, not as smooth as the wall's surface, but equally invisible. Inside the entrance lay a corridor of equal width, leading into the center part of the circle, and I felt my way forward.

"I must have made a strange picture, had there been any there to observe it. For while I knew that all around me were the towering, invisible walls, and I knew not what else, yet all my eyes could see was the great flat circle of sand beneath me, carpeted with the afternoon sunshine. Only, I seemed to be walking a foot above the ground, in thin air. That was the thickness of the floor beneath me, and it was the weight of this great floor, I knew, that held the circle of sand under it forever flat and unchanging.

"I walked slowly down the passageway, with hands outstretched before me, and had gone but a short distance when I brought up against another smooth wall that lay directly across the corridor, seemingly making it a blind-alley. But I was not discouraged now, for I knew that there must be a door somewhere, and began to feel around me in search of it.

"I found the door. In groping about the sides of the corridor my hands encountered a smoothly rounded knob set in the wall, and as I laid my hand on this, the door opened. There was a sighing, as of a little wind, and when I again felt my way forward, the wall that had lain across the passageway was gone, and I was free to go forward. But I dared not go through at once. I went back to the knob on the wall, and found that no amount of pressing or twisting of it would close the door that had opened. Some subtle mechanism within the knob had operated, that needed only a touch of the hand to work it, and the whole end of the corridor had moved out of the way, sliding up in grooves, I think, like a portcullis, though of this I am not sure.

"But the door was safely opened, and I passed through it. Moving about, like a blind man in a strange place, I found that I was in a vast inner court, the walls of which sloped away in a great curve. When I discovered this, I came back to the spot where the corridor opened into the court, and then walked straight out into the court itself.

"It was steps that I encountered: the first broad steps of what was evidently a staircase of titanic proportion. And I went up, slowly, carefully, feeling before me every foot of the way. It was only the feel of the staircase under me that gave reality to it, for as far as I could see,

I was simply climbing up into empty space. It was weird beyond telling.

"Up and up I went, until I was all of a hundred feet above the ground, and then the staircase narrowed, the sides drew together. A few more steps, and I came out on a flat floor again, which, after some groping about, I found to be a broad landing, with high, railed edges. I crawled across this landing on hands and knees, and then struck against another wall, and in it, another door. I went through this, too, still crawling, and though everything about me was still invisible, I sensed that I was no longer in the open air, but in a great room.

"I stopped short, and then, as I crouched on the floor, I felt a sudden prescience of evil, of some malignant, menacing entity that was native here. Nothing I could see, or hear, but strong upon my brain beat the thought of something infinitely ancient, infinitely evil, that was a part of this place. Was it a consciousness, I wonder, of the horror that had filled the place in ages long dead? Whatever caused it, I could go no farther in the face of the terror that possessed me, so I drew back and walked to the edge of the landing, leaning over its high, invisible railing and surveying the scene below.

"The setting sun hung like a great ball of red-hot iron in the western sky, and in its lurid rays the two great statues cast long shadows on the yellow sands. Not far away, my two camels, hobbled, moved restlessly about. To all appearances I was standing on thin air, a hundred feet or more above the ground, but in my mind's eye I had a picture of the great courts and corridors below me, through which I had felt my way.

"Musing there in the red light, it was clear to me that this was the great temple of the city. What a sight it must have been, in the time of the city's life! I could imagine the long procession of priests and people, in somber and gorgeous robes, coming out from the city, between the great statues and down the long avenue, dragging with them, perhaps, an unhappy prisoner to sacrifice to their god in this, his temple.

"THE sun was now dipping beneath the horizon, and I turned to go, but before ever I moved, I became rigid and my heart seemed to stand still. For on the farther edge of the clear stretch of sand that lay beneath the temple and the city, a hole suddenly appeared in the sand, springing into being on the desert's face exactly like the one I had seen at my campfire the night before. I watched, as fascinated as by the eyes of a snake. And before my eyes, another and another appeared, not in a straight line, but in a zigzag fashion. Two such holes would be punched down on one side, then two more on the other side, than one in the middle, making a series of tracks, perhaps two yards in width from side to side, and advancing straight toward the temple and myself. And I could see nothing!

"It was like—the comparison suddenly struck me—like the tracks a many-legged insect might make in the sand, only magnified to unheard-of proportions. And with that thought, the truth rushed on me, for I remembered the spider carved on the ruins and on the statues, and I knew now what it had signified to the dwellers in the city. What was it the inscription had said? 'The evil god of the city, who has been there from the beginning of time.' And as I saw those tracks advancing toward me, I knew that the city's ancient evil god still dwelt here, and that I was in his temple, alone and unarmed.

"What strange creatures might there not have been in the dawn of time? And this one, this gigantic monster in a spider's form—had not those who built the city found it here when they came, and, in awe, taken

it as the city's god, and built for it the mighty temple in which I now stood? And they, who had the wisdom and the art to make this vast fane invisible, not to be seen by human eyes, had they done the same to their god, and made of him almost a true god, invisible, powerful, undying? Undying! Almost it must have been, to survive the ages as it had done. Yet I knew that even some kinds of parrots live for centuries, and what could I know of this monstrous relic of dead ages? And when the city died and crumbled, and the victims were no longer brought to its lair in the temple, did it not live, as I thought, by ranging the desert? No wonder the Arabs had feared the country in this direction! It would be death for anything that came even within view of such a horror, that could clutch and spring and chase, and yet remain always unseen. And was it death for me?

"Such were some of the thoughts that pounded through my brain, as I watched death approach, with those steadily advancing tracks in the sand. And now the paralysis of terror that had gripped me was broken, and I ran down the great staircase, and into the court. I could think of no place in that great hall where I might hide. Imagine hiding in a place where all is invisible! But I must go some place, and finally I dashed past the foot of the great staircase until I reached a wall directly under the landing on which I had stood, and against this I crouched, praying that the deepening shadows of dusk might hide me from the gaze of the creature whose lair this was.

"I KNEW instantly when the thing entered the gate through which I too had come. Pad, pad, pad—that was the soft, cushioned sound of its passage. I heard the feet stop for a moment by the opened door at the end of the corridor. Perhaps it was in surprize that the door was open, I thought, for how could I know how great or little intelligence lay in that unseen creature's brain? Then pad, pad—across the court it came, and I heard the soft sound of its passing as it ascended the staircase. Had I not been afraid to breathe, I would have almost screamed with relief.

"Yet still fear held me, and I remained crouched against the wall while the thing went up the great stairs. Imagine that scene! All around me was absolutely nothing visible, nothing but the great flat circle of sand that lay a foot below me, yet I saw the place with my mind's eye, and knew of the walls and courts that lay about me, and the thing above me, in fear of which I was crouching there in the gathering darkness.

"The sound of feet above me had ceased, and I judged that the thing had gone into the great room above, which I had feared to enter. Now if ever was the time to make my escape in the darkness, so I rose, with infinite carefulness, and softly walked across the court to the door that led into the corridor. But when I had walked only half of the distance, as I thought, I crashed squarely into another invisible wall across my path, and fell backward, the metal handle of the sheath-knife at my belt striking the flooring with a loud clang. God help me, I had misjudged the position of the door, and had walked straight into the wall, instead!

"I lay there, motionless, with cold fear flooding every part of my being. Then, pad, pad—the soft steps of thing across the landing, and then for a moment silence. Could it see me from the landing, I wondered. Could it? For a moment, hope warmed me, as no sound came, but the next instant I knew that death had me by the throat, for pad, pad—down the stairs it came.

"With that sound my last vestige

of self-control fled and I scrambled to my feet and made another mad dash in the direction of the door. Crash!—into another wall I went, and rose to my feet trembling. There was no sound of footsteps now, and as quietly as I could, I walked into the great court still farther, as I thought, for my whole ideas of direction were hopelessly confused. God, what a weird game it was we played there on that darkened circle of sand!

"No sound whatever from the thing that hunted me, and my hope flickered up again. And with a dreadful irony, it was at that exact moment that I walked straight into the thing. My outstretched hand touched and grasped what must have been one of its limbs, thick and cold and hairy, that was instantly torn from my grasp and then seized me again, while another and another clutched me also. The thing had stood quite still, leaving me to walk directly into its grasp —the drama of the spider and the fly!

"A moment only it held me, for that cold grasp filled me with such deep, shuddering abhorrence that I wrenched myself loose and fled madly across the court, stumbling again on the first step of the great staircase. I ran madly up those stairs, and even as I ran I heard the thing in pursuit, no soft steps now, but a rapid shuffle.

"Up I went, and across the landing, and grasped the edge of the railing, for I meant to throw myself down from there, to a clean death on the floor below. But under my hands, the top of the railing moved, one of the great blocks that evidently made up its top was loosened and rocked toward me! In a flash I grasped the great block and staggered across the landing with it in my arms, to the head of the staircase. Two men could hardly have lifted it, I think, yet I did more, in a sudden access of mad strength; for as I heard that monster coming swiftly up the great stairs, I raised the block, invisible as ever, above my head, and sent it crashing down the staircase upon the place where I thought the thing was at that moment.

"For an instant after the crash there was silence, and then a low humming sound began, that waxed into a loud droning. And at the same time, at a spot half-way down the staircase where the block had crashed, a thin, purple liquid seemed to well out of the empty air, giving form to a few of the invisible steps as it flowed over them, and outlining too, the block I had thrown, and a great hairy limb that lay crushed beneath it, and from which the fluid that was the monster's blood was oozing. I had not killed the thing, but had chained it down, as I thought, with the block that held it prisoner.

"There was a thrashing sound on the staircase, and the purple stream ran more freely, and by the outline of its splashes, I saw, dimly, the monstrous god that had been known in Mamurth in ages past. Like a giant spider, it was, with angled limbs that were yards long, and a hairy, repellent body. Even as I stood there, I wondered that the thing, invisible as it was, was yet visible by the life-blood in it, when that blood was spilled. Yet so it was, nor can I even suggest a reason. But one glimpse I got of its half-visible, purple-splashed outline, and then, hugging the farther side of the stairs, I descended. When I passed the thing, the intolerable odor of a crushed insect almost smothered me, and the monster itself made frantic efforts to loosen itself and spring at me. But it could not, and I got safely down, shuddering and hardly able to walk.

"Straight across the great court I went, and ran shakily through the corridor, and down the long avenue, and out between the two great statues. The moonlight shone on them, and the tablets of inscriptions stood out on the sides of the statues

clearly, with their strange symbols and carved spider forms. But I knew now what their message was!

"It was well that my camels had wandered into the ruins, for such was the fear that struck through me that I would never have returned for them had they lingered by the invisible wall. All that night I rode to the north, and when morning came I did not stop, but still pushed north. And as I went through the mountain pass, one camel stumbled and fell, and in falling burst open all my water supplies that were lashed on its back.

"No water at all was left, but I still held north, killing the other camel by my constant speed, and then staggered on, on foot. On hands and knees I crawled forward, when my legs gave out, always north, away from that temple of evil and its evil god. And tonight, I had been crawling, how many miles I do not know, and I saw your fire. And that is all."

HE LAY back exhausted, and Mitchell and I looked at each other's faces in the firelight. Then, rising, Mitchell strode to the edge of our camp and looked for a long time at the moonlit desert, that lay toward the south. What his thoughts were, I do not know. I was nursing my own, as I watched the man that lay beside our fire.

It was early the next morning that he died, muttering about great walls around him. We wrapped his body securely, and bearing it with us held our way across the desert.

In Algiers we cabled to the friends whose address we found in his money belt, and arranged to ship the body to them, for such had been his only request. Later they wrote that he had been buried in the little churchyard of the New England village that had been his childhood home. I do not think that his sleep there will be troubled by dreams of that place of evil from which he fled. I pray that it will not.

Often and often have Mitchell and I discussed the thing, over lonely campfires and in the inns of the seaport towns. Did he kill the invisible monster he spoke of, and is it lying now, a withered remnant, under the block on the great staircase? Or did it gnaw its way loose; does it still roam the desert and make its lair in the vast, ancient temple, as unseen as itself?

Or, different still, was the man simply crazed by the heat and thirst of the desert, and his tale but the product of a maddened mind? I do not think that this is so. I think that he told truth, yet I do not know. Nor shall I ever know, for never, Mitchell and I have decided, shall we be the ones to venture into that place of hell on earth where that ancient god of evil may still be living, amid the invisible courts and towers, beyond the unseen wall.

The most thrilling, most enthralling weird-scientific story ever written, "Across Space," by Edmond Hamilton, author of the above story, will begin in next month's issue. Don't fail to read this astonishing thrill-tale.

*No. 14. The Horla**

By GUY de MAUPASSANT

MAY 8. What a lovely day! I have spent the whole morning lying on the lawn in front of my house, under the great plane tree that shades the whole of it. I like this part of the country and I like to live here, for I am attached to it by old associations, by those deep and delicate roots which attach a man to the soil on which his ancestors were born and died, which attach him to the ideas and usages of the place as well as to the food, to local expressions, to the peculiar twang of the peasants, to the smell of the soil, of the villages and of the atmosphere itself.

I love the house in which I grew up. From my windows I can see the Seine, which flows alongside my garden, on the other side of the high road, almost through my grounds—the great and wide Seine, which goes to Rouen and Havre, and is covered with boats passing to and fro.

On the left, down yonder, lies the large town of Rouen, with its blue roofs, under its pointed Gothic towers. These are innumerable, slender or broad, dominated by the spire of the cathedral, and full of bells which sound through the blue air on fine mornings, sending their sweet and distant iron clang even as far as my home; that song of the metal, which the breeze wafts in my direction, now stronger and now weaker, according as the wind is stronger or lighter.

What a delicious morning it was!

About 11 o'clock, a long line of boats drawn by a steam tug as big as a fly, scarcely puffing as it emitted its thick smoke, passed my gate.

After two English schooners, whose red flag fluttered in the breeze, there came a magnificent Brazilian three-master, perfectly white, and wonderfully clean and shining. I saluted it, I hardly knew why, except that the sight of the vessel gave me great pleasure.

MAY 12. I have had a slight feverish attack for the last few days, and I feel ill, or rather I feel low-spirited.

Whence come those mysterious influences which change our happiness into discouragement, and our self-confidence into diffidence? One might almost say that the air, the invisible air, is full of unknowable Powers whose mysterious presence we have to endure. I wake up in the best spirits, with an inclination to sing. Why? I go down to the edge of the water, and suddenly, after walking a short distance, I return home wretched, as if some misfortune were awaiting me there. Why? Is it a cold shiver which, passing over my skin, has upset my nerves and given me low spirits? Is it the form of the clouds, the color of the sky, or the changeable color of the surrounding objects, that has troubled my thoughts as they passed before my eyes? Who can tell? Everything that surrounds us, everything that we see, without looking at it, everything that we touch, without

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**Translated from the French.*

knowing it, everything that we handle, without feeling it, all that we meet, without clearly distinguishing it, has a rapid, surprizing and inexplicable effect upon us and upon our senses, and, through them, upon our ideas and upon our heart itself.

How profound that mystery of the Invisible is! We can not fathom it with our miserable senses, with our eyes which are unable to perceive what is either too small or too great, too near to us or too far from us—neither the inhabitants of a star nor of a drop of water; nor with our ears that deceive us, for they transmit to us the vibrations of the air in sonorous notes. They are fairies who work the miracle of changing these vibrations into sound, and by that metamorphosis give birth to music, which makes the silent motion of nature musical . . with our sense of smell which is less keen than that of a dog, . . . with our sense of taste which can scarcely distinguish the age of a wine!

Oh! If we only had other organs which would work other miracles in our favor, what a number of fresh things we might discover around us!

May 16. I am ill, decidedly! I was so well last month! I am feverish, horribly feverish, or rather I am in a state of feverish enervation, which makes my mind suffer as much as my body. I have, continually, that horrible sensation of some impending danger, that apprehension of some coming misfortune, or of approaching death; that presentiment which is, no doubt, an attack of some illness which is still unknown, which germinates in the flesh and in the blood.

May 17. I have just come from consulting my physician, for I could no longer get any sleep. He said my pulse was rapid, my eyes dilated, my nerves highly strung, but there were no alarming symptoms. I must take a course of shower baths and of bromide of potassium.

May 25. No change! My condition is really very peculiar. As the evening comes on, an incomprehensible feeling of disquietude seizes me, just as if night concealed some threatening disaster. I dine hurriedly, and then try to read, but I do not understand the words, and can scarcely distinguish the letters. Then I walk up and down my drawing room, oppressed by a feeling of confused and irresistible fear, the fear of sleep and fear of my bed.

About 10 o'clock I go up to my room. As soon as I enter it I double-lock and bolt the door; I am afraid—of what? Up to the present time I have been afraid of nothing. I open my cupboards, and look under my bed; I listen—to what? How strange it is that a simple feeling of discomfort, impeded or heightened circulation, perhaps the irritation of a nerve filament, a slight congestion, a small disturbance in the imperfect delicate functioning of our living machinery, may turn the most light-hearted of men into a melancholy one, and make a coward of the bravest! Then, I go to bed, and wait for sleep as a man might wait for the executioner. I wait for its coming with dread, and my heart beats and my legs tremble, while my whole body shivers beneath the warmth of the bedclothes, until all at once I fall asleep, as though one should plunge into a pool of stagnant water in order to drown. I do not feel it coming on as I did formerly, this perfidious sleep which is close to me and watching me, which is going to seize me by the head, to close my eyes and annihilate me.

I sleep—a long time—two or three hours perhaps—then a dream—no—a nightmare lays hold on me. I feel that I am in bed and asleep . . . I feel it and I know it—and I feel also that somebody is coming close to me, is looking at me, touching me, is getting on to my bed, is kneeling on my chest, is taking my neck between his

hands and squeezing it—squeezing it with all his might in order to strangle me.

I struggle, bound by that terrible sense of powerlessness which paralyzes us in our dreams; I try to cry out—but I can not; I want to move—I can not do so; I try, with the most violent efforts and breathing hard, to turn over and throw off this being who is crushing and suffocating me—I can not!

And then, suddenly, I wake up, trembling and bathed in perspiration; I light a candle and find that I am alone, and after that crisis, which occurs every night, I at length fall asleep and slumber tranquilly till morning.

June 2. My condition has grown worse. What is the matter with me? The bromide does me no good, and the shower baths have no effect. Sometimes, in order to tire myself thoroughly, though I am fatigued enough already, I go for a walk in the forest of Roumare. I used to think at first that the fresh light and soft air, impregnated with the odor of herbs and leaves, would instil new blood into my veins and impart fresh energy to my heart. I turned into a broad hunting road, and then turned toward La Bouille, through a narrow path, between two rows of exceedingly tall trees which placed a thick green, almost black, roof between the sky and me.

A sudden shiver ran through me, not a cold shiver, but a strange shiver of agony, and I hastened my steps, uneasy at being alone in the forest, afraid, stupidly and without reason, of the profound solitude. Suddenly it seemed to me as if I were being followed, that somebody was walking at my heels, close, quite close to me, near enough to touch me.

I turned round suddenly, but I was alone. I saw nothing behind me except the straight, broad path, empty and bordered by high trees, horribly empty; before me it also extended until it was lost in the distance, and looked just the same, terrible.

I closed my eyes. Why? And then I began to turn round on one heel very quickly, just like a top. I nearly fell down, and opened my eyes; the trees were dancing round me and the earth heaved; I was obliged to sit down. Then, ah! I no longer remembered how I had come! What a strange idea! What a strange, strange idea! I did not the least know. I started off to the right, and got back into the avenue which had led me into the middle of the forest.

June 3. I have had a terrible night. I shall go away for a few weeks, for no doubt a journey will set me up again.

JULY 2. I have come back, quite cured, and have had a most delightful trip into the bargain. I have been to Mont Saint-Michel, which I had not seen before.

What a sight, when one arrives as I did, at Avranches toward the end of the day! The town stands on a hill, and I was taken into the public garden at the extremity of the town. I uttered a cry of astonishment. An extraordinarily large bay lay extended before me, as far as my eyes could reach, between two hills which were lost to sight in the mist; and in the middle of this immense yellow bay, under a clear, golden sky, a peculiar hill rose up, somber and pointed, in the midst of the sand. The sun had just disappeared, and under the still flaming sky appeared the outline of that fantastic rock which bears on its summit a fantastic monument.

At daybreak I went out to it. The tide was low, as it had been the night before, and I saw that wonderful abbey rise up before me as I approached it. After several hours' walking, I reached the enormous mass of rocks which supports the little town, dominated by the great church.

Having climbed the steep and narrow street, I entered the most wonderful Gothic building that has ever been built to God on earth, as large as a town, full of low rooms which seem buried beneath vaulted roofs, and lofty galleries supported by delicate columns.

I entered this gigantic granite gem, which is as light as a bit of lace, covered with towers, with slender belfries with spiral staircases, which raise their strange heads that bristle with chimeras, with devils, with fantastic animals, with monstrous flowers, to the blue sky by day, and to the black sky by night, and are connected by finely carved arches.

When I had reached the summit I said to the monk who accompanied me: "Father, how happy you must be here!" And he replied: "It is very windy here, *Monsieur;*" and so we began to talk while watching the rising tide, which ran over the sand and covered it as with a steel cuirass.

And then the monk told me stories, all the old stories belonging to the place—legends, nothing but legends.

One of them struck me forcibly. The country people, those belonging to the Mount, declare that at night one can hear voices talking on the sands, and then that one hears two goats bleating, one with a strong, the other with a weak voice. Incredulous people declare that it is nothing but the cry of the sea birds, which occasionally resembles bleatings, and occasionally human lamentations; but belated fishermen swear that they have met an old shepherd wandering between tides on the sands around the little town. His head is completely concealed by his cloak and he is followed by a billy goat with a man's face, and a nanny goat with a woman's face, both having long, white hair and talking incessantly and quarreling in an unknown tongue. Then suddenly they cease and begin to bleat with all their might.

"Do you believe it?" I asked the monk. "I scarcely know," he replied, and I continued: "If there are other beings besides ourselves on this earth, how comes it that we have not known it long since, or why have *you* not seen them? How is it that *I* have not seen them?" He replied: "Do we see the hundred-thousandth part of what exists? Look here: there is the wind, which is the strongest force in nature, which knocks down men, and blows down buildings, uproots trees, raises the sea into mountains of water, destroys cliffs and casts great ships on the rocks; the wind which kills, which whistles, which sighs, which roars. Have you ever seen it, and can you see it? It exists for all that, however."

I was silent before this simple reasoning. That man was a philosopher, or perhaps a fool; I could not say which exactly, so I held my tongue. What he had said had often been in my own thoughts.

July 3. I have slept badly; certainly there is some feverish influence here, for my coachman is suffering in the same way as I am. When I went back home yesterday, I noticed his singular paleness, and I asked him: "What is the matter with you, Jean?" "The matter is that I never get any rest, and my nights devour my days. Since your departure, *Monsieur,* there has been a spell over me."

However, the other servants are all well, but I am very much afraid of having another attack myself.

July 4. I am decidedly ill again; for my old nightmares have returned. Last night I felt somebody leaning on me and sucking my life from between my lips. Yes, he was sucking it out of my throat, like a leech. Then he got up, satiated, and I woke up, so exhausted, crushed and weak that I could not move. If this continues for a few days, I shall certainly go away again.

JULY 5. Have I lost my reason? What happened last night is so strange that my head wanders when I think of it.

I had locked my door, as I do now every evening, and then, being thirsty, I drank half a glass of water, and accidentally noticed that the water bottle was full up to the cut-glass stopper.

Then I went to bed and fell into one of my terrible sleeps, from which I was aroused in about two hours by a still more frightful shock.

Picture to yourself a sleeping man who is being murdered and who wakes up with a knife in his lung, and whose breath rattles, who is covered with blood, and who can no longer breathe and is about to die, and does not understand—there you have it.

Having recovered my senses, I was thirsty again, so I lit a candle and went to the table on which stood my water bottle. I lifted it up and tilted it over my glass, but nothing came out. It was empty! It was completely empty! At first I could not understand it at all, and then suddenly I was seized by such a terrible feeling that I had to sit down, or rather I fell into a chair. Then I sprang up suddenly to look about me; then I sat down again, overcome by astonishment and fear, in front of the transparent glass bottle. I looked at it with fixed eyes, trying to conjecture, and my hands trembled. Somebody had drunk the water, but who? I? I without any doubt. It could surely only be I. In that case I was a somnambulist; I lived, without knowing it, that mysterious double life which makes us doubt whether there are not two beings in us, or whether a strange, unknowable and invisible being does not at such moments, when our soul is in a state of torpor, animate our captive body, which obeys this other being, as it obeys us, and more than it obeys ourselves.

Oh! Who will understand my horrible agony? Who will understand the emotion of a man who is sound in mind, wide-awake, full of common sense, who looks in horror through the glass of a water bottle for a little water that disappeared while he was asleep? I remained thus until it was daylight, without venturing to go to bed again.

July 6. I am going mad. Again all the contents of my water bottle have been drunk during the night—or rather, I have drunk it!

But is it I? Is it I? Who could it be? Who? Oh, God! Am I going mad? Who will save me?

July 10. I have just been through some surprizing ordeals. Decidedly I am mad! And yet——

On July 6, before going to bed, I put some wine, milk, water, bread and strawberries on my table. Somebody drank—I drank—all the water and a little of the milk, but neither the wine, bread, nor the strawberries were touched.

On the seventh of July I renewed the same experiment, with the same results, and on July 8, I left out the water and the milk, and nothing was touched.

Lastly, on July 9, I put only water and milk on my table, taking care to wrap up the bottles in white muslin and to tie down the stoppers. Then I rubbed my lips, my beard and my hands with pencil lead, and went to bed.

Irresistible sleep seized me, which was soon followed by a terrible awakening. I had not moved, and there was no mark of lead on the sheets. I rushed to the table. The muslin round the bottles remained intact; I undid the string, trembling with fear. All the water had been drunk, and so had the milk! Ah, Great God! . . .

I must start for Paris immediately.

JULY 12. Paris. I must have lost my head during the last few days. I must be the plaything of my enervated imagination, unless I am really a somnambulist—or have I been under the power of one of those hitherto unexplained influences which are called suggestions? In any case, my mental state bordered on madness, and twenty-four hours of Paris sufficed to restore my equilibrium.

Yesterday, after doing some business and paying some visits which instilled fresh and invigorating air into my soul, I wound up the evening at the Théâtre-Français. A play by Alexandre Dumas the younger was being acted, and his active and powerful imagination completed my cure. Certainly solitude is dangerous for active minds. We require around us men who can think and talk. When we are alone for a long time, we people space with phantoms.

I returned along the boulevards to my hotel in excellent spirits. Amid the jostling of the crowd I thought, not without irony, of my terrors and surmises of the previous week, because I had believed—yes, I had believed—that an invisible being lived beneath my roof. How weak our brains are, and how quickly they are terrified and led into error by a small incomprehensible fact!

Instead of saying simply: "I do not understand because I do not know the cause," we immediately imagine terrible mysteries and supernatural powers.

July 14. Fête of the Republic. I walked through the streets, amused as a child at the firecrackers and flags. Still it is very foolish to be merry on a fixed date, by government decree. The populace is an imbecile flock of sheep, now stupidly patient, and now in ferocious revolt. Say to it: "Amuse yourself," and it amuses itself. Say to it: "Go and fight with your neighbor," and it goes and fights. Say to it: "Vote for the emperor," and it votes for the emperor, and then say to it: "Vote for the republic," and it votes for the republic.

Those who direct it are also stupid; only, instead of obeying men, they obey principles which can only be stupid, sterile, and false, for the very reason that they are principles, that is to say, ideas which are considered as certain and unchangeable, in this world where one is certain of nothing, since light is an illusion and noise is an illusion.

JULY 16. I saw some things yesterday that troubled me very much.

I was dining at the house of my cousin, Madame Sablé, whose husband is colonel of the 76th Chasseurs at Limoges. There were two young women there, one of whom had married a medical man, Dr. Parent, who devotes much attention to nervous diseases and to the remarkable manifestations taking place at this moment under the influence of hypnotism and suggestion.

He related to us at some length the wonderful results obtained by English scientists and by the doctors of the Nancy school; and the facts which he adduced appeared to me so strange that I declared I was altogether incredulous.

"We are," he averred, "on the point of discovering one of the most important secrets of nature; I mean to say, one of its most important secrets on this earth, for there are certainly others of a different kind of importance up in the stars, yonder. Ever since man has thought, ever since he has been able to express and write down his thoughts, he has felt himself close to a mystery which is impenetrable to his gross and imperfect senses, and he endeavors to supplement through his intellect the inefficiency of his senses. As long as that intellect remained in its elemen-

tary stage, these apparitions of invisible spirits assumed forms that were commonplace, though terrifying. Thence sprang the popular belief in the supernatural, the legends of wandering spirits, of fairies, of gnomes, ghosts, I might even say the legend of God; for our conceptions of the Workman-Creator, from whatever religion they may have come down to us, are certainly the most mediocre, the most stupid and the most incredible inventions that ever sprang from the terrified brain of any human beings. Nothing is truer than what Voltaire says: 'God made man in His own image, but man has certainly paid Him back in his own coin.'

"However, for rather more than a century men seem to have had a presentiment of something new. Mesmer and some others have put us on an unexpected track, and, especially within the last two or three years, we have arrived at really surprizing results."

My cousin, who is also very incredulous, smiled, and Dr. Parent said to her: "Would you like me to try and send you to sleep, *Madame?*"

"Yes, certainly."

She sat down in an easy chair, and he began to look at her fixedly, so as to fascinate her. I suddenly felt myself growing uncomfortable, my heart beating rapidly and a choking sensation in my throat. I saw Madame Sablé's eyes becoming heavy, her mouth twitching and her bosom heaving, and at the end of ten minutes she was asleep.

"Go behind her," the doctor said to me, and I took a seat behind her. He put a visiting card into her hands, and said to her: "This is a looking glass; what do you see in it?" And she replied: "I see my cousin." "What is he doing?" "He is twisting his mustache." "And now?" "He is taking a photograph out of his pocket." "Whose photograph is it?" "His own."

That was true, and the photograph had been given me that same evening at the hotel.

"What is his attitude in this portrait?" "He is standing up with his hat in his hand."

She saw, therefore, on that card, on that piece of white pasteboard, as if she had seen it in a mirror.

The young women were frightened, and exclaimed: "That is enough! Quite, quite enough!"

But the doctor said to Madame Sablé authoritatively: "You will rise at 8 o'clock tomorrow morning; then you will go and call on your cousin at his hotel and ask him to lend you five thousand francs which your husband demands of you, and which he will ask for when he sets out on his coming journey."

Then he woke her up.

On returning to my hotel, I thought over this curious séance, and I was assailed by doubts, not as to my cousin's absolute and undoubted good faith, for I had known her as well as if she were my own sister ever since she was a child, but as to a possible trick on the doctor's part. Had he not, perhaps, kept a glass hidden in his hand, which he showed to the young woman in her sleep, at the same time as he did the card? Professional conjurors do things that are just as singular.

So I went home and to bed, and this morning, at about half-past 8, I was awakened by my valet, who said to me: "Madame Sablé has asked to see you immediately, *Monsieur.*" I dressed hastily and went to her.

She sat down in some agitation, with her eyes on the floor, and without raising her veil she said to me: "My dear cousin, I am going to ask a great favor of you." "What is it, cousin?" "I do not like to tell you, and yet I must. I am in absolute need of five thousand francs." "What, you?" "Yes, I, or rather

my husband, who has asked me to procure them for him."

I was so thunderstruck that I stammered out my answers. I asked myself whether she had not really been making fun of me with Dr. Parent, if it was not merely a very well-acted farce which had been rehearsed beforehand. On looking at her attentively, however, all my doubts disappeared. She was trembling with grief, so painful was this step to her, and I was convinced that her throat was full of sobs.

I knew that she was very rich and I continued: "What! Has not your husband five thousand francs at his disposal? Come, think. Are you sure that he commissioned you to ask me for them?"

She hesitated for a few seconds, as if she were making a great effort to search her memory, and then she replied: "Yes—yes, I am quite sure of it." "He has written to you?"

She hesitated again and reflected, and I guessed the torture of her thoughts. She did not know. She only knew that she was to borrow five thousand francs of me for her husband. So she told a lie. "Yes, he has written to me." "When, pray? You did not mention it to me yesterday." "I received his letter this morning." "Can you show it me?" "No; no—it contained private matters—things too personal to ourselves. I burned it." "So your husband runs into debt?"

She hesitated again, and then murmured: "I do not know." Thereupon I said bluntly: "I have not five thousand francs at my disposal at this moment, my dear cousin."

She uttered a kind of cry as if she were in pain and said: "Oh! oh! I beseech you, I beseech you to get them for me!"

She got excited and clasped her hands as if she were praying to me. I heard her voice change its tone; she wept and stammered, harassed and dominated by the irresistible order that she had received.

"Oh! oh! I beg you to! If you only knew what I am suffering! I want them today."

I had pity on her: "You shall have them by and by, I swear to you." "Oh! thank you! thank you! How kind you are."

I continued: "Do you remember what took place at your house last night?" "Yes." "Do you remember that Dr. Parent sent you to sleep?" "Yes." "Oh! Very well, then; he ordered you to come to me this morning to borrow five thousand francs, and at this moment you are obeying that suggestion."

She considered for a few moments, and then replied: "But as it is my husband who wants them——"

For a whole hour I tried to convince her, but could not succeed, and when she had gone I went to the doctor. He was just going out, and he listened to me with a smile, and said: "Do you believe now?" "Yes, I can not help it." "Let us go to your cousin's."

She was already half asleep on a reclining chair, overcome with fatigue. The doctor felt her pulse, looked at her for some time with one hand raised toward her eyes, which she closed by degrees under the irresistible power of this magnetic influence, and when she was asleep, he said:

"Your husband does not require the five thousand francs any longer. You must, therefore, forget that you asked your cousin to lend them to you, and, if he speaks to you about it, you will not understand him."

Then he woke her up, and I took out a pocketbook and said: "Here is what you asked me for this morning, my dear cousin." But she was so surprized that I did not venture to persist; nevertheless, I tried to recall the circumstance to her, but she denied it vigorously, thought I was mak-

ing fun of her, and, in the end, very nearly lost her temper.

I have just come back, and I have not been able to eat any lunch, for this experiment has altogether upset me.

July 19. Many people to whom I told the adventure laughed at me. I no longer know what to think. The wise man says: "It may be!"

July 21. I dined at Bougival, and then I spent the evening at a boatmen's ball. Decidedly everything depends on place and surroundings. It would be the height of folly to believe in the supernatural on the Île de la Grenouillière—but on the top of Mont Saint-Michel?—and in India? We are terribly influenced by our surroundings. I shall return home next week.

JULY 30. I came back to my own house yesterday. Everything is going on well.

August 2. Nothing new; it is splendid weather, and I spend my days in watching the Seine flowing past.

August 4. Quarrels among my servants. They declare that the glasses are broken in the cupboards at night. The footman accuses the cook, who accuses the seamstress, who accuses the other two. Who is the culprit? It is a clever person who can tell.

August 6. This time I am not mad. I have seen—I have seen! I can doubt no longer—I have seen it!

I was walking at 2 o'clock among my rose trees, in the full sunlight, in the walk bordered by autumn roses which are beginning to fall. As I stopped to look at a Géant de Bataille, which had three splendid blossoms, I distinctly saw the stalk of one of the roses near me bend, as if an invisible hand had bent it, and then break, as if that hand had picked it. Then the flower raised itself, following the curve which a hand would have described in carrying it toward a mouth, and it remained suspended in the transparent air, all alone and motionless, a terrible red spot, three yards from my eyes. In desperation I rushed at it to take it. I found nothing; it had disappeared. Then I was seized with furious rage against myself, for a reasonable and serious man should not have such hallucinations.

But was it an hallucination? I turned round to look for the stalk, and I found it at once, on the bush, freshly broken, between two other roses which remained on the branch. I returned home then, my mind greatly disturbed; for I am certain now, as certain as I am of the alternation of day and night, that there exists close to me an invisible being that lives on milk and water, that can touch objects, take them and change their places; that is, consequently, endowed with a material nature, although it is imperceptible to our senses, and that lives as I do, under my roof——

August 7. I slept tranquilly. He drank the water out of my decanter, but did not disturb my sleep.

I wonder if I am mad. As I was walking just now in the sun by the river side, doubts as to my sanity arose in me; not vague doubts such as I have had hitherto, but definite, absolute doubts. I have seen mad people, and I have known some who have been quite intelligent, lucid, even clear-sighted in every concern of life, except on one point. They spoke clearly, readily, profoundly on everything, when suddenly their mind struck upon the shoals of their madness and broke to pieces there, and scattered and floundered in that furious and terrible sea, full of rolling waves, fogs and squalls, which is called madness.

I certainly should think that I was mad, absolutely mad, if I were not conscious, did not perfectly know my

condition, did not fathom it by analyzing it with the most complete lucidity. I should, in fact, be only a rational man who was laboring under an hallucination. Some unknown disturbance must have arisen in my brain, one of those disturbances which physiologists of the present day try to note and to verify; and that disturbance must have caused a deep gap in my mind and in the sequence and logic of my ideas. Similar phenomena occur in dreams which lead us among the most unlikely fantasmagoria, without causing us any surprize, because our verifying apparatus and our organ of control are asleep, while our imaginative faculty is awake and active. Is it not possible that one of the imperceptible notes of the cerebral keyboard has been paralyzed in me? Some men lose the recollection of proper names, of verbs, or of numbers, or merely of dates, in consequence of an accident. The localization of all the variations of thought has been established nowadays; why, then, should it be surprizing if my faculty of controlling the unreality of certain hallucinations were dormant in me for the time being?

I thought of all this as I walked by the side of the water. The sun shone brightly on the river and made earth delightful, while it filled me with a love for life, for the swallows, whose agility always delights my eye, for the plants by the river side, the rustle of whose leaves is a pleasure to my ears.

By degrees, however, an inexplicable feeling of discomfort seized me. It seemed as if some unknown force were numbing and stopping me, were preventing me from going farther, and were calling me back. I felt that painful wish to return which oppresses you when you have left a beloved invalid at home, and when you are seized with a presentiment that he is worse.

I, therefore, returned in spite of myself, feeling certain that I should find some bad news awaiting me, a letter or a telegram. There was nothing, however, and I was more surprized and uneasy than if I had had another fantastic vision.

August 8. I spent a terrible evening yesterday. He does not show himself any more, but I feel that he is near me, watching me, looking at me, penetrating me, dominating me, and more redoubtable when he hides himself thus than if he were to manifest his constant and invisible presence by supernatural phenomena. However, I slept.

August 9. Nothing, but I am afraid.

August 10. Nothing; what will happen tomorrow?

August 11. Still nothing; I can not stop at home with this fear hanging over me and these thoughts in my mind; I shall go away.

August 12. Ten o'clock at night. All day long I have been trying to get away, and have not been able. I wish to accomplish this simple and easy act of freedom—to go out—to get into my carriage in order to go to Rouen—and I have not been able to do it. What is the reason?

August 13. When we are attacked by certain maladies, all the springs of our physical being appear to be broken, all our energies destroyed, all our muscles relaxed; our bones, too, have become as soft as flesh, and our blood as liquid as water. I am experiencing these sensations in my moral being in a strange and distressing manner. I have no longer any strength, any courage, any self-control, not even any power to set my own will in motion. I have no power left to will anything; but someone does it for me and I obey.

AUGUST 14. I am lost! Somebody possesses my soul and dominates it. Somebody orders all my acts, all my movements, all my

thoughts. I am no longer anything in myself, nothing except an enslaved and terrified spectator of all the things I do. I wish to go out; I can not. He does not wish to, and, so I remain, trembling and distracted, in the armchair in which he keeps me sitting. I merely wish to get up and rouse myself; I can not. I am riveted to my chair, and my chair adheres to the ground in such a manner that no power could move it.

Then, suddenly, I must, I must go to the bottom of my garden to pick some strawberries and eat them, and I go there. I pick the strawberries and eat them. Oh, my God! My God! Is there a God? If there be one, deliver me! Save me! Pardon! Pity! Mercy! Save me! Oh, what suffering! What torture! What horror!

August 15. This is certainly the way in which my poor cousin was possessed and controlled when she came to borrow five thousand francs of me. She was under the power of a strange will which had entered into her, like another soul, like another parasitic and dominating soul. Is the world coming to an end?

But who is he, this invisible being that rules me? This unknowable being, this rover of a supernatural race?

Invisible beings exist, then! How is it, then, that since the beginning of the world they have never manifested themselves precisely as they do to me? I have never read of anything that resembles what goes on in my house. Oh, if I could only leave it, if I could only go away, escape, and never return! I should be saved, but I can not.

August 16. I managed to escape today for two hours, like a prisoner who finds the door of his dungeon accidentally open. I suddenly felt that I was free and that he was far away, and so I gave orders to harness the horses as quickly as possible, and I drove to Rouen. Oh, how delightful to be able to say to a man who obeys you: "Go to Rouen!"

I made him pull up before the library, and I begged them to lend me Dr. Hermann Herestauss' treatise on the unknown inhabitants of the ancient and modern world.

Then, as I was getting into my carriage, I intended to say: "To the railway station!" but instead of this I shouted—I did not say, but I shouted—in such a loud voice that all the passers-by turned round: "Home!" and I fell back on the cushion of my carriage, overcome by mental agony. He had found me again and regained possession of me.

August 17. Oh, what a night! What a night! And yet it seems to me that I ought to rejoice. I read until 1 o'clock in the morning! Herestauss, doctor of philosophy and theogony, wrote the history of the manifestation of all those invisible beings which hover around man, or of which he dreams. He describes their origin, their domain, their power; but none of them resembles the one that haunts me. One might say that man, ever since he began to think, has had a foreboding fear of a new being, stronger than himself, his successor in this world, and that, feeling his presence, and not being able to foresee the nature of that master, he has, in his terror, created the whole race of occult beings, of vague phantoms born of fear.

Having, therefore, read until 1 o'clock in the morning, I went and sat down at the open window, in order to cool my forehead and my thoughts, in the calm night air. It was very pleasant and warm. How I should have enjoyed such a night formerly!

There was no moon, but the stars darted out their rays in the dark heavens. Who inhabits those worlds? What forms, what living beings, what animals are there yonder? What do the thinkers in those distant worlds know more than we do? What can

they do more than we can? What do they see which we do not know? Will not one of them, some day or other, traversing space, appear on our earth to conquer it, just as the Norsemen formerly crossed the sea in order to subjugate natives more feeble than themselves?

We are so weak, so defenseless, so ignorant, so small, we who live on this particle of mud which revolves in a drop of water.

I fell asleep, dreaming thus in the cool night air, and when I had slept for about three-quarters of an hour, I opened my eyes without moving, awakened by I know not what confused and strange sensation. At first I saw nothing, and then suddenly it appeared to me as if a page of a book which had remained open on my table turned over of its own accord. Not a breath of air had come in at my window, and I was surprized, and waited. In about four minutes, I saw—yes, I saw with my own eyes!—another page lift itself up and fall down on the others, as if a finger had turned it over. My armchair was empty—at least it appeared empty—but I knew that he was there, sitting in my place, and that he was reading. With a furious bound, the bound of an enraged wild beast that springs at its tamer, I crossed my room to seize him, to strangle him, to kill him! But before I could reach it, the chair fell over as if somebody had run away from me—my table rocked, my lamp fell and went out, and my window closed as if some thief had been surprized and had fled out into the night, shutting it behind him.

So he had run away; he had been afraid; he, afraid of me!

But—but—tomorrow—or later—some day or other—I should be able to hold him in my clutches and crush him against the ground! Do not dogs occasionally bite and strangle their masters?

August 18. I have been thinking the whole day long. Oh, yes, I will obey him, follow his impulses, fulfil all his wishes, show myself humble, submissive, a coward. He is the stronger; but the hour will come——

AUGUST 19. I know—I know—I know all! I have just read the following in the *Revue du Monde Scientifique:* "A curious piece of news comes to us from Rio de Janeiro. Madness, an epidemic of madness, which may be compared to that contagious madness which attacked the people of Europe in the Middle Ages, is at this moment raging in the Province of Sao Paulo. The terrified inhabitants are leaving their houses, saying that they are pursued, possessed, dominated like human cattle by invisible, though tangible beings, a species of vampire, which feed on their life while they are asleep, and who, besides, drink water and milk without appearing to touch any other nourishment.

"Professor Don Pedro Henriques, accompanied by several medical savants, has gone to the province of Sao Paulo, in order to study the origin and the manifestations of this surprizing madness on the spot, and to propose such measures to the emperor as may appear to be most fitted to restore the mad population to reason."

Ah! Ah! I remember now that fine Brazilian three-master which passed in front of my windows as it was going up the Seine, on the 8th day of last May! I thought it looked so pretty, so white and bright! That *being* was on board of her, coming from there, where its race originated. And it saw me! It saw my house, which was also white, and it sprang from the ship on to the land. Oh, merciful heaven!

Now I know, I can divine. The reign of man is over, and he has come. He who was feared by primitive man; whom disquieted priests exorcised; whom sorcerers evoked on dark nights,

without having seen him appear, to whom the imagination of the transient masters of the world lent all the monstrous or graceful forms of gnomes, spirits, jinns, fairies and familiar spirits. After the coarse conceptions of primitive fear, more clear-sighted men foresaw it more clearly. Mesmer divined it, and ten years ago physicians accurately discovered the nature of his power, even before he exercised it himself. They played with this new weapon of the Lord, the sway of a mysterious will over the human soul, which had become a slave. They called it magnetism, hypnotism, suggestion—what do I know? I have seen them amusing themselves like rash children with this horrible power. Wo to us! Wo to man! He has come, the—the—what does he call himself?—the—I fancy that he is shouting out his name to me and I do not hear him—the—yes—he is shouting it out—I am listening—I can not—he repeats it—the—Horla—I hear—the Horla—it is he—the Horla—he has come!

Ah! the vulture has eaten the pigeon; the wolf has eaten the lamb; the lion has devoured the sharp-horned buffalo; man has killed the lion with an arrow, with a sword, with gunpowder; but the Horla will make of man what we have made of the horse and of the ox; his chattel, his slave and his food, by the mere power of his will. Wo to us!

But, nevertheless, the animal sometimes revolts and kills the man who has subjugated it. I should also like—I shall be able to—but I must know him, touch him, see him! Scientists say that animals' eyes, being different from ours, do not distinguish objects as ours do. And my eye can not distinguish this newcomer who is oppressing me.

Why? Oh, now I remember the words of the monk at Mont Saint-Michel: "Can we see the hundred-thousandth part of what exists? See here: there is the wind, the strongest force in nature, which knocks down man, and bowls down buildings, uproots trees, raises the sea into mountains of water, destroys cliffs and casts great ships on the breakers; the wind which kills, which whistles, which sighs, which roars—have you ever seen it, and can you see it? It exists for all that, however!"

And I went on thinking; my eyes are so weak, so imperfect, that they do not even distinguish hard bodies, if they are as transparent as glass. If a glass without tinfoil behind it were to bar my way, I should run into it, just as a bird which has flown into a room breaks its head against the windowpanes. A thousand things, moreover, deceive man and lead him astray. Why should it then be surprizing that he can not perceive an unknown body through which the light passes?

A new being! Why not? It was assuredly bound to come. Why should we be the last? We do not distinguish it any more than all the others created before us. The reason is, that its nature is more perfect, its body finer and more finished than ours, that ours is so weak, so awkwardly constructed, encumbered with organs that are always tired, always on the strain like machinery that is too complicated, which lives like a plant and like a beast, nourishing itself with difficulty on air, herbs and flesh, an animal machine which is a prey to maladies, to malformations, to decay; broken-winded, badly regulated, simple and eccentric, at once a coarse and a delicate piece of workmanship, the sketch of a being that might become intelligent and grand.

We are only a few, so few in this world, from the oyster up to man. Why should there not be one more, once that period is passed which separates the successive apparitions from all the different species?

Why not one more? Why not, also,

other trees with immense, splendid flowers, perfuming whole regions? Why not other elements besides fire, air, earth and water? There are four, only four, those nursing fathers of various beings. What a pity! Why are there not forty, four hundred, four thousand? How poor everything is, how mean and wretched, grudgingly produced, roughly constructed, clumsily made! Ah, the elephant and the hippopotamus, what grace! And the camel, what elegance!

But the butterfly, you will say, a flying flower! I dream of one that should be as large as a hundred worlds, with wings whose shape, beauty, colors and motion I can not even express. But I see it—it flutters from star to star, refreshing them and perfuming them with the light and harmonious breath of its flight! And the people up there look at it in an ecstasy of delight as it passes!

What is the matter with me? It is he, the Horla, who haunts me, and who makes me think of these foolish things! He is within me, he is becoming my soul; I shall kill him!

AUGUST 20. I shall kill him. I have seen him! Yesterday I sat down at my table and pretended to write very assiduously. I knew quite well that he would come prowling round me, quite close to me, so close that I might perhaps be able to touch him, to seize him. And then—then I should have the strength of desperation; I should have my hands, my knees, my chest, my forehead, my teeth to strangle him, to crush him, to bite him, to tear him to pieces. And I watched for him with all my over-excited senses.

I had lighted my two lamps and the eight wax candles on my mantelpiece, as if with this light I could discover him.

My bedstead, my old oaken post bedstead, stood opposite me; on my right was the fireplace; on my left, the door, which was carefully closed, after I had left it open for some time in order to attract him; behind me was a very high wardrobe with a looking glass in it, before which I stood to shave and dress every day, and in which I was in the habit of glancing at myself from head to foot every time I passed it.

I pretended to be writing in order to deceive him, for he also was watching me, and suddenly I felt—I was certain that he was reading over my shoulder, that he was there, touching my ear.

I got up, my hands extended, and turned round so quickly that I almost fell. It was as bright as at midday, but I did not see my reflection in the mirror! It was empty, clear, profound, full of light! But my figure was not reflected in it—and I, I was opposite it! I saw the large, clear glass from top to bottom, and I looked at it with unsteady eyes; and I did not dare to advance; I did not venture to make a movement, feeling that he was there, but that he would escape me again, he whose imperceptible body had absorbed my reflection.

How frightened I was! And then, suddenly, I began to see myself in a mist in the depths of the looking glass, in a mist as it were a sheet of water; and it seemed to me as if this water were flowing clearer every moment. It was like the end of an eclipse. Whatever it was that hid me did not appear to possess any clearly defined outlines, but a sort of opaque transparency which gradually grew clearer. At last I was able to distinguish myself completely, as I do every day when I look at myself.

I had seen it! And the horror of it remained with me, and makes me shudder even now.

August 21. How could I kill it, as I could not get hold of it? Poison? But it would see me mix it with the water; and then, would our poisons have any effect on its impalpable

body? No—no—no doubt about the matter—— Then—then?——

August 22. I sent for a blacksmith from Rouen, and ordered iron shutters for my room, such as some private hotels in Paris have on the ground floor, for fear of burglars, and he is going to make me an iron door as well. I have made myself out a coward, but I do not care about that.

SEPTEMBER 10. Rouen, Hotel Continental. It is done—it is done—but is he dead? My mind is thoroughly upset by what I have seen.

Well then, yesterday, the locksmith having put on the iron shutters and door, I left everything open until midnight, although it was getting cold.

Suddenly I felt that he was there, and joy, mad joy, took possession of me. I got up softly, and walked up and down for some time, so that he might not suspect anything; then I took off my boots and put on my slippers carelessly; then I fastened the iron shutters, and, going back to the door, quickly double-locked it with a padlock, putting the key in my pocket.

Suddenly I noticed that he was moving restlessly round me, that in his turn he was frightened and was ordering me to let him out. I nearly yielded; I did not, however, but, putting my back to the door, I half opened it, just enough to allow me to go out backward, and as I am very tall my head touched the casing. I was sure that he had not been able to escape, and I shut him up quite alone, quite alone. What happiness! I had him fast. Then I ran downstairs; in the drawing room, which was under my bedroom, I took the two lamps and poured all the oil on the carpet, the furniture, everywhere; then I set fire to it and made my escape, after having carefully double-locked the door.

I went and hid myself at the bottom of the garden, in a clump of laurel bushes. How long it seemed! Everything was dark, silent, motionless, not a breath of air and not a star, but heavy banks of clouds which one could not see, but which weighed—oh, so heavily!—on my soul.

I looked at my house and waited. How long it was! I already began to think that the fire had gone out of its own accord, or that he had extinguished it, when one of the lower windows gave way under the violence of the flames, and a long, soft, caressing sheet of red flame mounted up the white wall, and enveloped it as far as the roof. The light fell on the trees, the branches and the leaves, and a shiver of fear pervaded them also. The birds awoke, a dog began to howl, and it seemed to me as if the day were breaking. Almost immediately two other windows flew into fragments, and I saw that the whole of the lower part of my house was nothing but a terrible furnace. But a cry, a horrible, shrill, heartrending cry, a woman's cry, sounded through the night, and two garret windows were opened. I had forgotten the servants! I saw their terror-stricken faces, and their arms waving frantically.

Then, overwhelmed with horror, I set off to run to the village, shouting: "Help! help! fire! fire!" I met some people who were already coming to the scene, and I returned with them.

By this time the house was nothing but a horrible and magnificent funeral pile, a monstrous funeral pile, which lit up the whole country, a funeral pile where men were burning, and where He was burning also—He, He, my prisoner, that new being, the new master, the Horla!

Suddenly the whole roof fell in between the walls, and a volcano of flames darted up to the sky. Through all the windows which opened on that furnace, I saw the flames darting, and I thought that he was there, in that kiln, dead.

Dead? Perhaps! His body? Was not his transparent body indestructible by such means as would kill ours?

If he were not dead——? Perhaps time alone has power over that invisible and redoubtable being. Why this transparent, unrecognizable body, this body belonging to a spirit, if it also has to fear ills, infirmities and premature destruction?

Premature destruction? All human terror springs from that! After man, the Horla. After him who can die every day, at any hour, at any moment, by any accident, came the one who would die only at his own proper hour, day, and minute, because he had touched the limits of his existence!

No—no—without any doubt—he is not dead! Then—then—I suppose I must kill myself! . . .

STARKEY STRANG

By BERTRANDE HARRY SNELL

Up from his grave rose Starkey Strang, when midnight's foulest gloom
Cast evil blackness on the earth: up from his musty tomb
He came, all fleshless and unclad, for Starkey had been dead
Full ten score years, the faded script upon his tombstone said.
His dry bones rattled as he walked and in his awful eye
There gleamed a light that ne'er was born beneath an earthly sky.

From where the mouthing vampire moults beneath the vapid moon,
Where Shaitan sings with ghastly grin a rude and rimeless rune,
The while he fondles at his feet a pauper, or a king
That his feal fiends have flayed for him—a writhing, nameless *thing;*
Where flaunt the fiercely flickering flames above the horrid hole,
That holds in helpless horror full many a screeching soul,
Where nameless gnomes in robes of red blaspheme with lurid cries,
And ghastly ghouls guard well the gates, to snatch the soul that tries,
In hopeless way, to make escape, and hurl it back, once more,
Into the scorched and slithering mass that fills the fiery floor:
From such a place had Starkey come, through vacuous realms of Naught
(Though barely had he ventured through, so nearly was he caught),
To walk once more upon the earth, to see the world he knew;
Now wasn't that a foolish thing for Starkey Strang to do?

He ambled through the churchyard gate, his fleshless jaws agrin;
"Cogswounds!" said he; "a stoup or three I'll have at Piebald Inn."
He turned—and, oh! there at his heels a specter, all in white,
With soundless step and swaying robe, came slinking through the night;
Then fearsome was the frenzied shriek that tore the midnight air,
And formless was the pile of bones that lay, all lifeless, where
Poor Starkey Strang had stood, erstwhile . . . . Lift up your skulls and toast
The man who died a second time, because he saw a ghost!

The Mad Surgeon

by Wright Field



"Look at the doctor's eyes!" I cried. "He is going to murder me! He is going crazy!"

THERE was nothing complicated or unusual about my case, Dr. Shelton assured me. It was merely the old story, now written daily into the pages of innumerable lives, that my appendix, never of any value to me, had suddenly become a menace to my life, and therefore, like any other obstruction to health and happiness, was due to be removed with promptness and dispatch. There had been several recurring periods of severe pain in the region of the offending organ, but it so far diminished that I was a little doubtful of the urgency of the case, and might have demurred to the point of blank refusal had I been under treatment of a stranger.

But I had every confidence in my physician, who had been the unfailing port of shelter in every storm of sickness that had assailed my family since my earliest recollections. He had carried me through measles and typhoid and diphtheria, saved my mother's life at least twice, and prevented my father from undergoing a serious operation, against the judgment of several other doctors, pulling him through in fine shape. So I believed him when he said the operation was necessary, but that there was no danger, with the efficient and sanitary present-day methods and the well-equipped hospital at my disposal.

"You will probably emerge a younger man than you are," he said, smilingly, a remark that came back to me afterward. So I yielded to his superior judgment, as I had always done, placing myself wholly at his disposal. It meant only a small incision and ten or twelve days in bed, I comforted myself. So I found myself being trundled into an elevator and stretched upon a tall wheeled wagon, with a pretty, womanly nurse at my head.

In spite of my predicament, my eyes kept seeking her face. I had never really cared for any woman, though I was nearly thirty years old, and it struck me, as she smiled encouragingly down at me, that here was one in whom, on closer acquaintance, I could take a real interest. Her cap was as becoming as her smile, but it was a certain strong womanliness and dependableness in her countenance that elicited my admiration, rather than any perfection of outline

or coloring. I hoped it would be my good fortune to remain under her care while in the hospital, and I remember wondering, whimsically, if I wouldn't be the better off for remaining three weeks instead of the conventional ten days!

My father was with me, also, but when the elevator arrived at the door of the mysterious region known as the surgery, he was left outside, to his relief, I am quite sure.

I had never had occasion to take ether before. I felt a faint curiosity to know what the experience would be like, but this was speedily overcome by a livelier anxiety concerning the various uses of the glittering assortment of surgical tools quite frankly displayed on a glass table near the one upon which I was placed. I raised my head to examine them more closely, feeling a crawling sensation at the pit of my stomach as I wondered which particular instrument was going to sever the tissues of my own flesh within the next few minutes!

At that moment my pretty nurse withdrew, to be replaced by one of a very different type, swathed from head to foot in white. Dr. Shelton now entered the surgery, accompanied by a brother physician, both looking strangely inhuman, with their bare arms and shoulders, close-fitting white garments, and heads so bandaged in thin white cloths that little more than the eyes were visible . . . . Once or twice lately, I had noticed something odd about my doctor's eyes—he had those large, somewhat bulging, agate-colored orbs that can stare at you so effectively and persistently—and at this moment they gave me a sensation that I can only describe as fear, as he leaned over and gazed into mine for an endless moment.

His voice, when he remarked conventionally, but pleasantly, "Well, old man, how are you?" held an accent of sympathy that, for the first time in my acquaintance with him, had what I fancied an insincere ring, as if his mind were not on them, and the strange look in his eyes held me again.

They seemed to gloat over my condition, over my helplessness, and as he rubbed his hands together in a characteristic way he had, I thought his fingers were twitching for the knife and itching to get about the business of dissecting me. I saw no reason why I should have this hallucination, if that was what it was, because I had not even yet smelled the ether, and I had loved and trusted Dr. Shelton for years.

But, as he turned away, and his brother surgeon attempted to force the white cone down over my face, gently but firmly, I tried with all my strength to push it aside and to cry out: "Look at the doctor's eyes! He is going to murder me! He is going crazy!"

I think I succeeded in muttering the words, muffled by the object that was shutting out my breath, and obscuring my vision, but if I did, no one heeded them, and the next moment I seemed to be floating in a great sea of white light, a nebula of tiny sparkling points, with a sweetish, sickening odor in my nostrils, and an overpowering necessity of swallowing while a voice somewhere at a great distance urged me to take deeper breaths—and yet, through it all, Dr. Shelton's great bulging agate orbs burning into my own, and growing larger and larger.

I KNEW nothing more for a space of time that might have been long or short—I had no means of measuring it. But presently I came to myself, at what was apparently the touch of a finger on my bare eye-ball. The cone seemed now to have been removed, and the whole room was quite clear to my vision—that is, so much of it as was in line with my eyes.

There was no one else in the surgery except the two doctors and the nurse with the hard, sharp features and granite lips, the spareness of her profile perhaps accentuated by the tight arrangement of bandages confining every strand of hair.

I tried to raise my head, to observe Dr. Shelton's movements—but found, to my horror, that I could not move a muscle, not even so little as was necessary for the flicker of an eyelid.

You can imagine my anguish of mind when he raised himself, a moment later, from the table whereon I had seen the instruments, with a gleaming scalpel in his hand; and bent over my bared abdomen, having for one terrible moment fixed his wide gray orbs on mine with nothing less than a triumphant, fiendish, gloating glare!

There could be no doubt of it: the man was mad—stark, staring mad. And I, one of his best friends, lay there inert, helpless, unable to speak or move, about to be murdered, perhaps dissected like a dog! Why did not one of the others see it? I tried to look at the nurse and the other doctor pleadingly, but they betrayed no answering gleam of intelligence—indeed, they merely glanced carelessly at me now and then during the horrors of the operation that followed, apparently having eyes only for the scientific side of the thing, regarding me as a *thing* upon which to wreak any experiment that entered their heads!

The pain that followed the use of the knife upon my flesh was sharp, yet it was negligible compared with my mental suffering, for I knew now that a madman in the guise of a reputable and responsible physician was taking my precious life into his hands as nonchalantly as he would eat his breakfast. That the others could look on so callously added to my horror. Would one of them notice if he made a false move, in time to save my life? Or would he be so sly about it that they would not know it if he did? Or would they dare raise a hand against the judgment of a surgeon so skilful and well-known, even should they suspect that he was inclined to make some new experiment?

For I feared nothing so raw as his cutting me up before their eyes. There were a hundred ways in which so knowing and experienced a master of his craft might put an end to my life without arousing suspicion, unless the onlookers had some reason for watching him closely. The sly opening of some internal vein, the delicate —but here Dr. Shelton straightened up, having done whatever he would with my internals, tossing aside something with the muffled remark, "In another day it would have bursted," and then came the painful process of sewing up the lips of the incision.

Although I could see and think with agonizing clearness, I seemed unable to comprehend the idea of Time —it was as if Time had no beginning, middle, nor end, like eternity itself. So I have no idea how long he was about the operation. But I felt a great relief when he straightened up at last, and announced, "It is done!" He came to my head, then, and stood looking down at me for a long time—an endless time.

The great, bulging, agate eyes stared into mine with such burning intensity that I wanted to scream aloud for relief. But I was, to all intents and purposes, dead, except the seeing, thinking, hurting part of me, and felt that, after all, movement is life, whatever we may prate of the soul, of the spiritual, intellectual, emotional sides of our natures. . . . The other doctor joined him, and pressed the tip of his finger cruelly against my unmoving eye-ball. "Entirely under still," he announced, and Dr. Shelton nodded, with apparent satisfaction.

"And now," the latter's clarion tones rang through my inner consciousness like the tolling bells of doom, "now for the *real* operation!"

MY GOD! At last it had come—the thing I had feared from the beginning! No doubt he had removed my appendix in the professionally correct manner, his cunning purpose held in temporary abeyance; but now he was certainly going to put his nefarious designs upon my helpless person into immediate execution!

What was it to be? Something intricate and scientific and doubly fiendish, having to do with the delicate mechanism of my inner organs?—or anything so crass and commonplace as cutting off an arm or a leg, or gouging out an eye? He looked capable of anything, as he stood there, leering down at me, and I gave myself up at once as irrevocably lost. . . .

My last hope lay in the possibility of the nurse or the other doctor suspecting the true state of affairs, and putting a stop to the thing before it went too far, but this chance grew more and more remote, as I recalled the proverbial shrewdness and cunning of the insane, and that Dr. Shelton might easily hoodwink them into believing that this second operation was also necessary to my full recovery.

But I was due to receive a severe shock in this direction, also. Dr. Shelton motioned slightly to the nurse, as she drew near, and nodding, she turned quietly toward a small, white-enameled cabinet with glass doors and shelves, on a revolving stand behind her. She drew from this, without hesitation, a small vial filled with a clear, rosy purple liquid, and passed it to him without a word, across my passive but bursting breast, wherein ten thousand little red-hot devils of fear and torment raged.

The doctor held the vial up to the light, so that the sparkling rose-colored beams danced through it, and chuckled—a deep-throated, gloating, anticipatory chuckle!

"At last I have the chance to try you out, and to demonstrate beyond doubt your efficacy!" he chortled. Of course I could see the faces of the other occupants of the room only as they incidentally entered the limited circle of my vision, so that I could not immediately know what effect this statement, startling in its crude frankness, had upon his two auditors. But he went on in a confident tone, still caressing the fatal bottle, pregnant with so many possibilities of horror to me. Might it not be a slow and insidious poison he wished to experiment with—a thousand times more horrible than instant death?

"Of course, I have explained it all to you before, and we have tried it out on several animals, including man's nearest prototype, the ape, in all of which it ran true to form. But this opportunity to try it on a human being is priceless. I have chosen this man because we are intimate friends, and I will therefore have the better chance to watch its hourly and daily effect. Once I have demonstrated the value and efficiency of this drug beyond doubt and cavil, my fame in the world of medical science is assured. . . . I have spent the best years of my life in perfecting the discovery, and have dreamed night and day of putting it to practical use for the benefit of man. . . . Many have I besought to lend themselves to the glorious task of demonstrating to mankind my theory, but all have selfishly refused. . . . I can not see why; there is something positively fascinating in the idea! Think of it, my friends! Perfect, sparkling, radiant health, undiminishing youth and energy—the halting, as it were, of Time itself for a stated number of years, and then—the end, suddenly, painlessly, with all opportunities of making one's preparations beforehand!

"How many would be eager for it, or ought to be, once its value were demonstrated beyond doubt? The elderly actress, watching her health go and her charms fade and her audiences thin, while in her prime intellectually—by a few drops of this liquid rosy with promise, she can be granted ten more years of brilliant, vivacious youth, the only penalty being sure and sudden death at the end, a thing which, with the ordinary chances of life, might take her unawares at any moment, or come as the result of painful and lingering illness. The feeble, bald old man, in love with the beautiful young girl, for whom he would give his life—this potent elixir will give him five or ten years of youth and happiness. The invalid, dragging out a suffering existence in the wheel-chair, has but to have it injected into his heart to be granted a comparatively short but free and healthy life, with miraculous strength and vitality, and youth itself renewed with all its hopes and ambitions!

"I only wish"—his voice dropped a bit here, while his tone, hitherto triumphant, became a bit regretful—"that it were possible to make the lease of life longer; but so far, ten years must be considered the limit. No system will longer withstand the terrible strain put upon it—the energy and vigor which should last a healthy man three score and ten years, drained out, as it were, in a brief, concentrated period! In this case, I shall use just enough to limit the man's life to five years from this date, because I am anxious to study the case at first hand, to learn if the end is as sudden and as painless as it is with the lower animals, and if it will fall as planned, exactly on the date five years hence. Five drops—five years!"

This was not the raving of a madman—unless the very coldness of the calculating scientist be madness! And as the other doctor came into my line of vision, I saw him nod, gravely and understandingly, and he, too, had the light of the fanatic in his eyes! As for the granite-lipped nurse, she set about preparing me for this further operation as calmly and methodically as if I had been only going to have my tonsils removed.

THERE was no longer even a glimmer of hope; they were three monsters leagued together in a common cause, caring no more for me personally than they would have cared for a common street mongrel they were going to dissect, intent only upon demonstrating a cold theory.

I grew as icy as death, all my pain numbed under this terrible strain of danger and helplessness, and made a last vain struggle, wholly mental, to break my bonds and speak! I might as well have tried to move, with my bare hands, the Washington monument. . . .

If only he would grant me ten years! Even that period looked short indeed to a man of thirty, just beginning to value life, and having had high hopes of reaching three score and ten. But five—five short winters, five sunny summers, and all would be over! And of what value to me would this wonderful elixir be, in any case? I was young enough, and usually in good health, and quite satisfied with life as it came to me. Yet this terrible creature granted me five years as ruthlessly as if he were planning to kill a beef after fattening it for a number of months. That I should be a martyr to science consoled me not at all, for I cared more for one red-blooded year of life than for all the dry-as-dust science in the world!

I was vividly aware when the edge of the scalpel touched my flesh. Yet the pain was not so terrible as I had expected, being sharp and quick. The awful sickening moment when my soul was ground to powder beneath

the wheels of agony, and I hoped that I was dying under the villain's hand, came when he reached in, with as little compunction as he would have suffered in pulling a beet, and lifted my palpitating heart from its bed!

He seemed to hold it in his hands for eons of time, and it beat and quivered and fluttered there, but in spite of my agony I observed the gesture with which he beckoned the nurse, and the hypodermic needle which she filled from the bottle and handed him.

Then came the sharp sting of the needle entering the heart itself, and for me the whole world swam in rose-color, with tens of thousands of flickering points dancing through it, like motes through a sunbeam. When my vision cleared again, all was apparently over, the bandages in place, and Dr. Shelton talking calmly to his confrere. "Five drops—five years, at this hour," was all I caught, before I drifted away into a deep, restful sleep.

IN THE course of time I recovered. I do not recall what cock-and-bull story Dr. Shelton put up to account for the scar on my breast, but I pretended to swallow his explanations, and even to thank him for his efforts in my behalf. I do not know what kept my hands from his throat during those first days when he bent over me with an expression of pretended sympathy, but I know I was only biding my time to get my revenge.

Meanwhile, I had but five years to live. I set about to get the most out of them. It never occurred to me to doubt that the unscrupulous fiend who had wrought my ruin was not right in every detail of his careful scheme. I fully expected health for the stated period, with sudden death at the end of it.

But I was hardly prepared for the complete rejuvenation, the abounding energy, the glow of ambition and optimism, which followed speedily on my complete recovery. So strong and vigorous and hopeful and happy was I, that even my natural hatred of Dr. Shelton and my morbid desire for revenge gradually subsided, until I hardly thought of it at all.

Not very long after the operation, I met a young woman with whom I fell in love with all the ardor of healthy, red-blooded young manhood. Alice had softly waving bronze hair, brown eyes with reddish lights in their depths, a bewitching, tantalizing dimple that came and went at the corner of her mouth on the slightest provocation, and a tiny round black spot just beneath her left eye, where the soft skin crinkled when she laughed. Our wooing was not "long a-doing," which is not to be wondered at when it is remembered that I had never before met a woman who interested me even temporarily; and we were married just one year from the date of the fatal operation, by a freak of fate, at the very same hour, 3 p. m.

It may have looked selfish in me to marry the girl I loved with the certainty of death ahead of me in such a short time, but I argued that the happiness of the intervening four years would be as much hers as mine, and that all must take such chances when they marry. Also, with my abundant health and unfading youth, I had an opportunity to add enough to my fortune to place her beyond the possible chance of want. I took out very heavy life insurance, being considered an excellent risk by the physician who examined me.

Dr. Shelton came and went at will, attending my wife's small ailments and watching his "case," as I supposed, but I was so happy in my married life that I had little thought to spare to him. And so the second and third and fourth years went by like a happy dream, and Alice presented me with a little son. . . .

There was only a moment of nightmare now and then, when something came up to remind me how short was to be my earthly span! And then something happened that opened my eyes to another complication in the plot; Dr. Shelton was becoming altogether too fond of my wife!

It was at this point in my life that the iron entered into my soul, and I began brooding and planning anew my vengeance on the man who had taken my life into his hands. . . .

The tenth of July came at last—the fatal day. I arose feeling as well as usual, but by noon I noticed my heart-beats growing a little slower, and also detected slight signs of fever. It was the first feeling of physical discomfort that I had experienced in five years, and I had not the slightest doubt that it betokened the end.

I spoke of it to Alice, asking her to telephone for Dr. Shelton, and on no account to enter my room after he came, nor until the following morning. I pressed tender kisses of farewell upon her wondering face, and having sent her away, I set about my preparations for murdering the doctor before my own end should come.

As he entered my room, a hypocritically professional smile on his lips and a scarcely-veiled triumph in his eyes, I seized him and gagged him—for my strength was still prodigious, in spite of my rapidly failing heart-beats. Then I bound him with leather straps to a bare table that I had dragged into the middle of the floor, having first coolly stripped his coat, shirt, and undershirt from his body. I produced a shining knife from his own bag (he had just come from the surgery) and flourished it meaningly before his horrified eyes.

"Do you remember what you did to me five years ago today, at 3 o'clock?" I asked, through closed teeth, my fingers writhing about the handle of the knife. "It is now my turn. I have still an hour in which to wreak my vengeance, and it shall be to the full! I am going to cut your heart out, and leave it to a museum for natural freaks, for, although you still live, it has been petrified for five years!"

Another moment, and I would have plunged the shining blade into his bosom. But my own moment of dissolution was come. . . . a numbness seized me, my nerveless hand loosened its grip on the knife, that clattered to the floor, everything grew dark, my heart-throbs seemed to cease entirely, and I felt myself falling—falling, through endless blackness. My last conscious thought was a bitter, poignant reflection on the injustice of everything, of the vengeance cruelly torn from my grasp at the last moment.

I OPENED my eyes, to find the sun shining across a well-ordered hospital room, reflected from a vase of rose-colored flowers similar to those carried by the nurse who had accompanied my little wagon into the elevator, previous to the operation. And at my side, the same sun bringing out golden light in the waving bronze hair above her smooth forehead, the same nurse!

I gazed up at her for a time in puzzled silence. She had brown eyes with reddish lights in their depths, a bewitching, tantalizing dimple that came and went at the corner of her mouth on the slightest provocation, and a tiny round black spot just under her left eye, where the soft skin would crinkle when she laughed. . . . Alice, of course. . . but Alice was not a nurse. And she wouldn't have left the baby at home, anyway. Then my glance fell upon a calendar on the wall.

"Why," I gasped, involuntarily, "that calendar still says 1925."

"Precisely," smiled my nurse, her soft hand slipping from my wrist, as she snapped shut the little gold watch she had been studying. Then she added, teasingly, "How long did you suppose you had been under the anesthetic?"

"Five years," I answered, faintly and somewhat doubtfully. The dimple danced merrily at the corner of her mouth, as she smothered a peal of low, silvery laughter.

"You were under just a few minutes," she answered, "and I thought that quite long enough."

"Where is—Dr. Shelton?" I managed to ask, after another minute's study.

Her sweet face grew grave and concerned—just as I had seen it do a thousand times in the past four years (now fast receding with the things that were not) over the misfortunes of another.

"Poor old doctor! You were hardly under the ether when he collapsed. It seemed he has been overworking, and a serious fever is setting in. His colleague, young Dr. Strahorn, knew much about your case, and thought Dr. Shelton might not have been entirely responsible when he insisted on removing your appendix, without more serious symptoms having set in. So they did not operate, after all, but you are to remain here ten days for treatment, just the same."

I gasped. Now, my brain having cleared rapidly, I knew what it was I had seen in his eyes as I went under—merely the premonitory symptoms of the breakdown brought on by a too conscientious adherence to his duty. And I had tried to murder him . . . but no, had I? Where were the past five years, anyway?

I felt a sudden stinging sensation in the center of my breast. Misgivings again seized me.

"Alice," I asked, gravely, "are you sure there was *no* operation performed?"

"Of course I am," she answered.

Then a look of remembrance came into her eyes.

"Oh yes, I forgot. Dr. Strahorn thought it a good opportunity, while you were so sound asleep, to remove that large mole on your chest. You didn't mind, did you?"

I shook my head, and then lay quite still, studying her delicate profile.

"How did you know that my name is Alice?" she asked, suddenly.

"I do not know," I answered, truthfully.

And to this day I do not know. We were quite alone. I put out my hand feebly and touched hers, to attract her attention. She seemed to have forgotten me in the contemplation of some problem far removed.

"Alice," I asked, gravely, "will you marry me?"

"Certainly not," she answered, in a matter-of-fact tone, though perhaps the rose-colored flowers had thrown a brighter reflection on her cheeks. "You have known me less than half an hour."

"I have known and loved you for more than four years," I answered, earnestly. She looked at me in a shocked way, and opening the little gold watch, began counting my pulse again in a professional manner.

I TURNED my head on my pillow with a satisfied sigh, at the touch of her soft little hand, that had soothed my dreams a hundred times in the past, still real to me. Ah, well, of course she could not be expected to understand until I had a chance to explain! But I was sure of ten days, at any rate—which is quite long enough for the wooing of a man who has been thirty years about beginning it!

The DEVIL'S GRAVEYARD

by

G. G. Pendarves



"There upon the open grave stood Giles, a gigantic shadow, and bestial, uncouth forms surged forward with horrid effort to pass the barrier of fire."

"YOU don't understand, John! I used to laugh at it, too, but these last months the thought of that old curse has been more and more in my mind."

"Well, dear, why worry yet? It will be time enough if this proves to be a boy; after all, we may have a daughter at last."

"No! I feel convinced it will be another boy, and the words of that old saying go round and round in my head:

"When Radcliffe's heir has brothers six
And seeks to take to wife
The only child of Blackmore's line,
The Curse shall wake to life."

"But, Agnes, you are really inventing worries. Supposing this seventh is a boy! According to the silly jingle you quoted, the worst will only happen about twenty years hence, if our eldest boy should happen to fall in love with Blackmore's small daughter. And after all, it's absurd," he went on. "She might have any number of brothers and sisters in the interval—or she might even die," he added hopefully.

"You may make light of it, and I know it sounds absurd; but I feel so afraid, so miserably afraid, as though some black shadow was by my side, always whispering and threatening."

"My dear," said Radcliffe, now genuinely alarmed, "You musn't let go like that! It's only a foolish old story, kept up by one generation after another. All old families boast of hidden treasures, or a curse, or a ghost, or something of that nature—it goes with the estate. You must not get fancies like that into your head, dear."

He got up and crossed the room to where his wife was sitting in the sunny window embrasure, and stood looking at her in a puzzled way, as though she were a new hybrid which had appeared among his treasured plants, and could not be accounted for. He was devoted to his wife, but hitherto she had been so normal and well-balanced that this strange fantastic notion of hers worried him considerably. It was so utterly unlike her.

"Better have Dr. Green up tomorrow and have a chat with him."

His wife suppressed a sigh. It was impossible to make him take her seriously. It was of no use to try to explain the awful weight that pressed upon her heart—the monstrous fear that oppressed her. He put it all down to her health, and brushed aside her premonitions as mere fancies.

But at the same time it comforted her that he should take this attitude. His unimaginative practical outlook on life, and careless way of disbeliev-

ing what he did not understand, actually did, for the moment, make her feel that perhaps after all her fears were only imaginary.

She smiled at her husband in the sudden relief of her thought, as he bent down to kiss her and, drawing her wrap about her shoulders, said:

"It would do you good to have a turn round the grounds, Agnes. I'll take you down to the potting sheds. There are some new hybrids there that will surprize you. Perfect specimens! Even old Burns was almost enthusiastic about them; he never believed I could get that blue dahlia."

THE stillness of a golden October evening enveloped the big room where so many generations of Radcliffes had first seen the light. Mrs. Radcliffe lay dying in that room now.

Her husband, bewildered and helpless, faced with the first great sorrow in a hitherto placid existence, stood over by one of the windows, staring out over the far-stretching acres of the Radcliffe estate.

The six elder sons had come and gone, she would see them no more; and on them, especially David, her first-born and dearest, the mother's thoughts were centered.

She glanced from time to time at the cot, where slept her seventh son. Who was he? What was he? Why did her whole being shrink from the tiny helpless thing? She had turned from him with loathing, when the nurse showed him to her first—how long ago was that? A day, or an hour? It was all a mist and confusion in her brain. But after that they had troubled her with him no more.

She looked again at the child. What was that dark shadow? Why did it move when everything else was still in that quiet room?

A little cloud resting on the cot. A vapor exhaling from the body of the child. Rapidly it darkened and spread, and soon loomed gigantic to the ceiling. Very slowly, almost imperceptibly, it took form and shape! Its vague outlines became sharp and definite, and presently something dimly approaching the semblance of a man towered there—a leering unholy thing! Its menacing bulk, shapeless and uncouth as one of the lesser animals in the far-off days of the primeval world! Its cold unsmiling eyes in dreadful contrast to the mouth distended in silent horrid laughter! Its bloated features a travesty of man even at his most vile!

The evil hour had dawned. This was the horror which had haunted her so long, this was the doom that would haunt her first-born!

She tried to call out—to move, and the pale eyes of that accursed thing gleamed evilly upon her efforts.

One last awful struggle with the icy numbness that pressed upon her limbs, and then the mother gave one great cry, pointing a shaking finger at the cot.

"The Curse! Kill—kill the child!"

John Radcliffe turned instantly; he saw nothing but the awful look on his wife's face as she fell back, and before he could reach her side she was gone—her heart had stopped in that supreme effort; and all unseen as Radcliffe stooped over the bed, that fell shadow moved about the silent room, and presently withdrew itself once more to the human habitation which sheltered it.

2

FAR up among the heather which spread its rich carpet to the very verge of his own fields and parklands, David Radcliffe sat, and by his side the girl who had just promised to marry him.

They were both extremely happy. The sun seemed to be shining for their especial benefit, the deep glowing colors of sky and moor to be painted just as a background for their joy.

"There is nothing to wait for, Maisie dear," said the man. "Now that my father is dead I must live at The Turrets altogether, and curb my desire for travel and expeditions. But you must marry me soon—very soon! I can't face the great lonely old place for very long without you. There's only Hirst at home now, and I see as little of him as possible."

"I shall feel dreadful about leaving my poor old dad by himself, though," answered the girl. "I know he would never consent to come and live at Radcliffe Turrets with us; he would never have a happy moment away from all those old Blackmore ancestors who gloom down on us from the walls. You've no idea how I dislike some of them."

"I expect you will dislike some of mine even more," laughed David, as he turned to kiss the sunburnt cheek so near his own.

"Well, for sheer ugliness I think the Blackmores score; your family was really rather handsome. But, of course, that horrible portrait you boast of is worse than all mine put together."

"Oh, you mean the man who was nick-named 'Giles the Thruster,' because he fought so many duels. He had a rather sinister reputation, and his face matches it. It is a very famous portrait, though."

"I hate it," said Maisie with a little shiver. "That sneering mouth and those long narrow eyes. Oh, it's a wicked face!"

David put a protecting arm about her.

"Well, it's only a picture after all; he's dead, hundreds of years ago."

"Yes, and I am very glad too. That old legend of the Radcliffe Curse is about him, isn't it?"

"Yes," answered David. "He said he was coming back to haunt us. I'm the one he ought to haunt, too! The eldest of seven sons, and you are a Blackmore, and an only child."

"Oh, David, what a perfectly horrid idea! Are you really the one that is meant in the Curse?"

He replied laughingly, "Yes, I really am. But, of course, it's only a fairy tale."

"What was the whole story of the Curse, dear? Why did your ancestor curse anybody at all?"

"Well, if you will promise not to take it seriously, I will tell you. I read it in some old manuscripts I found once in a secret drawer. The story goes that in the Thirteenth Century there was, as now, a family of seven Radcliffe brothers, and the youngest was this Giles the Thruster. He was betrothed to a girl, the only daughter of a Blackmore, whose land adjoined ours then, as it does now.

"The eldest Radcliffe also loved this girl, and the two of them ran away together. Giles pursued them, caught them up on the road, and the two men fought a duel in which Giles, blind with fury, missed his stroke, and was fatally wounded, and died, and was buried there in the clearing by the roadside, where they had fought. In dying, he cursed his brother bitterly, and swore that he would come again to earth and take his revenge.

"He prophesied that history would repeat itself, and that in the future once more seven Radcliffe brothers should be born, and the eldest again desire to wed a Blackmore's only daughter. Giles vowed that then he would return to snatch the girl from that eldest born, and cheat him of his love as he himself had been cheated."

"Oh, David! How awful if such things really could happen!"

"Well, they can't. We don't live in the Dark Ages now, darling. I am afraid old Giles would have a rough time of it if he returned to England in these post-war days. Everything got killed in the war. Religion and superstition alike. People only be-

lieve in what can be seen and paid for now."

"Nonsense, David! — Of course they——"

She broke off and turned to look at him. He had let his arm drop from her shoulders, and was sitting up stiffly, his eyes fixed on something ahead.

"Why, what's the matter? What are you looking at, David?"

She caught his arm, her own rosy color fading as she saw his dreadful pallor and the stricken look in his eyes.

"David! David! Answer me. Oh, do speak! There's nothing there!"

She beat with her little hand on the man's clenched fist, but he neither moved nor answered her.

"Oh, you must be ill. What shall I do? Can't you speak to me—just a word, dear?"

But he sat in frozen silence, his face a mask of horror.

At last she got up and moved toward the spot on which David's eyes were fixed so intently. Suddenly the wide sweep of moors seemed desolate, almost menacing. A dark cloud blotted out the sunshine, and a little squall of wind rushed up angrily against her as she moved forward.

"Come back, Maisie. A—a—h—h! come back."

The voice rose almost to a scream, and she turned to see David plunging over the heather toward her. He seized her roughly by the arm and dragged her away, and then stood holding her, panting as though he had run a race.

The reaction of finding him apparently recovered made her irritable, and she said, "I'm not going to run away; you needn't clutch me like that. What on earth is the matter with you, David?"

The man did not answer, but clasped her to him, his lips moving silently. He did not heed her questions, but began to walk away rapidly, holding her hand in his, and urging her to greater haste.

Once or twice he pushed up against her, as though to avoid someone or something at his other side, his hand gripping hers convulsively.

Maisie was first frightened and then annoyed at his behavior. Why couldn't he explain? It was ridiculous—dragging her across the moors like this.

She wrenched her hand free at last, and said, "I can't go so quickly. Leave me, David; I would rather go home alone."

He turned a white face to her, as she stood looking up at him, her brown curls all blown about her pretty face, her gray eyes wide and indignant.

Her heart melted when she saw his look, and she said, "Oh, my dear, what is it? Do tell me. I can't bear to be treated like this. You look as though you had seen a ghost!"

Then as David recoiled, the horror on his face was reflected on her own, and she said, in a terrified whisper, "Oh, David, have you seen something? What was it? Tell me!"

The man's lips moved, but no sound was audible. Maisie clasped his arm.

"Was it really a ghost?" she whispered, with a horrified glance over her shoulder. "Oh, let us go then, quickly; it may come back; it's so lonely here."

For answer David put his hand to his throat with a sudden sharp intake of breath.

"Go away—go away," he managed to gasp out. She fell back a few paces, her frightened eyes glued to his face.

"But why won't you let me touch you? I want to be near you, David."

"No, no," he muttered. "Keep away. It's—it's—oh, Maisie, it's the Curse!"

At the last word he shivered like one in an ague, and backed away still farther from the girl, his outstretched

hands repelling something terrible and unseen.

She covered her face and stood trembling and shaking in every limb.

David stood looking at her miserably, then he sprang to her side and, taking her in his arms, said, "Kiss me good-bye, Maisie. Quick, ah, quick! Before he——"

But as the girl raised her face to his, David jerked back violently, with such abruptness that Maisie almost lost her balance.

"Go home—run—run, darling," came David's voice, low and urgent. "It's no use. We may not be together."

At that she turned, and ran obediently in the opposite direction, looking over her shoulder at intervals to see him walking away, his head bent, his whole figure shrunk together like that of an old man.

3

A WHOLE week went by, and still Maisie, beside herself with constant anxiety, saw and heard nothing of David.

The memory of his face with that gray shadow of fear upon it, and the agony of his eyes haunted her night and day. She had never known how dear he was to her until now, when this awful invisible agency had thrust them asunder.

Her heart was torn between the longing to see him and the fear of adding to his sufferings if she did so.

Every day she wandered aimlessly about the moors, seeking the high levels where she could command a view of the country round, and perhaps catch a glimpse of his tall figure.

When dark came, she kept watch from the window of her room, staring for hours in the direction of Radcliffe Turrets, where the many lighted windows shone; and she pictured David alone and wanting her. All night she would keep the vigil, with the feeling that so she might help him, that her love would protect him when night and its evil shadows closed in around him; and when dawn came she would fall into heavy sleep, troubled by many dreams in which she and David fled over land and sea, pursued by a monster which would not let her go.

Then one day she saw him! It was late afternoon when she came upon him, sitting on a rough boulder, apparently watching the sun sinking into a smoky gray cloud-bank, which like a forest of dreams rose on the western horizon.

"David!—Oh, at last, my dear!"

She ran eagerly toward him, and he rose at the sound of her clear voice, and made as if to meet her. But at the first step he fell back suddenly, clutching the rock behind him with one hand and holding the other arm before his face, as though to ward off some invisible opponent.

"Don't come near me, Maisie," his voice came in a choking cry.

The girl stood rooted, and a great nausea swept over her as she watched the unspeakable loathing on the man's face, the blind terror with which he resisted some unseen foe.

Instinct warned her that in some way her presence was harmful to David, that her nearness increased his danger and suffering—and she retreated until she saw that he no longer struggled with that hateful enemy, but was sitting on the rock with his head bowed on his hands.

There she left him, and stumbling, with tears blinding her eyes, she went slowly home.

The bitterness of despair filled her as she realized that she had actually been the cause of torturing David afresh. She must never see him again. She would write and tell him so tonight.

4

"HERE is a letter for you, David, I found it on the hall table and brought it as I happened to be coming up."

Hirst Radcliffe, the youngest of the Radcliffe sons, entered his brother's study as he spoke, and stood, a tall, arresting figure, his pale cold eyes gleaming as he noted the bowed shoulders and drawn features of the man in the chair by the fire.

"It looks like Maisie's writing. I have wondered why we have seen so little of her lately—perhaps this will explain."

Hirst crossed the room and stood leaning up against the fireplace. He held the letter carelessly, and as David stretched out an eager hand, with a sudden glow of color in his sunken cheek, Hirst slipped, stumbled, and in some way too quick for David to see, the letter fell into the heart of the flames and was destroyed in a moment.

"Oh, I say! How stupid of me! My dear chap, I am sorry. What a perfectly rotten accident."

There was a wild light in David's eyes as he sprang to his feet.

"You're not sorry! I believe you did it on purpose. Get out of my room. I loathe the sight of you."

"That's nothing new, is it? No one would ever accuse us of being a David and Jonathan! But it's no use letting your feelings run away with you like that."

"Will you or won't you get out?"

"Yes, when I am ready to go. I just came up to bring your letter, and tell you I thought of strolling over to see old Blackmore and Maisie."

David's fists clenched, and he made a spring forward, but a sudden blackness descended upon him, and from out its murk, that which he knew and dreaded began slowly to take form. He collapsed, suddenly limp and shaking, into the chair behind him, as with a sneering laugh Hirst sauntered out of the room, closing the door softly behind him.

For long David sat, staring hard at the fire, as if out of the flames themselves he could reconstruct the precious letter they had consumed.

At last he rose shakily to his feet and rang the bell.

"Send Reed to me, will you?" he asked the footman.

The valet appeared almost at once, an old servant of the Radcliffes, and devoted to David as he had been to his father before him.

"Reed, I have made up my mind to go away. I want you to pack for me at once, and also take a message to Miss Blackmore."

"Yes, Mr. David."

"I won't write the message. You must remember it, Reed—it's safer so. Tell her I am going to try to escape if I can! I am going to that little place in the Carpathians where I stayed once with a college chum. She knows where it is. Ask her to write and—give her my love, Reed."

The old man stood hesitating.

"Take me with you, sir," he burst out at last. "You must not go alone."

But David shook his head.

"No, no, Reed. You can do more for me by staying here at home. I think you know or guess something of what has fallen on me. I am cursed—a doomed man, Reed."

The faithful old servant nodded dumbly, and David continued, "Look after her for me. You and she are the only ones who know or understand. And now come, we must be quick; I want to start in a few hours."

5

MAISIE BLACKMORE was in the train on the way to London. It was some weeks, the darkest she had ever known, since David had fled from England. The faithful Reed had given his master's message and she had written again and again to him, and waited now in the greatest suspense for news. It was a few days only since the wonderful idea had dawned which had impelled her to take her present journey.

It was her father who had been the unconscious means of sending her on it. At breakfast one morning, he had looked up suddenly from his *Northern Mail*, saying, "Well, well. I am sorry to have missed that. If I had known I would have gone up to town to hear him."

Maisie was absorbed in her own thoughts, wondering if David would write, if he had escaped from the Curse, and if she would ever see him again—and she answered abstractedly, "Would you?"

Mr. Blackmore continued with increasing enthusiasm, "Of course. Old Fremling was the best chum a man ever had. I shall never forget those years at Oxford together. And apart from that, his lecture must have been well worth hearing."

The girl's listless interest was roused at the name of Fremling, and she asked, "What was he lecturing on, father?"

"Devil Worship and Ancient Rites among the Nomadic Tribes of Central Asia."

"I would like to have heard that, too," said Maisie, her eye kindling with an almost painful interest.

"Nonsense, child! Not at all the sort of thing for you. The tales Fremling tells make even me—well, if not afraid, something very like it. It's appalling to think such things exist, even in foreign countries. Of course I consider Fremling exaggerates a great deal. He's an extraordinary man—a genius!—and knows more about Asia than any man alive."

"I remember him very well, coming to stay here once, when I was a child," answered Maisie reflectively.

"Yes—about ten years ago," agreed her father. "He was very much interested in the strange illness of the vicar of this parish, who was said to be haunted."

Maisie's voice shook as she asked, "And what happened? What did Sir Donald Fremling do?"

Blackmore buttered his toast, and helped himself to marmalade before replying, "Well, I never pretended to understand Fremling or his fantastic theories. He did explain his view of this particular case, but I have forgotten."

"But the vicar! Did Sir Donald save him?"

"There was no question of saving," said her father testily. "The vicar was mad—and he got better. Fremling helped in one way, soothing influence and all that, no doubt. But as to casting out devils—well it's not the sort of thing that happens to a decent Englishman. All very well for the colored races, with their hot climate, and priests, and opium."

And with this final statement the old man had risen from the table and gone out into the garden.

Maisie had swiftly made her decision; and accepting a long-standing invitation from a friend who lived in London, she left home two days later, determined to see Sir Donald Fremling and tell him the whole story of the Curse.

Sir Donald Fremling! The name rose up now in Maisie's mind, as a harbor light to a storm-tossed mariner. Could he really cast out devils? Would he be able to save David?

6

These two questions still burned in her mind as, on the following afternoon, she reached Sir Donald's house. He was sitting alone by his study fire, with a Great Dane stretched by his side, and an old worn book in black letter on a small table at his elbow.

He showed no surprize at her visit, and greeted her with a gentle Old World courtesy which gave her courage. She sank into a chair on the opposite side of the fire. The dog looked at her solemnly, then stalked over and put one heavy paw on her knee.

"You see you are among friends,"

Sir Donald said with a smile in his deep-set eyes, as they met the hesitating doubt in her own. "You can speak freely! Tell me why you are here, in London, instead of enjoying your moors and heather at home? You don't look as though the city agreed with you, either. Why are you so unhappy, dear child?"

"Oh, I am—I am most unhappy," said the girl, clasping her hands with painful earnestness. "It's too awful. It's not the sort of thing that *can* happen, really. I feel you can't possibly believe it."

"There's very little I can not believe," answered the old savant gravely. "Tell me everything, and let me judge for myself. Remember I have spent my whole life in warring against those dark forces which are all about us, and which manifest themselves so terribly at times."

Thus encouraged, Maisie told him all she knew, first of the legend of the Curse—and of its subsequent fulfilment in the haunting of David Radcliffe.

Sir Ronald heard her without comment or interruption, and when she had finished he sat gazing thoughtfully at the Persian rug under his feet, his deep-set eyes almost hidden under his white eyebrows, his thin face showing many a line furrowed by past ordeals and encounters with Evil.

"Tell me all you can about the present Radcliffe family," Sir Donald asked presently.

"Well, as I said, David has six brothers, and they are all particularly nice jolly boys, except Hirst—the youngest?"

"Ah! The youngest! And why is he so different?"

"It is difficult to explain what he is like. But I hate him, and so does David. In fact, none of the brothers got on with him, and as soon as they were old enough they left home rather than live with him. It's been a very unhappy household since their mother died. The father loved Hirst best, and could see no fault in him; he sacrificed all the rest of the family to his caprices and wishes."

"This is most valuable information," Sir Donald said, his keen eyes alight with interest. "Go on, tell me all you can remember about this youngest Radcliffe."

"He was the strangest child. Even as a baby no one ever knew him to cry or shed a tear. He has never had one hour's pain or illness in his life, and is absolutely callous to everyone else's suffering. In fact, I am sure he enjoys the sight of pain. He is a horrible man—cold, sneering and hateful."

"How did the other boys treat him at school?"

"Oh, no school kept him more than a few days. There were dreadful scandals about it. He had a tutor finally—a Mr. Fane. And that was the worst of all."

"What happened to the tutor?"

"No one knows exactly—that's the horrible part of it. He got to look wretchedly ill and miserable while he was at The Turrets. David once begged him not to stay, because it made him feel so angry to see how Hirst treated him."

"And why didn't Fane go away then?"

"He told David he couldn't go—he would give no reason, simply said he couldn't go. Then he disappeared, and they found his body later, lying in the woods among the bracken and dead leaves. The doctor said he had died of shock, and his face was terrible to see, I believe."

"And was Hirst held to blame for the tragedy?"

"Well, no! Not exactly. And yet everyone who knew Hirst well, and had seen Fane with him, felt uneasy. The poor man had so obviously been in his power, and cringed before him in a most painful way."

"And is this Hirst Radcliffe living at home now?"

"Yes," answered Maisie. "He rarely leaves The Turrets; he has a suite to himself, and is supposed to be studying astronomy. He's got telescopes and all sorts of apparatus fixed up on a flat roof, very strange instruments some of them look, but I have only seen them from a distance."

After a few more questions Sir Donald said, "It's well for David Radcliffe that you came to me. He will not find a place of escape in Europe, or on any spot on earth until the Curse is broken and its power destroyed. Will you give me his address? I will go in search of him and bring him home. The Curse must be undone where it was first uttered, and David must help mé to find that place."

Maisie rose, her white face raised imploringly to Sir Donald's.

"And do you think there is any hope of helping David?"

"Yes, my child," Sir Donald said, putting a hand on her shoulder. "There is always hope, and you have done much to help him already by coming here. In the meantime stay in London, do not return north. You must not see David again until he is a free man once more. Another meeting between you would mean danger to you both in the highest degree. And as to Hirst—I will explain more fully later, but if you value your immortal soul keep away from him. He is not what he seems."

7

DAVID RADCLIFFE stopped walking and stared around him. He realized suddenly that for the last few minutes that long-drawn-out sound had persistently forced itself upon his consciousness, but, absorbed in his own despairing thoughts, he had paid no heed to its appeal.

The broad highway over the Carpathian Alps stretched out before him, flinging its endless leagues about the shoulders of the mountains that towered in proud desolation to the wintry sky.

David stood for a minute, trying to penetrate the gloom of the dense fir-forests that marched on either hand; then, guided by that repeated cry, he turned off the road and plunged in among the trees. It was some minutes before he could locate the call accurately, but at last on the edge of a clearing he saw that an old man was there on the ground, leaning up against a tree and evidently in pain.

The stranger explained to David that he had walked out from Borviz, a small mountain hamlet about three miles distant, but had unfortunately slipped and wrenched his ankle, and found himself unable to walk or even stand.

Radcliffe, a great fair giant well over six feet, looked down on the slight figure of the injured man with considerable interest and sympathy; and for the first time in many weeks he felt the burden of his thoughts lifted, and an unwonted sense of security enveloped him.

"There's only one thing for it, I think, sir—I must carry you, if you will trust yourself to me."

The other man smiled up at this modern Sir Christopher.

"I think that would be imposing a little too far on your goodness, I am heavier than I look. But if you could find some conveyance and bring it here to me——"

Radcliffe shook his head.

"No! That would not do at all. These woods are far from safe even in the daylight, and it is already dusk! Night would have fallen long before I could get one of those rascally Tsziganes back here with a horse and cart. It is not safe for you to be here alone. Better let me carry you."

The older man looked up at his companion.

"Perhaps if you took me down to the road, someone might pass and give me a lift."

"I don't think there is any chance of that. Won't you let me try to lift you? We ought to start at once, there is a big fall of snow just about due."

As he spoke David knelt and hoisted the stranger on to his broad shoulders, and began to make his way slowly through the increasing darkness to the open road.

But there he halted. The snowstorm had arrived! And a stinging icy wind blew a flurry of sleet against his face as he emerged from the shelter of the forest.

"You can't do it in this. Better set me down again in the shelter of the trees, and make your way to the nearest village," said the stranger.

David answered with quick indignant warmth, "You don't know what a night, or even a few hours, means in these heights at this time of the year, sir. You would die of the cold, even apart from the danger of wolves. No! the only thing is to make a night of it together. I will build a fire, and find some sort of a shelter."

And in spite of protests, David carried his burden back to the woods, and having found a spot comparatively sheltered from the fury of the ever-rising storm, he proceeded to break off the lower branches of the fir trees, and soon made an effectual screen from the wind.

A fire was quickly built, and its cheerful crackle and the fragrant odor of the resinous wood drew a sigh of satisfaction from the man by whom Radcliffe now seated himself.

"You are showing great kindness to an absolute stranger—I owe my life to you," said the former, as he looked earnestly at his young benefactor, noting the hunted expression of the blue eyes, the marks of pain and fear on the young face.

David's color deepened as he made an awkward gesture of denial.

"I can't tell you how awfully glad I am of the accident that has brought us together," continued the old man. "I have come to this part of the world for the purpose of finding you."

"Finding me!" echoed David. "But I don't quite understand, I am afraid. Perhaps your name——?"

"My name is Fremling," answered the other.

"What! Not Sir Donald Fremling the famous traveler?"

Fremling smiled at the young man's enthusiasm.

"Yes, I suppose that describes me."

David put out his big brown hand and clasped that of the older man.

"I can't tell you how awfully glad I am to meet you, sir. It was only the other day I came across some friends of yours in Budapest. They were talking about what you had done for them, and all the strange places and people you had known."

David paused; then, encouraged by the listening attitude of his companion, he continued, rather hurriedly, "Is it true that you are interested in the supernatural, and—well, in what is called Black Magic?"

Fremling's face became very grave as he answered slowly, "Tell me what it is that haunts you."

"Haunts me!" gasped David. "But I did not say—I don't know why you think——?"

He suddenly turned and faced the other man, staring hard into Fremling's deep-set eyes.

"I am haunted! No man was ever haunted as I am. Do you believe in the power of a Curse?"

"I believe in the power of the hate which prompts a Curse," answered Fremling quietly.

Still David looked long and eagerly into the other's tranquil face; then, as if he had found what he sought and was satisfied, he turned away.

"It is not necessary for me to say that I am David Radcliffe," he said

at length. "Evidently you know who I am, and why I am here."

"Yes, I know everything. I have seen Maisie Blackmore—in fact she came to see me, and it was from her that I learned the danger you are in. I am an old friend of her father's, and remembering that I am interested in all supernatural manifestations she brought your case to me."

David flushed with pride and pleasure in this new proof of Maisie's love and ceaseless efforts to help him.

Sir Donald smiled.

"You are very young still in spite of your trouble. A girl whose spirit is so finely tempered as that of Maisie Blackmore, when she loves, loves without counting the cost at all—she would become the haunted one herself if by so doing she could free you from your Curse!'

"And what is your opinion, Sir Donald, now that you know all? What is it that haunts me—and why?"

"My opinion is that you have lived all your life with a demon at your side—your brother Hirst! He is not a human being, as we understand the term. His body is a vehicle borrowed by an Elemental. Your ancestor Giles died in a moment of eternal hate! And after death his strong personality was still bound to earth by its own overwhelming passions. Consequently it would ally itself with those Elemental forces of evil which strive unceasingly to gain access to mankind. Thus Giles has acquired force to project his hate down the centuries; and by infernal aid has at last gained possession of a body so that he may live on earth again."

David tossed a branch on to the fire, adding more and more fuel, until the crackling hiss of the flames almost drowned the moan of the wind, and the encroaching shadows of the forest fell back reluctantly.

Fremling noted the furtive glance the young man threw over his shoulder, and the nervous dilation of his nostrils.

"Tell me," begged David at last, "this—this *thing* that haunts me . . . can you destroy it . . . can you lift the Curse? Oh, I can not bear more."

"Poor boy!" said the older man. "All alone here in the wilderness with *that* ever at your side. I can realize what you must suffer."

At the compassion and understanding in Fremling's voice, the other looked up with tears in his eyes.

"I am going mad. I meant to end it all tonight. To walk on and on into the very heart of the storm, until the cold and snow had frozen the life out of me and I could never wait or fear or suffer any more."

"Only to find your implacable enemy awaiting you on the other side of the door you would thus force open."

"What do you say? No . . . Oh, no! I can't believe that."

"Won't believe it, you mean," corrected Fremling. "I do not wonder that you are eager to meet death—that you long for its merciful oblivion! But believe me when I tell you that there is no such easy way out of it as that. Should your enemy overcome you while you still possess your human body, his hate would cause your death . . . the death of your body, that is! But that would be the end, for in the effort he put forth to kill you, his power would expend itself, and your true self would henceforth continue freed from his malice.

"But on the other hand—should you cut short your span of human life yourself, Giles would meet you as an equal; you would have descended to his level, have pulled down the barriers between . . . and his hate would absorb your very being into his, and add incalculably to the diabolical force which gives him existence."

David leant forward in terrible agitation, and spoke rapidly, "Are you a devil, too? Has he sent you to taunt me—to drive me to greater de-

spair? You have taken away my only hope. Death was my one refuge."

His blue eyes glared at Fremling as he spoke, and it was only too evident that his reason was tottering to a fall.

With all the compassion of a father for a frightened child, Fremling clasped the hand of the unhappy man and answered gently, "I will help you. That is what I am here for. If you have courage and will to obey me, you may yet be saved. I can promise nothing, because so much depends on your own efforts and strength of purpose—but I have saved others in more desperate case even than yourself."

David's brief moment of madness passed, leaving him deeply contrite and ashamed of his outburst, and as the two men sat talking together hour after hour, David felt a spring of hope and confidence well up within him. His former passive acceptance of his awful fate changed to a strong determination to fight the evil which shadowed his existence. And when dawn came at last and the storm died, the quiet stillness of the mountains was reflected in his own heart as he rose to tread out the red fire and prepared to carry Fremling to some place of shelter and safety.

8

Over the jagged spine of rock which crested the hill known as the "Devil's Teeth," in that neighborhood—the great reddened orb of a harvest moon rose like the eye of some gigantic Polyphemus peering down on that unhallowed spot with wide unblinking stare, eager to witness once again the triumph of deathless hate—to gloat with full-orbed vision on the resurrection of all that was evil and abominable.

Fremling and Radcliffe stood watching the rising of this ill-omened moon, the younger man with beating heart and a feeling of helpless terror which made his hands and feet icy cold, and the breath come short and quick through his nostrils. His nervous excitement was in strong contrast to the calm of his companion, who looked alternately from his watch to the heavy shadow cast by the hill—a shadow retreating gradually like some furtive guilty thing back into the bulk of the hill which had cast it forth.

Fremling drew from his pocket a roll of parchment yellow with age, and consulted it narrowly.

"In half an hour's time, according to this manuscript," he said, "the outline of the grave should be distinct, and we shall learn the exact spot where Giles' blood was shed. It is there that we must meet the demon-soul which possesses your brother's body—and it is there alone that we can destroy it."

A long shudder shook David's body as he looked furtively round at the trees which encircled the open grassy space on which they stood. He watched the inky shadow of the hill, until its sharp outline became hazy and indistinct and the whole scene swam in a pale mist before his aching eyes. For a moment he shut them to recall Maisie's face—to nerve himself by the thought of her love and belief in him to face what was coming.

"Ah—h—h"—the low exclamation from Fremling made his heart stop beating; then his pulses throbbed furiously as he followed the direction of the other's pointing finger.

A luminous red stain, its shape unmistakable and sinister, was growing momentarily more distinct there on the grass in front of them . . . not six feet distant! Every leaf and blade of grass or weed within that rectangular boundary gleamed red as blood and fiery bright.

Sir Donald picked up from the ground a short, broad-bladed sword, worn and stained, its hilt encrusted with rubies whose fire outshone even the crimson glare of the grave itself.

"Dig . . . dig swiftly," he com-

manded, putting the weapon in the young man's hands. "Do not lose a moment—all depends now on your speed—before midnight that grave must lie open to the moon and stars, or we shall meet Giles unprepared and helpless."

Urged and goaded by repeated warnings, David pursued his dreadful task. The red grass came up easily enough, being rooted in a light powdered soil of the same deep red stain as the grass itself.

As the last sod of that stained weed was cut up and tossed aside, Fremling drew David quickly back from the graveside, and as he did so a great tremor shook the whole place, and a tongue of fire shot with a hissing roar skyward from the uncovered grave.

When it died Fremling went forward and peered cautiously into the grave, beckoning David to his side.

Clutching the older man with icy hands, the other looked, and drew back with a gasp . . . a dark shaft had opened, reaching to unfathomable depths, in whose yawning chasm a far-off point of green light burned like an evil star of the underworld.

David recoiled with ashen face, while Sir Donald's firm mouth set in its sternest lines.

"It is Gaffarel! Gaffarel the Mighty! Gaffarel and the Four Ancient Ones who come against us," he whispered to his trembling companion. "This place is saturated with unspeakable guilt."

His eyes closed for a minute as he muttered a few low indistinct words. Then taking from his pocket a small phial he turned to David again, and with a certain rare and fragrant oil he rapidly anointed the eyes, nose, and mouth of his companion and himself.

"I warn you," Fremling said, "to wait in silence now for what shall come. Do not utter a syllable, or you will plunge us both into that devil's tomb where Giles and his legions await us."

Chill eddies of wind swept up against the silent pair as the midnight hour approached . . . the ground under their feet trembled with the thundering march of some invisible army . . . the sound of countless hoarse voices and echoing horrid laughter came faintly to their ears.

Fremling drew forth a rod of ancient ivory, carved with symbols of magic as old as the dawn of the world. Its tip gleamed with pale fire, and as Sir Donald traced on the ground the outline of the sacred pentacle, the rank grass burned fiercely in its wake, and within the fiery five-pointed star David and Fremling stood by the graveside waiting.

Strange flickering lights moved among the trees which hemmed them in. Shadows formed and re-formed in sinister array about them.

The chill of death gripped David's heart, and he turned to look at his companion, standing upright and stedfast, his face raised to the midnight sky, his lips moving rapidly.

Suddenly all noise and movement ceased abruptly, and in the intense stillness which fell, David nerved himself for the last supreme effort. To face Giles the Thruster—to defy him—to pit his own will against the awful power of the demon.

It was coming—coming! In every nerve he felt the dread approach of the Enemy. With cold lips he murmured over to himself the ancient words of power which Fremling had taught him, and with shaking fingers pressed a leaf of vervain to his nostrils.

There upon the open grave stood Giles, a gigantic shadow, his beckoning figure drawing David with irresistible lure.

Like one in a trance, David took a stiff step forward, but ere he could move again, Fremling advanced swiftly and interposed his own body

between the monstrous Shadow and its victim.

At this, the baleful lights outside the pentacle drew closer, and dim forms were visible, bestial and uncouth, surging forward with horrid effort to pass the barrier of fire.

Fremling stood as though carved in stone; not a step did he give back, as with almost imperceptible movement Giles advanced upon him. There was not a hand's breadth between them, when Fremling held up the fire-tipped rod, and in a loud clear voice commanded Giles to return to the place whence he came. Three times Sir Donald repeated the terrible name which can command even the Ancient Four themselves, and slowly Giles the Thruster retreated—his hate powerless against the divine courage of his antagonist.

Inch by inch Sir Donald advanced—inch by inch Giles moved backward to the grave.

Sir Donald's face was awful in its set intensity, his steady eyes fixed on the flaming eyeballs of the demon who opposed him.

Good and Evil matched in a colossal struggle for supremacy.

Back over the brink of the grave Giles was forced, and then with the swiftness of light Fremling raised the magic rod and plunged its blazing tip deep into the Thruster's heart.

A great tongue of flame shot up from the fathomless depths of the grave, wrapping round Giles like a winding sheet of fire!

And in that same moment the phantom lights that pressed about the pentacle vanished utterly—the blazing star itself dimmed, and went out.

David gripped his companion's arm convulsively as they waited.

The black clouds overhead were torn by a blinding glare, followed by crash after crash of thunder, which seemed to shake the solid earth.

Then came the rain, sudden and torrential—washing the evil of the haunted spot from off the earth, and Fremling and Radcliffe lifted their faces thankfully to its cleasning sweetness.

AT LAST it ceased, the darkness lifted, and from a ragged fringe of cloud the moon shone clear and bright. Grass and trees glistened with the silvery sparkle of some enchanted forest.

How strangely altered was that sullen ring of trees! That ragged, haunted, desolate spot!

Not haunted now—quiet and lonely, perhaps, but not desolate.

A calm sweet peace brooded over the place; the threatening copse had become a friendly shelter from the storm, where the birds cowered and shook their wings, piping encouragement to one another as they dried their wet feathers.

The circle of grass was wholly green. No red stain now, nor gaping depth was there. Green and fragrant the weeds and long waving grasses shone in the moonlight.

But that which had walked among men as Hirst, the youngest of the Radcliffe brothers, would haunt them no more.

Cold and terrible in death they found the mortal body deserted by its demon!

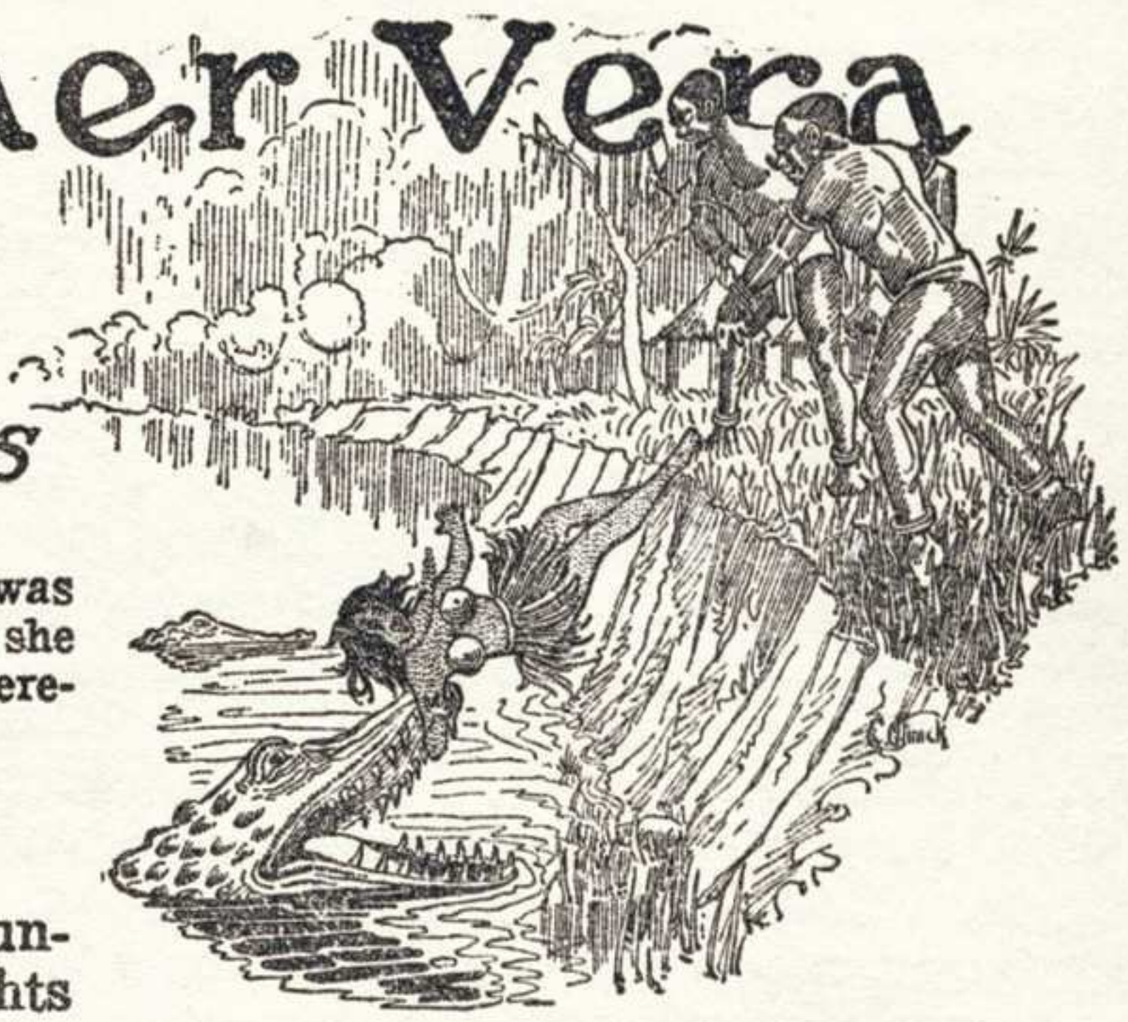
It faced them as they burst open the locked door of the study—sitting upright in a high carved chair—one hand clenched over its heart—the features twisted by inhuman rage.

The pale cold eyes were hardly changed by death, and stared into the horror-stricken faces around—and stared—and stared.

The Other Vera

by

Willis Knapp Jones



"Obju was dead, and his wife was thrown to the alligators that she might accompany him into the hereafter."

CALMLY the girl slept, all unconscious of the electric lights glaring intc her face or the celebrated specialist standing at her bedside. After studying that oval face and its bobbed brown hair tousled from sleep, he turned to her mother. "You say she's been this way ever since she was born, Mrs. Prentice. Have you noticed any other abnormality?"

"No, Dr. Stein. During the daytime, Vera is all one could wish for. That's why I asked you to come early this morning. By 6 or 7 o'clock she will awake and be like any other twenty-year-old girl. Then she'll have her interests and go and come, but about sundown she'll get drowsy and fall asleep and its just impossible to waken her till the next morning."

The gray-haired nerve specialist touched the arm lying above the bed clothes. "You're sure this will not arouse her?"

"Nothing will. At first the doctors tried everything, shaking, electric treatment. She slept through it all."

"Her pulse is steady, but slow," he remarked.

"Yes, all the doctors said there was nothing physically the matter. They thought she would outgrow it, so after her father's death, we decided to let her grow up and see what would happen. He, poor man, worried continually. Toward the end, he was somewhat insane, I believe. He kept raving about curses and African magicians and——"

"African, eh?" The doctor pondered a moment. "Well, I'll make a thorough examination after she wakes, and if you're willing, I'd like to bring a young friend of mine, a medical missionary just returned from Africa. And it might be just as well not to say we are doctors, but simply friends."

"Yes, indeed. Why don't you come for luncheon this noon? I'll—I'll introduce you as acquaintances of Captain Prentice. Perhaps your friend knew him, for he used to make trips to Africa. He was even wrecked there, twenty-two years ago. He lived among some coast tribes for months before he was rescued."

"I'm afraid Dr. Thornton didn't know him, then. He wasn't through high school then. But I must be going. I'll find my friend and return about——"

"Twelve o'clock. We'll eat at that hour."

And so the doctor bowed himself out.

Promptly at the hour set he and another gentleman presented themselves at the door. The newcomer, whom Dr. Stein addressed as "Ted",

was about thirty. His face was dark, and creases at eyes and nose bore evidence of his life in climates where the sun glared. He was lean and his every action showed his nervous tension.

"Miss Prentice, may I present ——" Dr. Stein began.

The girl's eyes widened and her face grew white, but she recovered herself. "I'm glad to meet Dr. Thornton," she said, a strange thrill and tenseness in her voice.

Mrs. Prentice wondered. She had not heard the visitor's name mentioned, yet momentarily she received the impression that the two young people had met before. There was not a sign of recognition on the tanned face of Dr. Thornton, however. His expression was that of one meeting a new and altogether charming person. So Vera's mother knew that she must have missed the introduction.

After a few minutes of general conversation, the meal was announced and all four entered the dining room, Mrs. Prentice on Dr. Stein's arm and the young people together.

During the course of the luncheon, the conversation turned to Africa.

"My father was fascinated by the continent," Vera said. "Surely you must want to go back, Dr. Thornton."

"I'm not sure," he replied. "I may have to remain here because my health won't stand the climate."

"But didn't you hate to leave?"

The doctor laughed shortly. "Some of them hated to have me. In fact, some of them tied me up, so that I couldn't."

"Is this a cannibal story, Ned?" Stein interrupted.

"But there aren't cannibals in Africa now!" protested Mrs. Prentice.

"Yes, there are, mother." Vera looked bewitching in her intensity.

"What do you know about it, dear?" Mrs. Prentice's voice held a tone with which a forward child is reproved. "When Vera was little," she explained, "she used to have the wildest dreams about Africa, till finally her father and I refused to let her read any of the captain's big library on African life and adventure."

"Well, she happens to be right about cannibals," replied Dr. Thornton, coming to her defense. "Of course, feasts of that sort are forbidden by law, but there are plenty of ways of evading the law, especially where the white man isn't very powerful."

"Don't yarn, Ted," Dr. Stein scoffed. "I read a British colonial report only last year saying that cannibalism in Africa was a thing of the past."

"Then don't believe it. I know what I'm talking about. I was slated for one of their feasts, myself."

"Tell us about it," begged Mrs. Prentice.

The medical missionary glanced over at Vera, whose cheeks were white. The nerve specialist, too, was studying her, but he nodded a slight assent.

"I'm not a story teller," Dr. Thornton apologized. "One of those writer chaps could trim my yarn up and make something out of it, but he'd have to give it an end. And it couldn't be the traditional one, either, for I didn't marry the girl who saved me."

They were all eagerness and so, after another glance around the table, he told them the story, sketching the pictures and leaving their imaginations to fill in the outline. He described his journey from the mission station toward the coast, going by a direct route against the advice of others, because he was weak and wanted to reach the seacoast to recuperate.

He made them see the trail through unfrequented country, telling how

sometimes he was so weak that he had to be carried in a traveling hammock supported by four natives. And as he told of the desertion of some of his carriers and the exciting details of a night attack by a savage tribe, Vera's eyes were dreamy, though her breath came fast.

"There I was, prisoner among a lot of black savages," he wound up. "I understood their dialect only imperfectly, but I made out enough to realize that I was being fattened up to be the guest of honor at a feast. Night and day an armed warrior guarded the circular thatched hut in which I was kept prisoner.

"They gave me all the food I wanted. The women brought me breadfruit, some sort of potatoes fried in fat, and delicious meat. And they'd see that I ate it. If I refused, there was a warrior to jab me with his spear till my appetite came back. The people were all homely enough, except one girl, as beautiful a savage as I've ever seen. She took quite a fancy to me, apparently."

Vera, whose eyes had not left his face, uttered a little expression of disgust which drew all eyes to her.

"Oh, if you'd seen her," went on the doctor quickly, "you wouldn't grunt. She was erect and cleaner than the rest. I might have suspected she had some white blood in her if there had been any chance for a white man to visit that tribe and live. She was very attractive. No wonder the chief of the tribe fell under her spell, although he already had a half-dozen or so of wives. But she is the heroine of my tale. She saved my life."

"How?" came in a chorus.

"I'm certainly not telling this story well. I should have drawn it out, told of the feeling of restlessness visible in every warrior, the rumors of the coming of an enemy, and all. But that's not my style. I can tell you only how it turned out. The warriors armed hastily and started off for battle. If I had been fatter or if there had been time, I imagine I'd have been eaten before they started. However, they said they were saving me for the victory banquet. Anyway, they moved me to a shelter right next to the king's palace, overlooking a pool where the chief's pet alligators basked, and after they tied me, they set all the women of the tribe to watch that I stayed put."

"Couldn't you escape?" Mrs. Prentice was drinking in his words.

"The men that put the grass ropes around me knew their business. I couldn't stretch them, and I couldn't reach the knot. And I knew that the men would be back probably that night.

"Finally, about noon, when the women had gone into their huts to keep a little cool, I heard the slightest of sounds. I turned my head and there stood my black beauty with a knife in her hand."

"It was a pair of scissors." Vera spoke as assuredly as though she had heard all the details before.

"Yes, I found that out soon, but ——" Thornton stopped in amazement. "I say, how did you know that?"

"I—I read it in—in——" She gave him an appealing look, like one throwing herself on his mercy.

Without knowing why, he came to her rescue. "Oh, in my article in the *World Review?* Did you see it, too, Mrs. Prentice?"

The matron shook her head.

"That's about all there was to the affair," the missionary resumed after a pause. "I thought that for some fancied slight she wanted to stab me, but she was rescuing me. She cut the ropes, gave me a package of food, and directed me to safety. I made my way as best I could to a seaport and was so run down that they shipped me home by the first boat."

"But the girl?" Mrs. Prentice wanted to know. "Did she escape?"

"That's the part that must be left to the fiction writer. I don't go any farther."

THE story caused such discussion that the meal was over before they finished. Then Dr. Stein told who he was, and Vera submitted to an examination. It was about 3 o'clock when the men left the house.

"I can not make it out," Dr. Stein confessed as they strolled together into the spring afternoon. "I couldn't find a single important abnormality."

"It's beyond me," Dr. Thornton agreed. "The thing that stumps me is how she knew that the girl who saved me carried a pair of scissors instead of a knife."

"She explained that. She had read your article."

"That's the trouble. I never wrote any article. I never even told the story before."

"Then why in the world——?"

"Why did I invent a magazine? That's what I don't know. She showed me she was in trouble about it. She's keeping something from her mother. And I'd like to know what it is."

"I'll go back tomorrow, Ted. You should have said something about it to me while we were there today."

"I didn't get a chance. But you needn't bother. I'm going to the bottom of this mystery myself. I asked for permission to call tomorrow afternoon."

"Smitten, are you, Ted?" Dr. Stein slapped his younger companion on the shoulder.

The thin man straightened up. "I don't know," he confessed. "They call women the eternal mystery; Vera's the super-mystery, and I've got to unravel it."

His attempt the next afternoon brought him little success. Vera begged him not to question her, though promising to tell him everything sometime in the future. In every other subject, she was entirely frank, and the young doctor found her very attractive. As his missionary board had ordered him to stay in that part of California for a few weeks, he managed to preempt a fair share of her time. Finally, the day he was compelled to leave for his lecturing trip, he proposed to her.

"No, Ted, I mustn't. It isn't because I don't love you," she hastened to add, observing his gloomy expression.

"Won't you tell me the reason, dear?"

Vera shook her head.

"You know you're the only girl I ever loved."

She broke into a bewitching smile. A roguish expression came over her face. "Then you didn't love the black girl who saved your life?"

He laughed out loud.

"And you wouldn't be sorry to learn that the chief of that tribe took her as his eighth wife?"

"What do you mean, Vera?"

"She married Obju, or whatever you said the chief's name was."

"Look here, dear. Why can't you explain? I never told you the chief's name because I could not remember it. But now that you mention it, I know that they called him that. Now where do you get your information?"

"Because I—I'm—oh, I can't explain! Trust me, Ted. I'm terribly upset, but things will be arranged soon and when you come back, if I'm here—I mean, when I see you, I'll tell you everything."

That had to satisfy him because he discovered that it was time to hurry to his train. She could not accompany him, because it left shortly before 6 and she fell asleep at sunset.

FOR nearly two weeks Dr. Thornton traveled through Washington and Oregon, speaking every night.

Each day he sent Vera a letter telling of his love, and at each post-office he found a letter from her awaiting him. Then came one from her that was so weird that it upset every theory he had ever had.

"Dearest," it began. "I've got to start letting you know about myself, and I couldn't tell you. The reason I knew all the details about the African girl is that I am she and she, I. By day I live in my white body, but at night here (and day in Africa) I inhabit hers. And my thoughts are just as badly mixed. I am a wife of Obju, though because he was taken sick on his wedding day, I married him by proxy and have not seen him since. He has been sick for several weeks. If you despise me, do not come near me when you return this week. And I am afraid you will hate me—for how could you love half a person? Could you respect me when you know that there's another Vera in Africa?"

Rational thinking told him at once that the whole story was a concoction of the girl's brain. There could be no truth in it. And yet—the strange behavior at night had no normal explanation. There was the detail of the scissors, too. He had studied psychology. He knew that Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde had many real life counterparts. With Dr. Prince's experiments with Miss Beauchamp he was familiar. He remembered how hypnotism had taken that woman's two selves (the real one and the dissociated one) and fused them together into a single personality that inhabited the body which previously was controlled alternately by each in turn. And as he was a student of abnormal psychology, other similar cases came thronging to his memory.

He was interrupted by the coming of the committeeman to take him to the lecture hall. "And here's a telegram that just came, Doctor," said the man. "Hope it isn't bad news."

With a foreboding of evil, Dr. Thornton tore open the flimsy manila envelope and took in the contents at a glance:

OBJU DIED LAST NIGHT. COME AT ONCE. I NEED YOU. VERA.

"When is the next train out of here?" Dr. Thornton asked.

"Tomorrow morning at 11."

"I've got to get away before that."

"Well, I can take you down to Ebersville after the lecture, if you like. There's a train out of there over the main line about midnight."

"I'd like to have you. And will you send a telegram, too, cancelling my lecture tomorrow evening?"

Dr. Thornton went on to the platform, still puzzling why the girl would telegraph him about the death of a minor African chief. But he had to put the idea aside and begin his missionary talk. He had given it so many times that the words came almost automatically. His mind was not on his subject, so that it was with a start that he heard himself informing them: "The Indian custom of *suttee,* the sacrifice of a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband, has its counterpart in Africa. Some of the most powerful men decree that their wives shall be killed to accompany them into the hereafter to be ready to wait on them."

Like a flash everything became clear. The death of the chief meant his wives would be killed. If that story had a grain of truth in it, it meant that the other Vera, the African Vera, would be one of them to die. He had read of the Siamese Twins, one of whom had died and the other lasted only a few minutes. The whole enormity of the situation rushed over him. Well for him that his speech was mechanical! He cut it and slashed, finishing fully fifteen minutes early. Then he fairly dragged the committeeman to his car.

What if he were too late? What if he reached Vera, the girl he loved, to find her dead?

There was no unoccupied berth in the express train when it finally arrived, but Thornton was in no mood for sleep. He sat by the window watching the train crawl along, till the east lightened. The sun came up and rose higher. It was already starting down into the Pacific when he reached his destination.

Even the automobile seemed to loiter as it carried him to Vera's home. Not till after 4 did he finally get there and see her, and then she was so changed that he scarcely recognized her. Her soft skin and delicate complexion had been wasted by fatigue and worry.

"It's too late," she moaned. "Tonight I am to be killed. It will be good-bye forever."

"But, Vera darling," he said in a tone he meant to be judicial, professional. "This is all a fancy of yours. It is impossible for one person to occupy two bodies!"

"I can't explain it, Ted. It may be impossible, but it is so. Many things in Africa are like that. Aren't they?"

Her challenge brought to his memory a demonstration he had witnessed in which a tribal magician had his ears, nose, and mouth stuffed with cotton, himself rolled in heavy blankets, and then was buried in a sandpile for three weeks. Afterward his friends dug him up, said incantations over him, and unwrapped him. He got up and walked around and showed that he had not suffered at all by his burial.

"Yes," Thornton agreed. "But how could you, an American girl, and that African be mixed up that way?"

"My father was wrecked there. His journal is a pretty full record of what he did. Mother never saw it, and he made me promise to destroy it, but I read it first. And the natives still remember the white man who saved the chief's life and so was protected in the village. But when he refused to worship the sacred snake, and laughed at the magicians, and even came into a gathering of all the tribal magicians, he made enemies of all the medicine men. He fell in love, they said, with the daughter of the chief of the magicians, and his desertion of my African mother was another cause of hate. After his rescue, the magicians gathered into a powwow that is still spoken of with awe in the tribe. The eleven tribal curses were put upon him and as a special incantation it was decreed that if he ever married one of his own white people, his first child should be only half a child, sharing its personality with the African baby he left behind."

Dr. Thornton said nothing. There was such conviction in the girl's voice, such sureness in her expression, that he was led to believe her story. And he knew by the way she trembled beneath his arm, that she believed in it implicitly.

"At noon all his wives are to be killed to go with Obju, and now it's —oh, Ted, it's sunrise in Africa now! Hold me. Don't let me slip away. If I leave, I'll never return." Frantically she clung to him.

"I'll protect you, sweetheart," he promised. He tightened his grip.

"Oh!" she screamed and shuddered. "I'm going. I'm——"

Her words trailed off. Her grasp relaxed, and if he had not had his arms around her, she would have fallen.

Mrs. Prentice, hastening in at the cry, found the doctor using every effort to revive her. She was not excited, however. In the occurrence she saw only the nightly episode to which she had become accustomed. "This is what I mean, doctor," she said. "I'm glad you could have seen her go to sleep. But don't look so startled.

She's all right. She'll awake in the morning."

Nothing the doctor could say would move her. In his insistence, she saw the worry which she used to have, but which she had outgrown. When he told her he must stay and watch her, she shrugged wearily and gave in finally, after sending him away while she prepared the girl for bed.

He realized that nothing would occur till midnight, but he would not lie down for rest. His weariness and lack of sleep no longer troubled him. Though he could not help the far-away girl in her fight for existence, he would be on hand at the turn. So he told Mrs. Prentice that he had a theory which would compel him to remain till after midnight. She sat with him for a time, but soon got up and left him with the sleeping girl.

THE hours ticked away. From the street came noises of modern life, automobile horns, police whistles, and the distant rumble of street cars. And on the bed Vera Prentice lay motionless. Her features were drawn with fatigue. Only a slight motion of her breast showed that she was alive.

Finally, when the clock's hands marked a quarter of 12, Dr. Thornton turned on all the lights, with a reading lamp spotting her face. In a few minutes he would know. At noon, she said, the sacrifice would take place. And since the tribal village was on the other side of the globe, directly opposite the place where he was, it would mean that midnight would reveal whether she was to live or to die when the African Vera was thrown to the alligators.

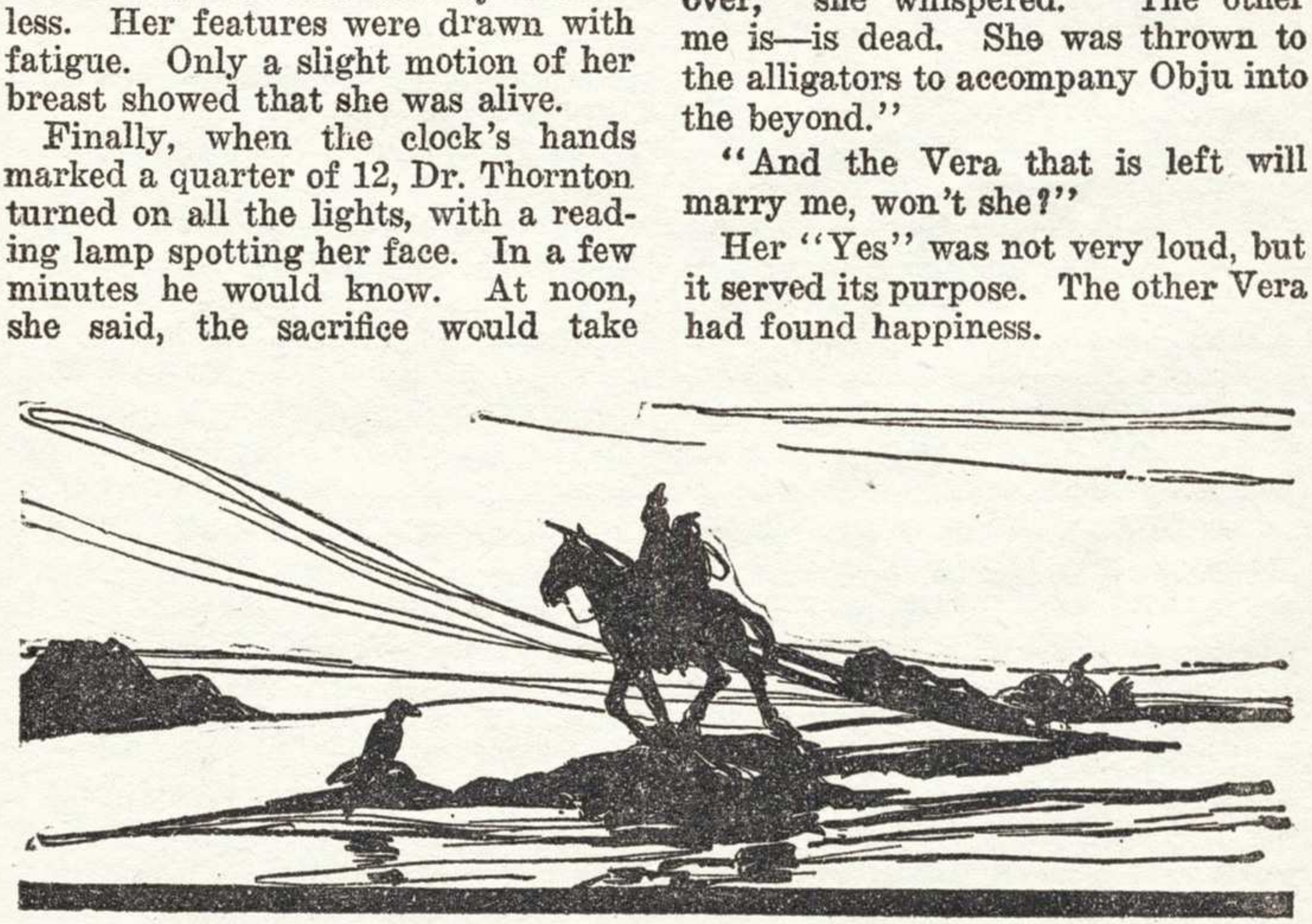
A clock somewhere struck 12. Still the girl did not move. Five minutes passed. Ten. He felt her pulse. The slow, steady rise and fall showed that the heart was still beating. If she lasted through the night——! While he held the wrist, he felt a quiver. A shriek such as he had never heard from mortal throat made his hair stand on end. The pulse slowed, almost stopped, and then quivered and raced. There was the slightest of movements in the eyelids. Then the girl on the bed blinked in the glare of the light. She opened her eyes and saw Dr. Thornton.

In an instant his arms were around her. "My sweetheart has returned," he said.

Vera was trembling. "It's all over," she whispered. "The other me is—is dead. She was thrown to the alligators to accompany Obju into the beyond."

"And the Vera that is left will marry me, won't she?"

Her "Yes" was not very loud, but it served its purpose. The other Vera had found happiness.



FETTERED

A Serial Novel

By GREYE LA SPINA

The Story So Far

DR. DALE ARMITAGE warns his neighbors, Ewan Gillespie and his twin sister Bessie, who have come to the woods to spend the summer, that they must never invite his wife, Gretel Armitage, into their cabin, under pain of dire consequences so fearful that they would not believe him should he explain what those consequences were. He leaves with Bessie the key to the lodge where he keeps his wife imprisoned behind heavy bars, while he goes to the funeral of a child who has died of pernicious anemia. Ewan, fearing that the doctor's lodge may be struck by lightning, rescues Gretel in the midst of a roaring thunderstorm and brings her to his cabin, but is forced to carry her across the stream that runs between. Bessie surprizes Gretel in the dead of night, as Gretel is leaning over her brother's face behind the cascade of her hair. As the storm has subsided, the brother and sister take Gretel back to the lodge, where Gretel tells Bessie that she will call Ewan to her when she wants him, and utters exultantly her threat, "You shall all be mine!" Bessie leads her brother, in a daze, back to the cabin.

CHAPTER 6

WOUNDS IN EWAN'S THROAT

THE day dragged for Bessie, who dreaded the doctor's return and at the same time longed for the meeting to be over. The personality of the man had so impressed her that she felt he would be just in the matter of the key. But what his attitude might be toward her too-forward brother she dared not conjecture, especially after the specific warning that under no circumstances was Mrs. Armitage to be invited into the Gillespie cabin. As for Gretel, Bessie felt that the doctor's wife was fully competent to look after her own interests.

All day Ewan was moody and irritable. He was indolent, too, with an indolence unlike his aforetime lazy moods, which inhibited his painting only. Although the sun shone, and sky and woods were magnificent in their allure, he lay flat on his back in his room, staring at the ceiling. At meal-time he roused, but ate with a lack of appetite that troubled his sister, who was accustomed to cook for a good trencherman. She thought him extraordinarily pale. When she looked in at the door for the twentieth time, she saw him with one hand at his throat gingerly.

"Throat sore?"

He answered languidly that it just bothered him. "Some insect must have stung me, Bess. Perhaps you'd better put on iodine just as a precaution."

She brought the iodine bottle. As he took his hand away from his neck, Bessie exclaimed:

"Why, Ewan, something certainly did bite you! There are two tiny white-rimmed punctures on your throat, and there's blood smeared——"

Ewan rolled wearily off the cot and went to the mirror, where he examined his throat attentively.

"Looks funny, doesn't it? More like a snake-bite than a spider-bite," he mused.

He washed off the streak of blood and Bessie touched the two angry-looking spots with iodine.

Bessie suggested then that he take fishing tackle down the brook a way, where they had observed trout on their trip up the first day.

"It's so beautiful out, Ewan, that it's a shame to stay indoors," she told him.

"Don't even feel up to fishing. Feel tired out. Jove, hope I'm not going to be sick, sis! Well, I'll go, anyway."

His sister watched the canoe slip downstream, with a mixture of relief and apprehension. She did not want Ewan present when the doctor returned for the lodge key, but at the same time she dreaded his meeting Mrs. Armitage, for no reason except her distaste for that lady. Also, she intended to question the doctor more fully as to his wife's mental condition; if Gretel were not insane, but worse, Bessie intended that the doctor should clarify this remarkable statement, in justice to her confidence in him.

About 4 o'clock her watchful eyes saw the doctor's sturdy form coming into sight. He drew up his canoe and walked across to the cabin. Bessie went out to meet him. The troubled face she lifted to his searching eyes must have told him that any secret apprehensions he had entertained were not without foundation.

"You have the key?" he queried, dark eyes upon her kindly, and he extended one hand, palm upturned.

Those world-weary eyes of his had heavy black shadows about them; his mouth looked drawn as if he had recently endured a severe nervous strain.

Bessie's voice trembled. She dreaded to add the new trouble to those secret burdens he was already shouldering.

"Last night there was a frightful thunderstorm," she began.

"And Gretel has been out!" supplemented the doctor quickly.

Bessie nodded.

"Oh, God in heaven, how long must this infamous traffic in human souls be permitted?" cried the doctor passionately, throwing back his head and apostrophizing the clear afternoon sky.

"I'm so troubled about it!" Bessie cried out anxiously. "But I couldn't help it. Honestly, I couldn't."

"It was your brother who let her out?" stated rather than asked the doctor. His face had assumed a heavily weary expression, but it was not angry. "Of course, he carried her across the brook? And at the doorway she fainted, and he picked her up and took her across the threshold?"

"How can you know?" the girl exclaimed, aghast at this mysterious knowledge of the preceding night's occurrences.

"History always repeats itself," answered Dr. Armitage significantly.

"I don't understand," faltered the girl.

The doctor bent dark eyes on her with stern tenderness.

"I am sorry, little brown wren, that you have been drawn into this wretched business, but you would stay, when I warned you to go."

"Perhaps I can help you," said the girl eagerly, then dropped her hazel eyes as warm color ran up into face and neck at the betrayal of her own interest.

"For that ingenuous blush I thank you, child," said the doctor, a slight tremble in his voice. "But I should have known better than to have drawn you into this business. I should have let Gretel run her own risks," bitterly.

He picked up Bessie's hands, pressing them so strongly that she almost cried out with the pain.

"You are reproaching yourself because of your friendly interest in me, are you not? Because I am a married man? Oh, brown girl with the kind eyes, if only you could be strong enough not to let your pity turn into anything warmer! You could help me, heaven only knows how much!" He dropped her hands then and with a shake of his whole body recovered his poise. "What I need to know just now is more for your sake and your brother's than for my own. Except," he corrected himself, "that my conscience is involved."

His hand caught her under the

chin. He tilted her face upward, scrutinizing her closely. He withdrew his hand with a sigh of relief.

"So far, all is well with you," said he thankfully. "And now, tell me everything that happened last night, my child. Everything. Do not omit the most trivial word or action of my —of Mrs. Armitage."

WHILE Bessie told of Gretel's coming, Dr. Armitage listened in silence. He saw in sequence the pictures of Ewan carrying Gretel against his breast over the log bridge; of Gretel's fainting without the door and Ewan carrying her inside. Then Bessie told of how Gretel had called her in the night, and of how she had kept silence, knowing not why. And at that, he groaned aloud, but bade her continue. She told of finding Gretel's face against Ewan's, behind that veil of flaxen hair . . .

"God! God!" ejaculated the doctor, dark eyes blazing with combined pain and anger. "Is this vicious circle of corruption to go on forever? And then, Bessie——?"

"We took her home early, at daybreak," the girl concluded. "She told me that she intended to call Ewan, and that she would call me, too. And you," shivered Bessie, lifting a pale, scared face to his. "Can she? Can she? And what does she mean by it?"

Again the doctor jerked her chin up, exclaiming as he did so:

"Impossible!" He scrutinized her white throat closely. "No. As yet you are safe. But your brother——?"

Bessie caught at his sleeve in fright.

"What has happened to Ewan?" she managed to ask, choked.

"Tell me, brown girl, has he complained of feeling weak and languid, since last night?" asked the doctor grimly. She nodded. "Have you seen, by any chance, whether his throat——?"

"Something had bitten him. There were two white-rimmed little holes on his throat, and his neck was smeared with blood. I put iodine on the bites."

"Iodine!" ejaculated the physician, with a shout of wild laughter that made the girl shrink back in momentary alarm. "Iodine! Since when can iodine save a soul?" he demanded of nobody in particular, but followed his words with another terrible, sardonic laugh.

"Then it's something serious? Something poisonous?" she faltered.

"Serious? Good God, yes! Poisonous? Brown Bessie, the most venomous thing upon God's footstool has attacked your brother and unless drastic measures are taken immediately, he will lose not only his body, but his soul's salvation," declared Dale Armitage gravely.

Great tears rose in the girl's eyes.

"You can save him, can't you?" she whispered hopefully.

"Do you believe that I can?" he parried.

"Yes! Oh, yes, I do!"

"God bless you, child," said he fervently. "Only He knows how much your simple faith means to me. Yes, I believe I can save your brother, but only if he puts himself completely into my hands, and I doubt if he can be persuaded to do that," sadly, "for Gretel has succeeded in arousing his antagonism against me."

"I will *make* him," said Ewan's sister with emphasis.

"Then we will do what we can, Bessie."

"But what was it that bit him?"

The doctor laughed. It was not the wild laughter of a moment since; it was the hopeless laughter of one who laughs because otherwise he must weep.

"If I were to tell you, you would not believe me," he said.

"You are wrong. I would believe anything you told me."

"I wonder," said he, slowly.

"Well, let me see how much you are capable of believing, from my lips." A cynical smile, but his dark eyes were yearning, and Bessie felt her whole being answer that call for understanding and trust.

"If I told you, for example, that yesterday I attended the funeral of a child, in order to locate its grave readily this morning, could open it without hindrance, could expose that poor little bloodless corpse——"

The girl's eyes were staring, wide upon his face, but she moistened her dry lips and said firmly: "I would believe that you had some good reason."

"Thank you, brown girl. And suppose I told you that I cut off the poor little head? That I drove a sharp stake through the little wasted body into the stilled heart? That I filled the dead baby's mouth with garlic?"

Uncontrollable shudders shook Bessie, but something in her heart bade her maintain her courage and her trust. She quavered, her voice trembling in spite of herself:

"You *must* have had a good reason."

"Again, I thank you," he murmured.

At the tremolo in his voice, Bessie knew that he was touched to the core by her expression of confidence.

"And then I left the grave as I had found it, and returned here, and—and found that yet worse than that awaited me!" he groaned, all at once losing his forced composure.

He dropped his face into his hands despairingly. Bessie was at his side, her gentle hand on his arm. He lifted his face to smile wanly at her.

"You may have thought me harsh and cruel when I warned you against ever having Mrs. Armitage here, in your cabin. How little you felt the actual weight of my words you have shown by the tale of last night's occurrence. Oh, had you realized the fearful consequences of your hospitality, you would have stood immobile in the doorway, and have refused to let even your brother enter, if he carried *her* with him. You would have bidden him leave her without, to perish in the storm!"

"I can not believe that anything would make me as inhuman as that," cried the girl incredulously. "What could possibly change me so? You owe it to me to tell me, now that you have trusted me so far."

He regarded her pityingly.

"I shall tell you—but not until I must," he responded. "And it will not be because I owe you the reason, but because I have made it the business of my life to keep—Mrs. Armitage—from committing any more gruesome murders——"

"You dare call your wife a murderess!" interrupted Bessie, gasping and shrinking from him.

"She is not my wife," said the doctor gravely.

"Not—your—wife?"

"Legally, yes. So that I may in a measure control her actions. But only a moral monster would dare to make such a—such a—to make Gretel Armitage his wife in anything but name only," dryly.

Bessie's brown cheeks flushed scarlet.

"I know that it is all a strange mystery, child. It is because of what she is that I married her—and because of it that she will never be my mate. And this, unhappily, has turned her love for me into fury. Out of a desire to be revenged upon me, she takes pleasure in escaping my vigilance, and then—because of her hatred for me she does these frightful things! The poor child whose little body I dug up this morning, that I might set its soul free, was slain by Gretel Armitage, in spite of all my precautions! In spite of all her promises to me, given time and again!"

Bessie's hands flew to her mouth,

smothering a cry of horror and incredulity.

"You don't believe me, of course?" said the doctor patiently.

"I am trying to. But I read the clipping about the child. It died of pernicious anemia."

He smiled, shrugging his shoulders expressively.

"All this is part of the matter that I can not tell you because you would believe me quite mad," said he simply. "Yet Gretel is the direct cause of that child's death, and because of it I had to go today to do what I told you. Partly for the child's sake, partly because the burden of Gretel's —being what she is—rests upon me," he admitted with a heavy sigh of patient resignation. "And now, can you still trust me?"

Bessie stood, eyes downcast, mien thoughtful.

"I believe you are sincere," she said at last. "As to the rest, I can not understand it, but I believe that you do understand it."

CHAPTER 7

WILD ROSES BLOSSOMING

"BROWN girl, you are a marvel among women!" cried the doctor, a kind of wonder ringing in his voice. "Yet I must save you while I can. Will you leave this place tomorrow? Oh, you do not know what it costs me in resolution, to put distance between myself and the first human soul that has shown a measure of comprehension for me in my frightful situation! But I must be strong," he added.

Her emotion overcame Bessie.

"How can you ask me to go away," cried she pitifully, "when you ought to know that I would never have a moment's peace the rest of my life, thinking of you—working out some hideous, ghastly problem alone—and thinking that I might have helped you somehow?"

"Child, child, you are breaking my heart," said he gravely, taking her wrists in his dry, burning palms. "I dare not think that you, too——? I have never believed that I could so quickly learn to care, as I have in these few pregnant days! Do not tell me that you, too, care more for me than casually? Oh, brown Bessie, tell me it is only as a friend that you hold me in your heart! It can not be that you, too, care? Tell me that I am nothing but a friend, child," he pleaded.

Bessie hung her head; she could not give him the answer he desired. She knew all at once that he had become more than a friend. She realized that out of her pity and her interest had sprung a deeper sentiment, that was to chain her life to his more surely than iron bands could have done. Yet he was tied to another woman whom he did not love; another woman who wore his name.

At her silence the doctor groaned as if in such terrible mental agony that he could no longer contain himself. The girl raised pitying eyes to those burning ones that plunged their gaze deeply into hers as if to cool themselves. The convulsed face frightened her. She spoke his name in a little voice, trembling as she tried to withdraw her hands, gripped so fiercely now in his fingers.

"No, Bessie, do not take away these gentle hands," he pleaded in a tone so poignant that she desisted. "Let me hold onto them, and onto sanity for a little, before I go back into the yawning darkness of horror that awaits me."

"What are you saying?" she whispered. "What darkness do you fear, Dale? You—so brave—and fearless?"

His ugly laugh shook her anew with shuddering, although she knew it was not meant to frighten her. As if in

reassurance, his grasp on her hands became lighter; he pressed her fingers gently, then released them.

"Bessie, my little brown Bessie! Why did you have to love me, and so thrust yourself into the most horrible tangle of infernal machinations that the world has ever known?"

"Dale," said she stumblingly, "there never need be any tangle because of me."

"Good heavens, child!"

"Isn't that what you mean?"

"Bessie, your innocent and wholly natural assumption betrays only too clearly how little you dream of the horrors into which you may be plunged unless you go away at once and leave me—forever. God forgive me for not having been more brutal in my behavior; perhaps then you would not have pitied me, you would have kept me away. How I blame myself for having brought that key to you! Yet, I dared not leave—her—all alone, and how could I trust—a man?"

"Perhaps God knew best when He sent me here," murmured the girl, timidly. "Perhaps somehow I can help you, Dale. If only you would let me know what I can do."

"Take your brother away from here," responded the man quickly. "If he remains in this vicinity and refuses to put himself into my hands for treatment, he is in such ghastly danger that the human mind would refuse to credit it, for sheer horror."

At the seriousness of the doctor's face, the gravity of his intonation, cold shivers passed over Bessie's body.

"But *I* am not going, Dale. I—I *could* not go, leaving you to face your problems alone."

"How can I persuade you? Bessie, I can not bear to have you, too, fall victim to that poisonous Thing which Gretel has become."

"*I* am not a silly man," retorted the girl, wrinkling her nose scornfully at masculine weakness.

"And do you think your sex will save you?" asked the doctor ironically.

"I would be strong where Ewan might be weak, Dale."

"But you see, Bessie, that Gretel now has the entrée to the cabin. Ewan has carried her across your threshold and welcomed her within."

"I would refuse to admit her," sturdily.

"She needs no welcome from you now," went on the doctor sadly. "The fact that your brother was within would secure her entrance. He carried her across the stream and over the threshold. And on his throat"—the doctor closed and opened his eyes slowly as if in pain—"are the marks that make him her slave for all time, unless he leaves this place at once and goes where she can not reach him. Until those wounds heal, he is in her power."

"Then she can really call him to her?"

"Yes, my dear. And in time he will die like that poor child. Of pernicious anemia," he finished, in light scorn of that newspaper diagnosis. "He will be drained of his life blood, Bessie. God, girl, don't you understand, yet?"

"Do you mean that Gretel is a—a vampire?"

"If you consider me quite mad, it may frighten you away," said the doctor, with a short laugh. "Bessie, Gretel is a vampire. Do you understand that? Gretel is a bloodsucking demon. I am the husband of a living fiend. I am chained to her for her life by my own innocent act——"

"That will do, Dale, please. You can't frighten me off by shouting at me," Bessie said tranquilly. "So that is the secret. I've read of such things, but I didn't think they really existed. How did she ever get such an illusion?"

"Illusion? Are you quite sure you've understood what I told you? It can not be that you would take the matter so calmly if you really understood it."

"Can she be cured, Dale?"

"Nothing can be done for her until she dies, and then I must do for her what I did for that poor child-victim."

"Then how can you cure Ewan?"

"If he persists in remaining here, and she gets at him again, I can not cure him. If he goes away before those wounds on his throat heal, he will be beyond her jurisdiction."

"But *she* had no wounds on her throat," objected Bessie.

"That is such a long story that I can not go into it now," said the doctor wearily. "Her inclinations have been so evil that she herself does not care to be healed, you see. Bessie, can you manage to get your brother away from here?"

"Can harm come to him, if he remains, putting himself into your hands?" queried the girl.

"How your interest in me weakens my resolution!" cried the doctor. "You are trying to coax me into letting you stay. Instead of arguing with you, I should be urging you to leave here at once."

"You did not answer my question," said the girl's soft voice.

"If he puts himself into my hands, he will be comparatively safe," admitted the doctor reluctantly. "But he will have to be watched constantly, or, under Gretel's compelling psychic influence, he will remove the very safeguards that I shall have put about him."

"I shall watch over him myself. She shall not touch him again," promised the girl fervently. "Now you must tell me how I can help *you*, Dale."

He leaned over and kissed one of her hands reverently.

"Just believe in me, brown Bessie. And if it chances that I die before her, you will see to it that upon her death her body is cremated, as my will directs. On a funeral pyre of mountain ash. They will try to keep you from doing it. They will say you are mad. But for the sake of an unhappy soul that through my inadvertence would otherwise be burdened by that awful curse, you must do it."

"I promise," said she with white lips. At last her indomitable spirit sensed that possible defeat she had not cared to admit. "But you *won't* die first, Dale!" she begged piteously, like a child.

"No, I won't die first," he comforted her gently.

"Ewan is returning!"

The girl's sharp ears had caught the sound of the water rippling back from the prow of the canoe, and the dripping of the flashing drops from the paddle.

"He will be furious to find you here," she murmured nervously.

"Nevertheless, he must find me here, Bessie. He will want to tell me what a brute I am," commented the doctor dryly.

He turned to watch Ewan, and as he looked, his expression softened into a great and understanding pity.

THE young artist drew the canoe to shore as if even that trifling effort was hard for him. He picked up the fishing tackle and basket that came up so easily that one realized it must be empty, and started up from the bank with the weary, dragging steps of an old man. At the door his eyes lifted heavily, and took in the doctor standing near by with Bessie. A flash of resentment came into that heaviness. Ewan dropped the basket and fishing tackle and took a hasty, stumbling step forward.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded belligerently, but as he came toward the two he swayed weakly and fell.

The doctor sprang, caught the fainting form, and carried the artist into the cabin, where he laid Ewan on the cot. He stood over him, looking down with gathered brow. The girl had followed, her round face pale with apprehension.

"He's not——?"

"It's the lack of blood," explained the doctor, absently. "He's been about drained. She—she'd been fasting," he murmured significantly.

"This is horrible!" gasped the girl sickly, the truth coming home at last with force.

The doctor caught her arm as she swayed dizzily and led her to a chair.

"You see, you didn't really understand how terribly true all I told you was. Now you're beginning to realize it. Sit still, child, while I make an examination of your brother."

He returned to Ewan; straightened the fainting man's limbs into a more comfortable position; pulled up the eyelids and looked at the dull eyes; drew the lips apart, that he might examine the teeth with meticulous care; pulled taut the skin of the throat and stared white-faced at the two odd little openings on the neck.

"Bessie, your brother is in pretty bad case. She—she must have been ravenous. If it were not already growing night, I would put him into the canoe and leave it to you to slip down the stream to the town. Any risks you might take alone in the woods would be as nothing in comparison to those you face by remaining here."

The girl leaned back weakly in her chair.

"He isn't going to die, is he?" she whispered anxiously.

"I think not. At least, not *this* time," replied the doctor pointedly. "But we must take care that there isn't another time, Bessie. And to that end," he added as if to himself, "I have an hour of daylight, and I saw wild roses in blossom about a mile down the stream, on my side."

He turned briskly to the door after those cryptic words.

"Close this window, my child. Keep it tightly closed."

"But the night is growing warm and heavy, Dale. The air in here is so close——"

"There are worse things than close air, brown Bessie," returned the doctor enigmatically. "Keep *all* the windows closed, and also the door. Until I return," he amended.

"What shall I do for Ewan?"

"Let him sleep. Nature has her own best means of recuperation. When he wakens, give him bacon, eggs, thick slices of well-buttered bread. Plenty of coffee with evaporated milk. Don't stint him. He'll be hungry, I promise you, after he's rested a while."

He walked across the clearing, Bessie watching him. Then he came striding back again.

"Don't be alarmed if I'm not back before dark, Bessie. Keep the doors and windows closed until I return. I'll have to stop in at the lodge, you see. I must attend to Gretel before I return."

Dejection was in his mien and accent.

"I understand, Dale. I'll be waiting."

In those few words, Bessie Gillespie outlined her trust and her patience and her future policy in life to the man who went away comforted because of her sturdy simplicity and wholesomeness.

CHAPTER 8

EWAN SUBMITS

WAITING was not to be as easy for Bessie as she had fancied. Ewan stirred on his cot shortly after dark, and when she flew to his side he begged her peevishly to let a little air

into the room; he felt as if he were suffocating, he declared.

"I can't do that, Ewan. I promised the doctor——"

He sat up on his cot weakly.

"Jove, but it's exasperating to feel down and out like this," he complained. "Can't understand what's come over me. Bessie, fix me something to eat; that's a good girl. I'm half starved. Why, that must be it. I'm faint for want of food. I hardly ate this noon."

"Do keep quiet, Ewan," begged his sister earnestly. "Lie down—please. I'll bring you something in a few minutes. The doctor——"

"What's all this about the doctor? Why can't I get up, Bess? Must be a touch of grippe," said the young man, his hand going to his throat in a familiar gesture.

"Ewan, you fainted, and Dr. Armitage had to bring you in here."

"You were talking with him when I came back," accused Ewan. He sat up and leaned limply against the wall. "Jove, if only I felt like myself, sis, I'd rate you well. The fellow's married, you know."

"You don't have to warn me off, Ewan," retorted his sister, but her tones lacked conviction. "I might point out to you that Gretel Armitage is married, too, and that her husband might not be over pleased if he knew that you——"

She broke off abruptly. Why should she tell Ewan that she had caught the doctor's wife bestowing upon him her loathsome caresses? More, that Gretel had——? Oh, she dared not broach that subject! He would not believe her. She would wait. Dale would know how to tell her brother.

"Poor Gretel!" Ewan was saying languidly. "The fellow took advantage of her innocent unworldliness, and when her father died, he married her and got hold of all her money."

Bessie was momentarily indignant, but she relaxed, letting him talk on. So that was what Gretel had been telling him.

"And then he began to betray his jealous disposition. He wouldn't let her have a friend. Even children were taboo. When she did make friends on the sly with a seven-year-old girl, he dragged her off into the woods. When the little thing died recently, he wouldn't even let her attend the funeral or send flowers. Jove, he's a jealous brute!"

Bessie, listening as she turned bacon and broke eggs into the sizzling fat, felt resentment sweeping over her. So this was Gretel's version of the child's death. Incredible as the doctor's story would have been had anyone but himself related it to her, Bessie, with a loving woman's contrariness, preferred to believe it, rather than to accept Gretel's. Yet she was forced unwillingly to admit to herself that Gretel's story was more reasonable.

Presently she invited her brother to come into the larger room and eat. The inviting aroma of steaming coffee floated alluringly to the artist's nostrils. He rose weakly from the cot and walked into the adjoining room, where he sank into a chair, looking with the appreciation of a hungry man at his sister's culinary efforts.

"Is your throat better?" she asked presently, unable to keep away from a topic she very well knew she should have avoided until the doctor was present to make it as reasonable as such an incredible affair could be made.

Ewan put one hand to his neck; stroked it gingerly.

"Some spider, I'll say," he observed. "It feels as if all of me had been drawn into my neck," he smiled, wincing.

Bessie could have shrieked her new knowledge at him. "And so it is," she felt like crying in terrible warning. "And so it is!"

"I suppose the doctor could give me something to put on it?" Ewan continued, half reluctantly.

"I'm glad you're not going to let any silly prejudice against him stand in your way when you need him," commented his sister gravely. "He saw those wounds on your neck, Ewan, and is much disturbed."

"Over a spider's bite?" asked Ewan mockingly. "Just like a doctor, to exaggerate the thing, so that a cure will appear marvelous."

"A very venomous creature attacked you, Ewan," responded his sister, with such seriousness that Ewan's fork paused on its way to his mouth, and he stared hard at her.

"Jove! And this creature is——?"

"He'll explain everything when he comes," she evaded, for the subject she had so carelessly introduced had gone a little beyond what she had intended.

"I see," said Ewan shortly. "And I presume he'll also explain why he visits my sister so frequently behind my back?"

"It will be intolerable if you start anything of that kind!" cried the girl passionately. "Haven't I a right to consult a physician if I choose?"

"Ah!" Ewan stared at her again. "Well, it all depends upon what attitude he takes with regard to that poor little lonely wife of his. More bacon and another egg, please, sis."

Bessie refilled his plate in silence. She was relieved when she saw the dancing light of a flashlight coming across the log bridge.

"Ewan, he's coming. Please be nice to him," she begged.

Her brother regarded her with drawn brow.

"Bessie, this is the first time I've known you to be really interested in a man. And he has to be married," he grunted, half in disgust.

"It's the first time I've known you to take up the cudgels in defense of a married woman," she put in quickly.

"Oh, for the Lord's sake, Bessie!"

"Well, be decent, then," said the girl in a tense undertone, as the doctor's flashlight approached the doorway and hesitated without, dancing on the window and through it upon the cabin roof.

"Let him in, will you?" Ewan said shortly, as Bessie hesitated. "He comes as a physician, doesn't he?"

She flew to the door and opened it.

THE doctor came striding in, pushing the door to behind him and putting the bar into place with a caution that stirred the artist's curiosity and Bessie's apprehension.

"Feeling better after a good supper?" he asked Ewan pleasantly.

The artist took his cue from the other's finely impersonal tone.

"My neck's a bit sore," said he, touching it and wincing a bit.

The doctor nodded with contracted brows and a quick glance at Bessie.

"Anything you can do for it?" continued Ewan. "It—it seems to be—drawing me so," he added distastefully. "And if it was something venomous that bit me, as Bessie says you told her——"

"What bit you, Mr. Gillespie, was a creature so venomous that I hardly dare encourage you very much in feeling sanguine about consequences unless you agree to put yourself unreservedly into my hands for such treatment as I may outline, no matter how absurd or inadequate such treatment may appear to you just now," said the doctor gravely.

Ewan gave a short, dry laugh.

"You don't mean that these tiny punctures on my neck may prove fatal?" he asked incredulously, and at the other's grave inclination of the head he laughed again. "Bessie, do you make any sense out of that? I've never heard that there was any insect

in these woods that could give a fatal bite."

"Did I say 'insect'?" asked the doctor very quietly.

Ewan twisted about in his chair, the better to observe the doctor's face.

"Are you joking at my expense?" he inquired, with an assumption of offended dignity.

"No, Mr. Gillespie, I am not joking. I am in deadly earnest."

"Then please explain yourself," demanded the artist, pushing back his chair and looking imperatively at the other man.

The doctor hesitated. He sighed heavily, and then, without Ewan's invitation, drew up a chair to the opposite side of the table and seated himself with deliberation.

"If I were to tell you outright what has happened, you would refuse to believe my explanation," he said finally. "Can you not just trust my statement that your wounds—which appear so trifling—are of an importance that can not be exaggerated? That unless they are healed within a few days you are in danger of losing your life, to say nothing of what is far more important to you than life—your immortal soul?"

"You are not talking to a baby, Dr. Armitage," retorted the artist nervously, feeling in his pocket for a cigarette case. "Do you object to a sick man's smoking? It may help to settle my nerves after your wonderfully clear statement," he finished ironically.

The doctor accepted a cigarette, and replied with obvious reluctance: "You are a baby, Mr. Gillespie, when it comes to matters medical. If I were to give you in technical terms the story of what has happened to your throat, and what is liable to happen to you unless drastic steps are taken at once, you will admit that you would most likely be unable to understand those technical terms?"

"I agree with you there." Ewan coolly puffed his cigarette. "But why should you hesitate to tell me in non-technical terms what bit me? And the effect of this bite upon the human system? Always in non-technical terms. And the proper measures to be taken to heal these dangerous wounds?" he finished sarcastically.

"I do not tell you, because you would consider me a madman," replied the doctor with conviction. "And, considering me out of my mind, you would hardly credit or carry out my means of protection from further infection, would you?"

"I suppose not," Ewan said after a short pause.

"I will make a bargain with you," offered the doctor thoughtfully. "If you will put yourself into my hands and let me provide such measures of precaution for the healing of that dangerous infection which is even now creeping over your system"—Ewan's hand went to his throat again; and his face was startled as he listened—"when you have been healed I will tell you all that I feel I can not wisely tell you at this time, when your confidence in me is so absolutely necessary that I dare not risk losing an iota of any faith you may have in me *as a medical man*," he emphasized pointedly.

Ewan's face became thoughtful.

"Oh, Ewan, please let the doctor do what he thinks is best for you. Please!" begged the girl earnestly. "You can not realize how important it all is."

Her earnestness betrayed her. Ewan turned his eyes on her with an inscrutable expression. The doctor's brows contracted and his fine lips pressed firmly together.

"Jove, Bessie, you talk as if you know something about the habits of this—ah—bug, or whatever it was," Ewan commented, his gaze scrutiniz-

ing his sister's flushed face. "How about it, sis?"

She threw a quick glance at the doctor for help and counsel.

"Your sister happened to see the—creature—that bit you," said the doctor slowly, "and described—it—to me. Do you wish to tell him, Bessie?"

The girl turned her back to them both, shuddering uncontrollably. Her voice was half smothered when she finally spoke.

"No, I can't tell him now. You know I can't. He would be furious with me. He wouldn't believe me," she almost whispered.

"Bessie!" reproached her brother sharply.

"Well, Ewan," the girl cried, whirling about to face him, her gentle face convulsed by the emotion induced by the fearful memory of that night, "if I can not, myself, credit fully as yet the evidence of my own eyes, how can I expect you to?"

Ewan eyed her in silence. At last he said, his face moody:

"There's something darned queer about this whole business. I don't understand it. I admit that. But I do know one thing: if I've been bitten by something venomous, and you, Dr. Armitage, believe you can heal the wound and stop the circulation of the poison through my system—well, I put myself unreservedly into your hands. Until," he added hastily, "until the wound is healed and the poison gone. Then I shall certainly expect an explanation of all this mystery. It seems very childish to me now."

Bessie had dropped her face into her hands and was crying softly.

"Don't, please, Bessie!" The doctor sprang to his feet and looked at her with all his heart plainly written on his face. "He shall be healed, I promise you. Don't worry, dear. He has put himself into my hands, and I can take care of him if my directions are followed with strict attention."

The girl finally managed to choke back her sobs of relief at her brother's decision. She raised her tear-stained face to meet Ewan's pluckily.

"Why, sis, I'd no idea you'd feel that way about it," said her twin, deeply touched by her sisterly solicitude. "Well, doctor, on with the dance! What's first on the docket?"

Dr. Armitage's reply was wordless. He went to the door, opened it cautiously, peering outside beforehand. He leaned down and came back, barring the door behind him. His arms were full of blossoming sprays of wild roses.

"This is the best I can do tonight. They must go all over the window crevices in your brother's room," he directed, addressing Bessie with an appeal in his dark eyes to which she responded, although the oddity of his orders was stirring Ewan into humorous mood.

"Is that part of the 'important treatment'?" inquired the artist, struggling to maintain his gravity, the absurdity of decorating his room with flowers as a precaution having affected his risibility.

"This is an important part of the precautions that we must take to prevent a further recurrence of infection," responded the doctor, his face so grave that the other man controlled himself for fear of stirring Dale Armitage to indignation. "Over the doorway here," he added, placing a long pink-blossomed spray over the lintel of the door that led out-of-doors from the larger room.

"Aren't you going to put something on my neck?" inquired Ewan with considerable curiosity.

The doctor gave him a long look.

"It won't be necessary," he said finally. "That is, as long as you are wearing this," and he took from his pocket a rosary with a crucifix of silver.

"I'm not a Catholic," declared

Ewan decidedly. "Why on Earth should I put that about my neck? It's absurd."

"It may be absurd to you," responded the doctor quietly, "but it is part—and a deeply serious part—of the necessary treatment. If you keep this crucifix close about your neck, Mr. Gillespie, that—Thing—which infected you will be unable to approach easily."

"Jove! Do you actually expect me to *believe* that?"

"I do not care whether you believe it or not," flashed the other man, "as long as you follow my orders to wear it."

"Oh, I suppose I shall have to, then," submitted Ewan, with unexpected meekness. "But I'll say I never thought I'd be wearing a Catholic emblem——"

"Is the cross any more Catholic than Protestant?" demanded the doctor sharply. "It is not the thing in itself. It is what hundreds of years of reverence and adoration from millions of human souls have made it. It is the visible emblem of that which has been the redemption of mankind from Evil, and as such, Evil flees it today because of its powerful occult influence, gathered through the ages from the loving worship of so many human hearts."

The doctor finished fastening the wild rose branches about Ewan's room.

"Now, Mr. Gillespie, if the windows and doors are kept tightly closed tonight, and that crucifix remains on your neck, I can guarantee that you will sleep well, waken refreshed and stronger——"

"And the wounds will heal, won't they?" eagerly interrupted the girl.

"And the wounds—in time—will heal," agreed the doctor. "But——"

"Ah, always there is a 'but'," the artist murmured, with an odd expression on his face as he fingered the rosary about his neck and stared at the garlands now decorating his sleeping quarters.

"In the meantime, Mr. Gillespie, you must agree not to see Mrs. Armitage alone," decreed the doctor, and with a quickly uplifted finger cut short Ewan's instant, indignant protest. "After the wounds have healed and I have explained to you, in her presence if necessary, the cause of them—you may make your own choice about seeing her further," he ended heavily in dejected tone. "But that choice may spell tragedy to you," he added, grimly.

Ewan's eyes were on the doctor's face.

"Frankly," said he lightly, "my opinion is that you're off your head. But as Bessie insists—and I've promised—I'll keep to your orders. So I accept the added foolish condition, with its corollary that I may have the honor of seeing Mrs. Armitage later on, in her husband's presence," he laughed.

He turned on his heel and went into his room, closing the door without so little as a good-night.

"Oh, Dale!"

Bessie was perilously close to tears again.

The doctor went to her, gently took her hands in his and held them quietly until it seemed to her that she could feel his strength pouring into her from his strong, cool fingers.

"Bessie, my dear, if your brother does not see Gretel privately until those wounds are healed, all will go well with him. But you," he ordered reluctantly, "must watch over him all night. She will try her utmost to impress her evil wishes upon his subjective mind, forcing him to tear off the crucifix I have placed about his neck, and even to pull down the protecting branches of the wild rose that I have put about his window and door, for she has this power over him now. As long as all remains as arranged, she can not enter, bodily.

Have you the courage to undertake this vigil?"

"Can't you stay?" she quavered, the whole horror of the prospective night weighing upon her spirits.

He shook his head in negation.

"No, brown girl, I can not remain. I must return to her. In my own way I must also watch. I must keep her mind so occupied that she will be unable to concentrate upon your brother."

"Was she angry?" queried Bessie timidly.

He laughed, a short, grim laugh.

"Angry! If *that* could describe it, Bessie! She made a threat which I hardly think she will carry out. If she does," he said huskily, "God would have to be especially merciful to all three of us here!"

Bessie's fingers trembled in his. Her hazel eyes glazed with inward terror.

"Dale, you terrify me! What—what do you mean?"

"My dear, if she gets the opportunity to carry out her threat, an opportunity I don't intend she shall have, then it will be time enough for me to tell you what I mean. Until then, do not open the door until morning breaks full," he warned impressively. "Nor a window. And keep awake, for Ewan's sake. Do not leave him out of your sight for a single minute."

Bessie, white to the lips, nodded acquiescence.

CHAPTER 9

ON THE WINGS OF THE WIND

As SHE barred the door when the doctor left, Bessie found herself shaking with nervous chills. All her life she had been protected; an old-fashioned home girl. Never had she been separated from her twin brother as she was now, in spirit. Depressing and terrifying was the thought that she must spend that entire night virtually alone, with an evil something hovering near with malicious intent, the outworking of which she could not foresee. Only the reflection that Dale Armitage would be thinking of her, struggling from his own place to protect Ewan and herself, comforted her, for she had much confidence in his superior knowledge and ability to ward off this pressing evil.

Hardly had the doctor gone than Bessie heard her brother stirring in his room. She flew to the communicating door and opened it, with a light but imperative tap. Ewan stood at the window, pulling down the sprays of wild roses which the doctor had placed about it. On the floor lay the rosary, where he must have tossed it after tearing it from his neck. At his sister's involuntary cry of apprehension and warning, Ewan turned and faced her. She shrank sickly at the revelation of that hard, far-away gaze that seemed to pass through her and out—out—beyond the cabin walls.

"Ewan! What are you doing? You promised!" she cried.

As she called his name, the artist shuddered slightly. By slow degrees his eyes became more normal. He moved his head so that his gaze rested on his sister's solicitous face. Then it passed her and went, as if drawn irresistibly, to the window.

"Jove!" The ejaculation was jerked convulsively from his pale lips. "Bessie! Bessie! Am I *mad?* Or do *you* see it, too?"

His sister sprang across the room to his side. She had had a moment's terrible hallucination; or so she explained it to herself, for she feared to admit it was anything more substantial than a purely mental image that had all at once flattened chalky face against the window, with parted crimson lips drawn back tightly against red gums and pointed, shining white teeth. And those horridly

gleaming eyes! Flashing with ruby glints! The evil smile!

"Come away from that window, Ewan!" she screamed, grasping her brother's arm in sheer panic.

The artist retreated slowly, but his eyes were glued to the panes, and in them once more that far-away look began to grow. He moved like a person in a trance.

Bessie pulled at him frantically. Then she leaned down, picked up the rosary and tried to put it about his neck, a gesture he vaguely but ineffectually repulsed. She had the final satisfaction of seeing the sacred emblem slip down over his heart.

He sighed deeply, then, and removed his eyes from the window. Still in that dazed manner he groped his way back to his cot and let himself slip supinely upon it, his sister watching meantime in an agony of apprehension lest that ghastly countenance that had seemed to flash against the windowpane should once more glare in upon them.

"I'm—sleepy," drawled the artist.

He closed heavy lids, seemingly falling quickly into a deep sleep.

Bessie, although she shrank from approaching the window, crossed the room again and picked up the wild rose sprays. She replaced them in as nearly the same positions as the doctor had. Then she went into the living room for a hammer and some nails, determined to tack a piece of burlap securely over the window, to put a permanent stop to such hallucinations. This accomplished, she felt much more comfortable, and with Ewan's door open so that she could watch him from her seat by the table, where she purposed to sit and read, Bessie settled herself for her long night vigil.

The alarm-clock ticked sedately on the table before her, until its little black hands passed 3 o'clock. A penetrating cold, strangely out of place on a summer night, began to chill her to the marrow. And she found herself attacked by fits of yawning, and a deep longing for sleep. At that, she rose and began to prepare hot coffee, to ward off that overwhelming impulse to throw herself on her cot and let herself slip off into slumber.

As she stood over the bubbling saucepan, watching the boiling water rise around the edges and overflow the island of coffee in its midst, a sudden roaring in the forest aisles startled her into frozen stillness. It was as if all the trees were suddenly shouting together; a tumult almost incredible to have come without previous warning into the quiet peace of the night. And in the midst of that terrible, portentous sound there was borne to Bessie's straining ears a wailing cry of eery omen that sent her staggering back against the table, clutching at the edge of it to support her trembling body.

"Help—help—help!" wailed that shrilling voice, and the cry was a woman's, and it came from a soul in the final throes of some intolerable agony.

The roaring in the forest trees grew with noticeable steadiness into a fearful uproar that seemed the voice of a tremendous volume of blasting wind, but in spite of all this racket the little cabin seemed to stand in the midst of a mighty calm, for there was no whistling of that tremendous air movement around its sturdy walls. Yet a terrible and penetrating cold came pushing through every crack and crevice. And ever above the booming of that mysterious force, whatever it was that swelled thundering among the forest giants, shrilled with distinct and horrisonous significance that woman's cry for help.

Although the blood seemed congealing about her slowly beating heart,

Bessie Gillespie's first thought was for her brother, for that this cry upon the mounting larum of the forest was a portent of impending evil she felt instinctively. At her hasty glance about, she saw that the wild rose spray over Ewan's door had slipped off and disappeared. She remembered that she had caught them all up in her perturbation of spirit and had put them about the window, that spray, probably, with the others. She ran now to the living room door and pulled down the branch above it. This she pushed into position over the lintel of the door leading to her brother's room, and heaved a deep sigh of relief as she saw him apparently in a heavy sleep, the beads of the rosary just in sight about his neck, and the window protected, as she had last arranged it.

Now there came a wild rapping at the cabin door. A frantic pounding of fists upon the sturdy wood. Then the noisy moaning as of a woman's ultimate clamoring appeal, wordless in its stress of emotion.

BESSIE trembled where she stood, indecision whirling her mentally this way and that. Ewan, if she could believe the doctor's word, was more or less safe as long as the wild rose sprays and the crucifix remained in place; unless he wakened, tore them down, or emerged from the room which just now was his one refuge. She told herself that if that shouting tumult of the forest had not wakened him, nothing else could.

She knew that she could not refuse admittance to that poor soul moaning without her door. There were bears and wildcats in the woods, so Amity Dam folk had told Ewan. And the cold was biting more and more cruelly in spite of the fire the girl had made in the stove to boil her coffee. Suppose a wild animal should attack some poor night wanderer outside her very door; in the morning she might find the half-devoured body, the picked bones. . . . Her dark hair almost stood on end at this obnoxious thought; she felt that she could not, in the name of common humanity, ignore that cry in the night.

With a swelling prayer for protection and guidance, she lifted the bar from the door. Simultaneously, it burst inward, bringing with it all the roar of the furious forest giants, and bearing upon that almost tangible booming the form of a woman that came sweeping upon the startled girl as if actually carried into the cabin by the force of the wild gust. And as Bessie retreated in involuntary dismay—although to her increasing bewilderment not a breath of air seemed to infringe upon the stillness of the room's atmosphere—the din and hubbub was gone as suddenly as it had arisen. The cabin door slammed shut as if sucked back by the retreating of those mysterious and potent forces that had been invoked for her own fell purpose by Gretel Armitage, who uncovered her flaxen hair with a quick gesture that flung her enveloping mantle aside imperiously.

"You!" gasped Bessie, retreating toward Ewan's door in an attitude of unconscious guardianship, her arms out, her palms spread against this unexpected and unwelcome visitor.

Gretel smiled in a superior way, disclosing sharp white teeth between her ruby lips, which she touched delicately with her red tongue in a manner almost animal, wakening apprehensive shudders in that other woman who stood watching and waiting for the visitor's next move.

"Didn't you expect me?" murmured Gretel sweetly. "Surely you must have known that I would come again—and again—after your brother brought me in here in his arms,

against his heart,'' she stabbed softly, subtly.

Bessie's hazel eyes darkened with anger and fear.

''It is abominable of you to have returned,'' she enunciated finally, speaking with careful precision, and standing before Ewan's threshold with firmness, while her heart beat heavily and her soul cried out for courage and help. ''Was there any reason why you should beat upon my door as you did, when you have a home of your own to shelter you?''

''A home of my own?'' said the doctor's wife, with an indescribably bitter accent. ''Girl, I have no home. Home—home is where the heart is, they say. My heart has been trampled upon until its sweetness has been turned to fury and resentment. There is no place where I can rest my aching heart, you brown thing,'' she cried with a sudden flash of such concentrated venom that Bessie shrank hastily backward.

''What brought you here?'' demanded the girl, summoning all her courage, and throwing back her shoulders pluckily.

''What brought me here? Your brother, my dear, of whom I am very fond,'' replied the doctor's wife, with an oddly surreptitious glance into the room beyond Bessie. ''Why all those flowers? Is that interior decorating idea yours?''

''Your husband put those sprays there,'' replied the girl steadily. ''And you know why. You know why my brother is not himself just now. He is protected, thanks to your husband. You shall not have him again, as you did the other night. Dale knows all about it, and he will see that my brother is kept in safety.''

'' 'Dale'?'' repeated Gretel, musingly. ''So you are having a little intrigue of your own, you demure brown thing? I might tell you that if you let my husband alone, I'd let your brother alone, but—but I intend to have your brother for my own. Already he is half mine,'' she said, leaning forward with lifted eyebrows, as if in pretty confidential mood. ''Tonight—or some other night—will be all the same to me. I can wait, Bessie Gillespie. He will be entirely mine, when I find the right opportunity, as find it I shall. And that is a promise,'' she added, scarlet lips drawing into a straight, uncompromising line. ''Now, my dear, for *you*——''

At the flickering red lights in those flashing blue eyes, Bessie felt herself grow faint. There was something irresistibly alluring, if terrible, emanating from the doctor's wife, as she stood without moving from the spot where the forest forces had brought her; it stirred at the very roots of the girl's hair until she could feel each separate hair stiffening on her prickling scalp. She clutched at the doorway on either side, hazel eyes wide, fixed upon the unwavering, snakelike gaze of Gretel Armitage. The strange hypnotic orbs of the doctor's wife did not move from Bessie's strained face; over Gretel's countenance there began to play a subtle expression of gratification and unsuppressed amusement.

''Oh, Bessie, you are *so* simple and so *easy* to handle!'' gurgled the doctor's wife softly. ''After all, it will be amusing to take you first. Ewan can wait for my kisses; he can not get away from me, for he has tasted them once. *You are losing yourself, my plump brown maid—you are falling into the abysses of my eyes, that are drowning you in flames of dizzy rapture*——'' The voice droned on, sending humming tones through Bessie's unhappy, unwilling ears.

All at once, brusk and imperative, came Gretel's command.

"Put out that light on the table, my dear," she said sharply. "It would only draw my furious husband here after me, and—ah, how I love the enveloping darkness," she ended in a lower tone. "Do as I tell you, Bessie. You have saved your brother for tonight. I shall not bother him just now, for you will do very nicely in his stead. Let him grow strong again; all the better for me!" Her eery laugh sounded like the intolerable resonance of silver bells, which rang—and rang—and rang—in Bessie's ears.

The girl stirred in the doorway and moved away from it slowly. Her arms fell limply at her sides. Her dazed eyes were drawn powerfully to those fixed, redly flashing orbs of the other woman, who stood smiling confidently in the middle of the living room. Through Bessie's whole body a pleasant languor crept, a kind of voluptuous pleasure in the urging of her body forward under the will of that other, a releasing of responsibility that gave her a sense of freedom, almost sweet.

"Come, rosy Bessie! Put out the light," droned Gretel's achingly penetrating voice. "You have hated me, but you shall yet love me *with every drop of your blood.*" She laughed softly, terribly. "Come, and when we are in the enveloping darkness I shall put my arms tightly about you, lovely little plump brown thing that you are. Oh, it will be much pleasanter than Dale's kisses, when you sink into delicate faintness under my lips, I promise you! Put out the light, my dear, so that you may come the more quickly and surely into my arms! Oh, you will thrill—from head to foot—with delicious tremblings. Ah, Bessie, I love you already, for you are almost mine. When you are completely mine, I shall love you very tenderly—and you will come to me and offer me everything you have to give, my dear! Come—come—I long to have you of your own free will—it will be more delicious to have it so—little brown thing!"

The voice was languorous, thrillingly sweet and penetrating. Gretel leaned forward, arms outstretched, long fingers beckoning. Her ruby lips smiled with a terrible significance. Her white, pointed teeth flashed as she touched them with her tongue. About her shoulders tumbled that writhing mass of flaxen hair that had veiled Ewan's face as his head lay on her lap that other night.

BESSIE took an involuntary step forward, drawn by Gretel's encouraging smile. She moved dazed-like across the room to the table, stretched out her hand, turned down the wick. The dim flame still flickered and smoldered.

"Blow it out!" commanded Gretel's voice, in harsh impatience, a panicky haste running in undertone through every accent. "Hurry! I can hear Dale's feet trampling through the forest! Hurry, Bessie, or you will not taste tonight what I have promised you! The thrill—the ecstasy—of my kisses——"

Bessie turned her face toward the smoldering light of the lamp, her lips pursed to blow out the flame. As she turned, a shout from the clearing startled her from her half-trance into her normal consciousness. She followed out the intended action under the impetus of Gretel's imperative order, but as the flame died, she knew what awaited her, and from her lips went a shrill, wailing cry of terrible helplessness, as she found herself gripped firmly in Gretel's arms in the darkness.

Gretel's lips were moistly, horribly, pressing upon her shrinking flesh.

The darkness grew Stygian, heavy,

oppressive. In it Bessie struggled weakly to push those sharp white teeth away, even if her flesh were torn badly in her effort to escape that impending doom. She realized her futility. The atmosphere was supercharged with malicious triumph. Evil reigned supreme.

Gretel's panting breath came hotly against the struggling girl's throat. Gretel's white teeth met with a click——

"Dale!" sobbed out Bessie.

Consciousness left the agonized girl as a sharp pain at her throat apprized her that her battle was lost.

Gretel was chuckling horribly in the dark.

This story rises in a thrilling crescendo of horror in next month's issue of WEIRD TALES, wherein is described Gretel's desperate attempt to wreck the lives of her husband and of Ewan and Bessie Gillespie.

On Canton Road

By **SAMUEL M. SARGENT, Jr.**

The ancient house on Canton Road
  Is bleak, and blank, and lone;
Its windows stare with stolid eyes
  Over its walls of stone.

Its windows stare with stolid eyes,
  But window eyes are blind;
Its windows are like midnight lakes
  Deep-frozen in the wind.

Its stoop is dank, of prison stone
  (If prison stone be cold);
Its stoop is dank, and creepers crawl
  Over it, fold on fold.

It has a yard of fetid vines
  That straggle to the wall;
It has a tree—one weary tree—
  Waiting long to fall.

The trunk is green with viscid growth,
  The wall, the house, are green;
And at the windows, of a night,
  The creepers' souls are seen.

But souls of things are better hid
  That fiends gaze on with lust;
The vines like millepedes squirm up
  House-high above the dust.

The vines, like things from Styx-fed tarns,
  Edge upward to the night;
Hell-grown mosses choke the house,
  For houses do not fight.

Hell-grown mosses writhe and twist
  On wall, on house, on tree. . . .
('Tis better not to see the souls
  Of things men should not see.)

The ancient house on Canton Road
  Is bleak, and blank, and green,
And filmy with a thousand things
  That better are not seen.



THE illusion of reality! That seems to be the key to the amazing success of WEIRD TALES. Stories that take one far from the sordid, humdrum, everyday life of the world into a deathless land of fantasy, of imaginative unrealities that seem real; stories that plumb the future with the eye of prophecy, explore the spaces between the stars, cross the threshold of death and deal boldly with devil-worship and black magic, witchcraft and voodoo, ghosts, forces of occult evil and occult good; yet the stories seem real—otherwise they could not hold the thrill that has given WEIRD TALES its fame. When it was first decided to put out a magazine that should be truly different from all others in the world, convincingness was made the essential test for all stories. Tales that amaze, yet convince; tales that thrill—and seem true. Some of the stories in WEIRD TALES are absolutely impossible (as far as we know what is possible and what is not), but even the impossible stories seem probable. They carry the illusion of reality.

The classic example of impossibility made probable is *Dracula*, which was written by Sir Henry Irving's manager, Mr. Bram Stoker. It deals with vampires—the Undead who come out from their tombs at night and prey upon the living; an absolutely impossible story, treating of things that nobody believes in any more (though such beliefs were once common enough); yet so carefully and convincingly does the author develop his theme that the story seems entirely real *while we are reading it*, and thus we are able to become tremendously excited over the thrilling adventures therein described. And it is the aim of WEIRD TALES to keep this thrill that comes of the illusion of reality, even in stories that deal with what is called the impossible. They *seem* possible while we are reading them; otherwise they could hold no thrill.

It is much more difficult for an author to write a convincing weird tale now than it was when the *Arabian Nights Entertainments* were written, when everyone believed in magic, in jinns and occult influence. It is real art to write a thoroughly convincing story in which the planet Mars hurtles in flaming destruction straight toward Earth, pulled from its orbit by creatures on this world with power to repel or attract the planet by stabbing across space with red or green rays of light. *Across Space*, the story by Edmond Hamilton, which begins next month in WEIRD TALES, is replete with thrills, because it is written so convincingly that nothing in it seems impossible, and the reader is carried along in the sweep of hopes and fears that beset the world, for the story seems utterly probable in every detail. It is pseudo-science, but it is based on sound scientific principles. And it is this magazine's in-

tention to print the best weird and weird-scientific stories obtainable, but all must carry the illusion of reality. If they have this, then they have power to thrill; and it is this illusion of reality that has established the success of this magazine of "weird tales."

The June issue has called forth many enthusiastic letters, though we have space to print only a few. "The magazine certainly deserves credit for its wonderful strides in the last few months," writes Rosemary E. Field of Uniontown, Pennsylvania. "You are carrying better stories, and I love the magazine—even if it does keep me awake all night shivering with imagined dangers. Why don't you print the pictures of the authors? I, for one, would like to see what they look like."

Amelia Tarnozzi, of San Francisco, suggests: "Would it be possible to secure as reprints chapters or extracts of some of the practically unknown books on black magic, witchcraft, etc.? Many of the rare books of the Middle Ages none of us have a chance to read, and some of them certainly must be suitable for publication in WEIRD TALES as reprints."

Writes L. J. Frank, of Portland, Oregon: "In The Eyrie I see that you hear from many parts of the East. I want you to know that there are people out in the West that also wait anxiously for each edition of WEIRD TALES. I congratulate you on your selection of stories for the last edition and am eagerly waiting for the next one."

"*Spider-Bite*, in the June issue, is the most eery and fascinating tale I have ever read," writes Carroll McMasters, of Tacoma, Washington. "I would also like many more stories by Lovecraft, please, for he is a wonderful writer."

Manual S. Perry, of New Bedford, Massachusetts, voices his dissent from those readers who want WEIRD TALES published twice as often as at present. "Many readers suggest having the magazine published semi-monthly, but let it remain as it is," he writes. "The stories in your magazine would lose their thrilling effect if published oftener. Remember, Mr. Editor, that only rare things are precious; so let it be rare."

"Your magazine each month proves an oasis in a weary desert of standard reading matter," writes Manly Wade Wellman, of Wichita, Kansas. "I have long been attracted by the fantastic and unusual in fiction, but there seemed to be little in modern writing of that order. I have been reading WEIRD TALES with intense interest for months."

Ralph Anstad, of Minneapolis, writes enthusiastically to The Eyrie: "Though I have read your magazine since it was first published, never have I read a more thrill-inspiring issue than the June copy. The magazine held me spellbound for the whole afternoon. To think that in one magazine are stories by the great Stamper, Powers, Burks and Lovecraft is worth ten times the price of the magazine."

Frank Simon, of Hartsville, Tennessee, finds reading WEIRD TALES lucrative. He writes to The Eyrie: "I began reading WEIRD TALES with the March number, 1925, and haven't missed a copy since. I have all my magazines, as I read them and then lease them out for ten cents a week. I have four out this week, so I make my magazine free."

Harold Weight, of Pasadena, California, writes: "I've been a constant reader of WEIRD TALES from almost the first issue. The magazine certainly is improving. There isn't a bad story in the May issue. Strange though it may seem, with all the good stories, none of them held my interest as much as one little poem. That poem was *The Moon Dance*, by A. Leslie. The poem was wonderful. I must have read it a dozen times. There was a certain swing to

it which gripped my imagination. *The Dance of Death* by Jean Lahors was another poem which attracted my attention. Please have more such issues as the May one."

Writes William S. Pillsbury, of Eugene, Oregon: "For some time I have been reading and enjoying your magazine. I like Mr. Quinn's stories a lot, I think Mr. Powers is clever, and of course Mr. Wells' stories get a vote. But I think the best author you have is this Eli Colter. His stories get me right where I live. Just finished the serial one, *On the Dead Man's Chest,* and it certainly is a knockout. I've an idea Colter meant a lot more than he said in that story. He has one quality I like more than any other. O. Henry had it. I mean the business of handing you a whale of a punch at the end of the story. Whenever I start in on a Colter story I know it's going to wind up with a bang. I hope you get another one soon." Mr. Pillsbury will be glad to hear that we have not merely one, but several stories by Eli Colter scheduled; and *The Last Horror,* which will appear soon, is one of the greatest, most thought-stimulating stories we have ever read, anywhere. There is a whole philosophy of life in that story, and the "bang" at the end is a veritable explosion.

Writes John Paul Ward, from Marblehead: "I live on a lonely stretch of seacoast in Massachusetts, and our house is apart from the others in the village. It overlooks the ocean; and on a dark, stormy night with the rain spattering against the window, and noises (real or imaginary) and WEIRD TALES!——well, you can draw your own conclusions as to how anyone would feel. But I love it and I know many readers of this unique magazine would like to have my surroundings to read it in."

What is your favorite story in this issue? Your votes for the best-liked story in the June issue gave an overwhelming lead to *Spidèr-Bite,* Robert S. Carr's eery tale of resurrected mummies and great white Egyptian tomb-spiders. Five or six stories are in a close race for second place as this issue goes to press, but all of these are far behind *Spider-Bite* in popularity.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE AUGUST WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)_____	_____
(2)_____	_____
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I do not like the following stories:

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Next Month

The Bird of Space

By Everil Worrell

ON A dark star warmed by internal heat lives a race of green-faced men who have learned how to cross from one world to another. And one of these green-hued men comes to Earth to take back human beings with him to stock the cattle-pens of Furos, the dark star.

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The Woman of the Wood

(Continued from page 166)

"What but the trees, M'sieu?" answered the old man, and McKay thought that his gaze dwelt upon him strangely. "The trees killed them. See—we went up the little path through the wood, and close to its end we found it blocked by fallen trees. The flies buzzed round those trees, M'sieu, so we searched there. They were under them, Polleau and his sons. A fir had fallen upon Polleau and had crushed in his chest. Another son we found beneath a fir and upturned birches. They had broken his back, and an eye had been torn out—but that was no new wound, the latter."

He paused.

"It must have been a sudden wind," said his man. "Yet I never knew of a wind such as that must have been. There were no trees down except those that lay upon them. And of those it was as though they had leaped out of the ground! Yes, as though they had leaped out of the ground upon them. Or it was as though giants had torn them out for clubs. They were not broken—their roots were bare——"

"But the other son—Polleau had two?" Try as he might, McKay could not keep the tremor out of his voice.

"Pierre," said the old man, and again McKay felt that strange quality in his gaze. "He lay beneath a fir. His throat was torn out!"

"His throat torn out!" whispered McKay. His knife! The knife that had been slipped into his hand by the shadowy shapes!

"His throat was torn out," repeated the innkeeper. "And in it still was the broken branch that had

done it. A broken branch, M'sieu, pointed like a knife. It must have caught Pierre as the fir fell, and ripping through his throat—been broken off as the tree crashed."

McKay stood, mind whirling in wild conjecture. "You said—a broken branch?" McKay asked through lips gone white.

"A broken branch, M'sieu." The innkeeper's eyes searched him. "It was very plain—what it was that happened. Jacques;" he turned to his man, "go up to the house."

He watched until the man shuffled out of sight.

"Yet not all is so plain, M'sieu,"

(Continued on next page)



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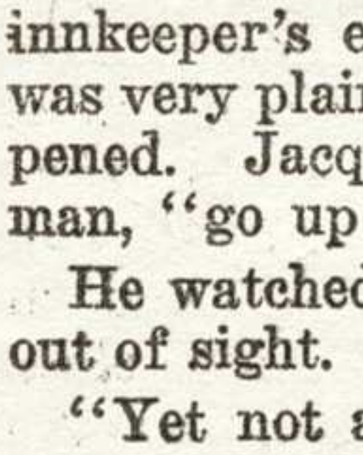
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he spoke low to McKay, "since in Pierre's hand I found—this."

He reached into a pocket and drew out a button from which hung a strip of cloth. They had once been part of that stained coat which McKay had hidden in his trunk. And as McKay strove to speak the old man raised his hand. Button and cloth dropped from it, into the water. A wave took it and floated it away; another and another snatched it and passed it on. They watched it, silently, until it had vanished.

"Tell me nothing," said the keeper of the inn. "Polleau was a hard man and hard men were his sons. The trees hated them. The trees killed them. The—souvenir—is gone. Only M'sieu would better also—go."

THAT night McKay packed. When dawn had broken he stood at his window, looking long at the little wood. It too was awakening, stirring sleepily—like drowsy, delicate demoiselles. He thought he could see that one slim birch that was—what?

Tree or woman? Or both?

Silently, the old landlord and his wife watched him as he swung out his car—a touch of awe, a half-fear, in their eyes. Without a word they let him go.

And as McKay swept up the road that led over the lip of the green bowl he seemed to hear from all the forest a deep-toned, mournful chanting. It arose around him as he topped the rise in one vast whispering cloud—of farewell! And died.

Never, he knew, would that green door of enchantment be opened to him again. His fear had closed it—forever. Something had been offered to him beyond mortal experience—something that might have raised him to the level of the gods of Earth's youth. He had rejected it. And nevermore, he knew, would he cease to regret.

Disappearing Bullets

By GEORGE J. BRENN

EXPERIENCE SMITH, master detective, looked pointedly at the man seated opposite him.

"Let's get down to business," he suggested. "When did this trouble of yours start?"

"About two weeks ago," said Bradley.

"Someone telephoned my home at Westbury about midnight. Told me that I would be shot while I was breakfasting. I hung up the receiver and returned to bed. Thought it was just a crank or practical joker. Next morning a bullet pierced the window of my breakfast room, on a level with my head!"

"What!"

"That's not all," continued Bradley nervously. "It never touched me, and we couldn't find a trace of it, other than the hole in the glass. The whole room has been examined minutely, but we are unable to find that a bullet has lodged in the walls or furniture. The hole in the window pane is about the size that a .38 caliber bullet would make.'

"What did you do?" asked Smith.

"I was about to look out the window for the person who did the shooting, but Bernice, my daughter, restrained me. She persuaded me to go to another window to look out, assuming that it would be less dangerous. There wasn't a person in sight, however."

"Strange," commented Barnes.

"Fairly strange," drawled Smith. "What else, sir?"

"The same thing has happened half a dozen times since. First there would be a threatening telephone call, advising me of the hour at which the shot would be fired. The strange voice would say: 'The bullet will not touch you *this* time.' The manner in which it was said would lead one to believe that on some subsequent occasion the bullet *would* touch me."

"Always the same voice?" asked Experience Smith.

"Yes. I have no doubt of that, but I can't seem to place the owner. There is a slight imperfection or impediment in his speech, but I don't know how to describe it. It's not a lisp or a stammer, nor is it due to inability to pronounce certain consonants. The only way I can describe it is to say that it is a 'thick,' imperfect or slurred pronunciation of almost every word, although what is said is always intelligible enough."

"And has this feller made good his threats every time?" questioned Smith.

Bradley nodded emphatically.

"He surely has! There are two other holes in windows at Westbury. There is one in a library window in my home in Park Avenue. Another is in the plate glass window of my office in the Corinthian Building. Do you wonder that the thing is driving me mad?"

"No need of bein' alarmed, yit," encouraged Experience Smith. "Any demands been made for money, or anything like that?"

"None," answered Bradley.

"Any idea of the reason for the attacks?"

"None," repeated Bradley.

The telephone on Barnes' desk rang, and the telephone official answered it.

"Yes, Mr. Bradley is here," Barnes announced. "No. He won't talk over the telephone to anyone." Barnes listened for another minute and hung up the receiver.

"Was that right?" he asked, turning to Bradley. "I understood you to say that you've given up answering your telephone."

"I've *tried* to," said the financier, wearily, "but it's almost impossible to transact business without it. That call may have been from my office, or it may have been from that —man."

"It was, Mr. Bradley," said Barnes. "I don't wish to alarm you unnecessarily, but your Unknown says he is going to launch another harmless bullet in your direction."

"I thought so!" muttered Bradley.

Smith sauntered to the window nearest Bradley and looked out. They were fifteen stories above the street. He could look out on half a dozen skyscrapers. Far below was the seething bustle of down-town New York.

"Come away from there, Experience!" cautioned Barnes.

As he spoke there came a sharp impact against the window pane,——

Read how this strange mystery of the disappearing bullets is solved by Experience Smith, master detective. This novelette in booklet form, together with eleven (11) others, may be had for $1.00 postpaid. The titles of the others are: Crimson Poppies, Buff, The Triangle of Terror, The Valley of Missing Men, The Sign of the Toad, The Mystery at Eagle Lodge, The Web, The Glass Eye, Ten Dangerous Hours, The Green-Eyed Monster and Derring-Do. Each novelette has a handsome two-colored cover, and ranges in length from 15,000 to 25,000 words. These mystery stories will thrill you and help pass away many a lonely hour. In convenient pocket size. Just the thing for vacation reading. Order now while the supply lasts. Mail One Dollar to the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, Dept. N-1, Indianapolis, Ind., and these smashing novelettes will be sent you by return mail.—Advertisement.

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Tsantsa of Professor Von Rothapfel

(Continued from page 100)

getting you, in a little while a real present after you sending."

"THREE weeks later I was enjoying a cup of *café del pais* with Señor Don Jaime Salazar in his trading camp on the border of Oriente, while I awaited the arrival of my pack mules to carry out the specimens to the nearest point on the Trans-Andean railroad. The *señor* being called into his shop for a few minutes, I was gazing eastward over the darkling mountains and thinking of home, when I was startled by a touch on my arm, and turning, I beheld an armed Jivaro, naked, and hideous in his brilliant war-paint.

"'*Señor Capitan Americano*,' said he in his strange Spanish, 'my Indian chief his friend not forgetting, his promise keeping, a real present sending.' And he placed in my hand a small object wrapped in the green leaf of a wild plantain. Before I could speak he had slid like a shadow into the gathering darkness, and left me alone on the veranda.

"A premonition of evil seized me, and, shivering unaccountably, I shouted to Don Jaime to bring a light. Placing the lamp on the table, with trembling fingers I tore open the plantain leaf covering, and dropped the contents on the table in dismay.

"Hideous, shriveled, and shrunken though they were, there could be no mistake. The features were those of Herr Doktor Professor Ludwig Von Rothapfel, curator of anthropology in the Berlin Museum and personal friend of William the Second. And with them, in his formal German script, was the manuscript of the professor's account of the secret ceremony of the *tsantsas*."