Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

DROME

by John Martin Leahy



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(Continued from Preceding Page)

The Horror at Red Hook ——— **H. P. Lovecraft** **59**
The cults of darkness are rooted in blasphemies deeper than the well of Democritus

Fame ——— **A. Leslie** **73**
Verse

The Lost Race ——— **Robert E. Howard** **74**
A bizarre romance of the cave-dwelling Picts, that half-mythical people that inhabited Britain before the Gaels

The Major's Menagerie ——— **Victor Rousseau** **83**
The fifth in a series of stories, each complete in itself, dealing with Dr. Ivan Brodsky, "The Surgeon of Souls"

Ballade of Phantom Ships ——— **William James Price** **90**
Verse

Leonora ——— **Everil Worrell** **91**
A modern version of the old German legend of Leonora, by the author of "The Bird of Space"

Song ——— **Samuel Taylor Coleridge** **98**
Verse

The Dream Peddler ——— **Frank Owen** **99**
An odd tale about an old man who was able to make the dreams of his young friend come true

The Star Shell (Part 3) ——— **George C. Wallis & B. Wallis** **108**
A four-part serial about a voyage to the planet Jupiter and thrilling adventures in the Forest of the Great Red Weed

Ye Goode Olde Ghoste Storie ——— **William A. P. White** **122**
The Chilling Chamber of Fantomheath Fields; or, The Winning of Alicia, the Beautiful

Weird Story Reprint
No. 19. The Dream Woman ——— **Wilkie Collins** **123**
In a vivid dream he saw her, the knife raised to strike into his heart—and then he met her in reality

The Eyrie ——— **136**
A chat with the readers

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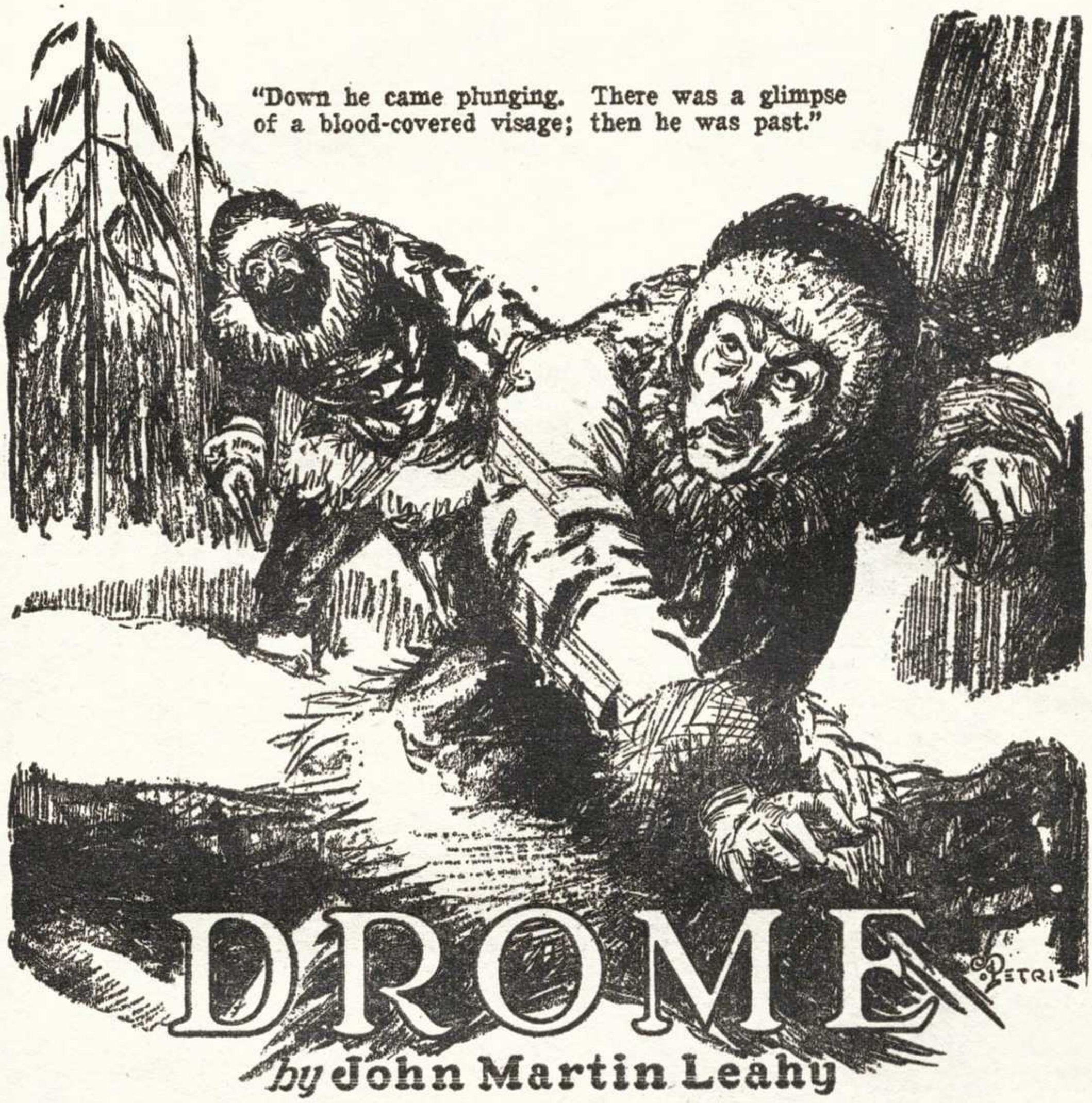
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CHAPTER 1

THE MYSTERIOUS VISITOR

THE forenoon of that momentous August day (how momentous Time, like unto some spirit-shaking vision, was soon and swiftly to show us) had been bright and sunny. Snowy cumuli sailed along before a breeze from the north. When the wind comes from that quarter here in Seattle, it means good weather. But there was something sinister about this one.

As the day advanced, the clouds increased in number and volume; by noon the whole sky was overcast. And now? It was midafternoon now; a gale from the south was savagely flinging and dashing the rain against the windows, and it had become so dark that Milton Rhodes had turned on one of the library lamps. There was something strange, unearthly about that darkness which so suddenly had fallen upon us.

"Too fierce to last long, Bill," observed Milton, raising his head and listening to the beating of the rain and the roar of the wind.

He arose from his chair, went over to one of the southern windows and stood looking out into the storm.

"Coming down in sheets, Bill. It can't keep this up for very long."

I went over and stood beside him.

"No," I returned; "it can't keep this up. But, rain or sun, our trip is spoiled now."

"For today, yes. But there is tomorrow, Bill."

But, in the sense that Milton Rhodes meant, there was to be no tomorrow: at that moment, in the very midst of the roar and rage of the elements, Destiny spoke, in the ring of a telephone bell—Destiny, she who is wont to make such strange sport with the lives of men. Certainly stranger sport no man had ever known than she was to make with ours.

"Wonder who the deuce 'tis now," muttered Rhodes as he left the room to answer the call.

I remained there at the window. Of that fateful conversation over the wire, I heard not so much as a single syllable. I must have fallen into a deep revery; at any rate, the next thing I knew there was a sudden voice, and Milton Rhodes was standing beside me again, a quizzical expression on his dark features.

"What is it, Bill?" he smiled. "In love at last, old *tillicum?* Didn't hear me until I spoke the third time."

"Gosh," I said, "this is getting dreadful! But——"

"Well?"

"What is it?"

"Oh, a visitor."

I regarded him for a moment in silence.

"You don't seem very enthusiastic."

"Why should I be? Some crank, most likely. Must be, or he wouldn't set out in such a storm as this is."

"Great Pluvius, is he coming through this deluge?"

"He is. Unless I'm mighty badly mistaken, he is on his way over right now."

"Must be something mighty important."

"Oh, it's important all right—to *him,*" said Milton Rhodes. "But will it interest *me?*"

"I'll tell you that before the day is done. But who is the fellow?"

"'Name's Scranton—Mr. James W. Scranton. That's all I know about him, save that he is bringing us a mystery—a terrible, horrible, *scientific* mystery he called it."

"That," I exclaimed, "sounds interesting."

It was patent, however, that Milton Rhodes was not looking forward to the meeting with any particular enthusiasm.

"It may sound interesting," he said; "but will it prove so? That is the question, Bill. To some people, you know, some very funny things constitute a mystery. We must wait and see. Said he had heard of me, that, as I have a gift (that is what he called it, Bill, a gift) of solving puzzles and mysteries, whether scientific, psychic, spooky or otherwise—well, he had a story to tell me that would eclipse any I ever had heard, a mystery that would drive Sherlock Holmes himself to suicide. Yes, that's what he said, Bill—the great Sherlock himself to suicide."

"That's coming big!" I said.

Rhodes smiled wanly.

"We haven't heard his yarn yet. We can't come to a judgment on such uncertain data."

"Scranton," said I. "Scranton. Hold on a minute!"

"What is it now?"

"Wonder if he belongs to the old Scranton family."

"Never heard of it, Bill."

"Pioneers," said I. "Came out here before Seattle was ever founded. Homesteaded down at Puyallup or somewhere, about the same time as Ezra Meeker. It seems to me——"

"Well?" queried Milton Rhodes after some moments, during which I

tried my level best to recollect the particulars of a certain wild, gloomy story of mystery and horror that I had heard long years before—in my boyhood days, in fact.

"I can not recollect it," I told him. "I didn't understand it even when I heard the man, an old acquaintance of the Scrantons, tell the story—a story of some black fate, some terrible curse that had fallen upon the family."

"So *that's* the kind of mystery it is! From what the man said—though that was vague, shadowy—I thought 'twas something very different. I thought it was *scientific.*"

"Maybe it is. We are speculating, you know, if one may call it that, on pretty flimsy data. One thing: I distinctly remember that Rainier had something to do with it."

"What Rainier?"

"Why, Mount Rainier."

"This is becoming intriguing," said Milton Rhodes, "if it isn't anything else. You spoke of a black fate, a horrible curse: what has noble Old He, as the old mountain-men called Rainier, to do with such insignificant matters as the destinies of us insects called humans?"

"According to this fellow I mentioned, this old acquaintance of the Scrantons, it was there that the dark and mysterious business started."

"What was it that started?"

"That's just it. The man didn't know himself what had happened up there."

"Hum," said Milton Rhodes.

"That," I went on, "was many years ago—just, I believe, after Kautz climbed the mountain. Yes, I am sure he said 'twas just after that. And this man who told us the story—his name was. Simpson—said 'twas something that Scranton learned on Kautz's return to Steilacoom that had led to his (Scranton's) visit to Old He. Not from Kautz himself, though Scranton knew the lieutenant well, but from the soldier Dogue."

"What was it he learned?"

"There it is again!" I told him. "Simpson said he could tell what that something was, but that he would not do so."

"A very mysterious business," smiled Milton Rhodes. "I hope, Bill, that our visitor's story, whatever it is, will prove more definite."

"Wasn't it," I asked, "in the fifties that Kautz made the ascent?"

"In July, 1857. And pretty shabbily has history treated him, too. It's always Stevens and Van Trump, Van Trump and Stevens—why, their Indian, Sluiskin, is better known than Kautz!"

"But," I began, "I thought that Stevens and Van Trump were the very first——"

"Oh, don't misunderstand me, Bill!" said Milton Rhodes. "All honor to Stevens and Van Trump, the first of men to reach the very summit; but all honor, too, to the first white man to set foot on the mountain, the discoverer of the great Nisqually Glacier, the first to stand upon the top of Rainier, though adverse circumstances prevented his reaching the highest point."

"Amen!" said I—as little dreaming as Kautz, Stevens and Van Trump themselves had ever done of that discovery which was to follow, and soon now at that.

For a time we held desultory talk, then fell silent and waited.

There was a lull in the storm; the darkness lifted, then suddenly it fell again, and the rain began to descend with greater violence than ever.

Milton Rhodes had left his chair and was standing by one of the eastern windows.

"This must be our visitor, Bill," he said suddenly.

I arose and went over to his side, to see a big sedan swinging in to the curb.

"Yes!" exclaimed Rhodes, his face beginning to brighten. "There is Mr. James W. Scranton. Let us hope, Bill, that the mystery which he is bringing us will prove a real one, real and scientific."

If we had only known the truth!

The next moment a slight figure, collar up to ears, stepped from the car and headed swiftly up the walk, leaning sidewise against the wind and rain.

"'Now is the dramatic moment of fate, Watson,'" quoted Milton Rhodes with a smile as he started toward the door, "'when you hear a step upon the stair which is walking into your life, and you know not whether for good or ill.'"

CHAPTER 2

WHAT HE TOLD US

A FEW moments, and Milton Rhodes and his visitor entered the room.

"My friend Mr. Carter," Rhodes remarked to Mr. James W. Scranton as he introduced us, "has assisted me in some of my problems; he is my colleague, so to say, and you may speak with the utmost confidence that your story, if you wish it so, will be held an utter secret."

"For the present, I wish it a secret," returned Scranton, seating himself in the chair which Rhodes had pushed forward, "and so always if no discovery follows. If, however, you discover things—and I have no doubt that you will do so—why, then, of course, you may make everything public where, when and in whatsoever manner you wish."

"And so," said Milton, "you bring us a mystery—a scientific mystery, I believe."

"Yes, Mr. Rhodes. And it is very probable that it will prove stranger than any mystery any man on this earth has ever known."

There was not the slightest change on Milton Rhodes' features, and yet I could have sworn that a slight fleeting smile had touched them. I turned my look back to our visitor and saw upon his face an expression so strange that I stared at him in astonishment. What horrible, mysterious thing was it that this man had to tell us?

Soon the look was gone, though its shadow still rested on his thin, pale features.

"The mystery," said he suddenly, "is an old, old one."

I glanced at Milton Rhodes.

"Then why," he asked, "bring it to me?"

An enigmatic smile flitted across Scranton's face.

"Because it is new as well. You will soon see what I mean, Mr. Rhodes—why, after all these years, I suddenly found myself so anxious to see you that I couldn't even wait until this storm and deluge ended."

From the inside pocket of his coat he drew a leather-covered note-book, much worn and evidently very old.

"This," said he, holding the book up between thumb and forefinger, "is the journal kept by my grandfather, Charles Scranton, during his journey to, and partial ascent of, Mount Rainier in the year 1858."

Milton glanced over at me and said: "Our little deduction, Bill, wasn't so bad, after all."

Scranton turned his eyes from one to the other of us with a questioning look.

"Mr. Carter," Rhodes explained, "was just telling me about that trip, and he wondered if you belonged to the old pioneer Scranton family."

"This," exclaimed the other, "is something of a surprize to me! Few people, I thought, even knew of the journey."

"Well, Mr. Carter happens to be one of the few."

"May I ask," said Scranton, addressing himself to me, "how you knew my grandfather had visited the mountain? And *what* you know?"

"When I was a boy, I heard a man —his name was Simpson—tell about it."

"Oh," said Scranton, and it was as though some fear or thing of dread had suddenly left him.

"His story, however," I added, "was vague, mysterious. Even at the time I couldn't understand what it was about."

"Of course. For, though Simpson knew of the journey, he knew but little of what had *happened*. And more than once I have heard my grandfather express regret that he had told Simpson even as much as he had. I suppose there was something of that I-could-tell-a-lot-if-I-wanted-to in Simpson's yarn."

"There was," I nodded.

"The man, however, knew virtually nothing—in fact, nothing at all about *it*. I have no doubt, though, that he did a lot of guessing. I don't believe that my grandfather, dead these many years now, ever told a single soul *all*. And, as for all that he told me—well, I can't tell everything even to you, Mr. Rhodes."

A strange look came into the eyes of Milton Rhodes, but he remained silent.

Scranton raised the note-book again.

"Nor is everything *here*. Nor do I propose to read everything that is here. Just now the details do not matter. It is the facts, the principal facts, with which we have to do now. This record, if you are interested—and I have no doubt you will be—I shall leave in your hands until such time as you care to return it to me. Now for my grandfather's journey.

"With three companions, he left the old homestead, near what is now Puyallup, on the 16th of August, 1858. At Steilacoom, they got an Indian guide, Sklokoyum by name. The journey was made on horseback to the Mishawl Prairie. There the animals were left, with one man to guard them, and my grandfather, his two companions and the Indian—this guide, however, had never been higher up the Nisqually than Copper Creek—set out on foot for the mountain."

"One moment," Milton Rhodes interrupted. "According to that Simpson, it was something that your grandfather heard from the soldier Dogue, and not from Kautz himself, that led to his making this journey to Rainier. Is that correct?"

"Yes; it is correct."

"May I ask, Mr. Scranton, what it was that he learned?"

Again that enigmatic smile on Scranton's face. He tapped the old journal.

"You will learn that, Mr. Rhodes, when you read this record."

"I see. Pray proceed."

CHAPTER 3

THE MYSTERY OF OLD HE

"IT WAS about 3 o'clock in the afternoon of the 24th," said Scranton, "that they reached the foot of the Nisqually Glacier, called Kautz Glacier by my grandfather. As for what followed, I shall give you that in my grandfather's own words."

He opened the book, at a place marked with a strip of paper, and read from it the following:

"*August 24th, 10 p. m.*—At last we are on the mountain. And how can I set it down—this amazing thing that has happened? What I write here must be inadequate indeed, but I shall not worry about that, for a hundred years could never dim the memory of what I saw. I have often wondered why the Indians were afraid of Rainier; I know now. And what do I really know? I know what I saw, I know what happened; but only God in heaven knows what it *means*.

"Got started early. Still following the river. Going very difficult.

Crossed stream a number of times and once had to take to the woods. Reached the glacier about 3 o'clock—an enormous wall of dirty ice, four or five hundred feet in height, with the Nisqually flowing right out of it. Day had turned dark and threatening. Climbed the eastern wall of the canyon. Clouds suddenly settled down—a fog cold and thick and dripping—and we made camp by a tiny stream, near the edge of the canyon cut by the glacier. Soon had a good fire burning, and it was not long before it came—the shrouded figure and with it that horrible shape, 'if,' as old Milton has it in *Paradise Lost*, 'shape it might be called that shape had none.'

"At times the fog would settle down so thick we could see no farther than fifty feet. Then of a sudden objects could be made out two or three hundred feet away. At the moment the fog was about us thicker than ever. We were sitting there by the fire, warming ourselves and talking—White, Long and myself. Of a sudden there was an exclamation. I looked at Long, and what I saw on his face and in his eyes brought me to my feet in an instant and whirled my look up in that direction in which he was staring.

"And, there on the top of the bank, not more than forty feet from us, stood a tall, white, shrouded figure, a female figure, and beside it, seemingly squatting like a monstrous toad, was that dark, fearful shape that had no shape. But, though shape it had none, it had eyes—small eyes that burned at us with a greenish, hellish fire.

"White snatched up his rifle and thrust it forward, but I stepped over and shoved the muzzle aside. When we looked up there again, the woman—for a woman, a white woman too, it certainly was—well, she was gone, and with her that formless thing with the hellish fire in its eyes.

"'What was it?' exclaimed White.

"He rubbed his eyes and stared up there again, then this way and that, all about into the thick vapor.

"'Was it only a dream?'

"'It was real enough,' I told him. 'It was a woman, a white woman.'

"'Or,' put in Long, 'the spirit of one.'

"'I know one thing,' said White: 'she may be a flesh-and-blood creature, and she may be a spirit; but that thing that crouched beside her was not of this world of ours!'

"He shuddered.

"'Men, what *was* that thing?'

"That, of course, was a question that neither Long nor myself could answer.

"Of a sudden White exclaimed: 'Where's Sklokoyum?'

"'Not far,' I told him. 'Come, let's look into this.'

"I sprang up the bank. They followed. A moment, and we were in that very spot where the woman and the thing had stood so brief a space before.

"'It was no dream,' observed Long, pointing to the crushed purple flowers—a species, I believe, of aster.

"'No,' I returned; 'it was no dream.'

"'Maybe,' said White, peering about, 'we'll wish, before this business is ended, that it had been a dream.'

"Came a loud scream from above—silence—and then the crash of some body through the branches and shrubs.

"'Sklokoyum!' I cried.

"White's hand closed on my arm with the grip of a vise.

"'Hear that!'

"I heard it—the voice of a woman or girl!

"'She's calling,' said Long, "calling to *it*.'

"Great heaven!' I exclaimed; 'it's after the Indian! Come!'

"I started up, but I had taken only a half dozen springs or so when Sklokoyum came leaping, plunging into view. I have seen fear, horrible fear, that of cowards and the fear of brave men; but never had I seen anything like that fear which I saw now. And Sklokoyum, whatever his faults, has a *skookum tumtum*—in other words, is no coward.

"Down he came plunging. There was a glimpse of a blood-covered visage; then he was past. The next instant a shock, a savage oath from White, and he and the Siwash fell in a heap, went over the edge and rolled down the bank and clean to the fire.

"Long and I followed, keeping a sharp lookout behind us, and, indeed, in every direction. But no glimpse was caught of any moving thing, nor did the faintest sound come to us from out that cursed vapor, settling on the trees and dripping, dripping, dripping.

"Sklokoyum's right cheek was slashed as though by some great talon, and he had been terribly bitten in the throat.

"'A little more,' observed Long, 'and it would have been the jugular, and that would have meant *klahowya*, Sklokoyum.'

"The Indian declared that he had been attacked by a demon, a *klale tamahnowis, a* winged fiend from the white man's hell itself. What was it like? Sklokoyum could not tell us that. All he knew was that the demon had wings, teeth a foot in length, and that fire shot out of its eyes and smoke belched from its nostrils. And surely it would have killed him (and I have no doubt that it would) if an angel, an angel from the white man's heaven, had not come and driven it off. What was the angel like? Sklokoyum could not describe her, so wonderful was the vision. And her voice—why, at the very sound of her voice, that horrible *tamahnowis* flapped its wings and slunk away into the fog and the gloom of the trees.

"Poor Sklokoyum! No wonder he gave us so wild an account of what happened up there! And, said he, to remain here would be certain death. We must go back, start at once. Well, we are still here, and we are not going to turn back at this spot, though I have no doubt that Sklokoyum himself will do so the very first thing in the morning.

"The fog is thinning. Now and again I see a star gleaming down with ghostly fire. We came here seeking a mystery; well, we certainly have found one. I wonder if I can get any sleep tonight. Long is to relieve me at 12 o'clock. For, of course, we can not, after what has happened, leave our camp without a guard. And I wonder if—what, though, is the good of wondering? But what is she, Sklokoyum's angel? And where is she now?"

CHAPTER 4

"VOICES!"

SCRANTON closed the journal on the forefinger of his right hand and looked at Milton Rhodes.

"Well," said he, "what do you think of that?"

Rhodes did not say what he thought of it. I thought I knew—though I had to acknowledge that I wasn't sure just what I thought of this wild yarn myself.

After a little silence, Milton asked: "Is that all?"

"All? Indeed, *no!*" returned Scranton.

He opened the book and prepared to read from it again.

"This adventure I have just read to you," he said, looking over the top of the journal at Milton Rhodes, "took place in what is now known as Paradise Park—a Paradise where there is sometimes twenty-five feet of snow in the winter."

"Of course," Milton nodded, "for they had climbed the eastern wall of the canyon and camped near the edge."

"And the one that followed," Scranton added, "on the Cowlitz Glacier. I suppose, Mr. Rhodes, that you have visited Rainier?"

"Many times. Few men, I believe, know the great mountain better than I do—and I never followed in the footsteps of a guide, imported or otherwise, either."

"Then you know the Tamahnowis Rocks in the Cowlitz?"

"I have been there a dozen times."

"Did you ever notice anything unusual at that place?"

"Nothing whatever. I found the ascent of the rocks rather difficult and the crevasses there interesting, but nothing more."

"Well," said Scranton, "it was there that what I am going to read to you now took place. Yes, I *know* that it was there at the Tamahnowis Rocks, though I never could find anything there. And now, after all these long years, once more it is in that spot that——"

He broke off abruptly and dropped his look to the old record.

Milton Rhodes leaned forward.

"Mr. Scranton," he asked, "what were you going to say?"

Scranton tapped the journal with a forefinger.

"*This* first," he said. "Then *that*."

"The story begins to take shape," observed Milton Rhodes—and I wondered what on earth he meant. "Pray proceed."

Whereupon the other raised the book, cleared his throat and started to read to us this astonishing record:

"*August 25th.*—I was right: the very first thing in the morning the Indian left us. Nothing could induce him to go forward, or even to remain at the camp. The demons of Rainier would get us, said he, if we went on—the terrible *tamahnowis* that dwelt in the fiery lake on the summit and in the caverns in the mountainside—caverns dark and fiery and horrible as the caves in hell. Had we not had warning? One had come down here, even among the trees, and undoubtedly it would have killed us all had it not been for that angel. He, Sklokoyum, would not go forward a single foot. He was going to *klatawah hyak kopa Steilacoom*. How the old fellow begged us to turn back, too! It was quite touching, as was his leave-taking when he finally saw that we were determined to go on. Old Sklokoyum acted as though he was taking leave of the dead—as, indeed, he was! And at last he turned and left us, and in a few minutes he had vanished from sight. How I wish to God now that we had gone back with him!"

At this point, Scranton paused and said: "The Indian was never seen or even heard of again."

The account went on thus:

"Fog disappeared during the night. A fairer morning, I believe, never dawned on Rainier. Sky the softest, loveliest of blues. A few fleecy clouds about the summit of the mountain, but not a single wisp of vapor to be seen anywhere else in all the sky.

"Proceeded to get a good survey of things. From the edge of the canyon, got a fine view clear down the glacier and clear up it, too. Ice here covered with dirt and rock fragments, save for a strip in the middle, showing white and bluish. Badly crevassed. It must have been right about here that Kautz left the glacier. He climbed the cliffs on the other side, and then, the next morning, he started for the top. It seemed to us, however, that the ascent could be made more easily on this side. But we were not headed for the summit; we had a mystery to solve, and we immediately set about doing it.

"We started to trail them—the angel and that thing with the eyes

that burned with a greenish, hellish fire. Where they had crushed through the flower-meadows, this was not difficult. At other places, however, no more sign than if they had moved on through the air itself. One thing: they had held steadily *upward*, never swinging far from the edge of that profound canyon in which flows that mighty river of ice.

"The ground became rocky—no sign. Then at last, in a sandy spot, we suddenly came to the plain prints left by the feet of the angel as she passed there, and, mingled with those prints, there were marks over which we bent in perplexity and then utter amazement.

"These marks were about eight inches in length, and, as I looked at them, I felt a shiver run through me and I thought of a monstrous bird and even of a reptilian horror. But that squatting form we had seen for those few fleeting moments—well, *that* had not been either a bird or a reptile.

" 'One thing,' said Long, 'is plain: *it* was leading and the angel was following.'

"White and I looked closely, and saw that this had certainly been so.

" 'It appears,' Long remarked, 'that the fog didn't interfere any with their journey. They seem to have gone along as steadily and surely as if they had been in bright sunshine.'

" 'I wonder,' White said, 'if the thing was smelling the way back like a dog.'

" 'Back where?' I asked. 'And I see no sign of a down trail.'

" 'Lord,' exclaimed Long, looking about uneasily, 'the Siwashes say that queer things go on up here, that the mountain is haunted; and blame me if I ain't beginning to think that they are right! Maybe, before we are done, we'll wish we had turned back with old Sklokoyum.'

"I didn't like to hear him talk like that. He spoke as though he were jesting, but I knew that superstitious dread had laid a hand upon him.

" 'Nonsense!' I laughed. 'Haunted? That woman and that thing—well, we know that they were real enough, even when we didn't have these footprints to tell us.'

" 'Oh, they are real,' said Long. 'But real *what?*'

"Not long after that, we came to a snowfield, an acre or two in extent, and there we made a strange discovery. The trail led right across it. And it was plain that *it* had still been leading and the angel had been following. Of a sudden White, who was in advance, exclaimed and pointed.

" 'Look at that,' he said. 'Its tracks end here.'

"And that is just what they did! But the tracks of the angel went right on across the snow.

" 'Where did it go?' I wondered.

" 'Perhaps,' suggested Long, 'she picked it up and carried it.'

"But I shook my head.

" 'A woman—or a man either, for the matter of that—carrying that thing!' White exclaimed. 'And you can see for yourself: she never even paused here. Had she stopped to pick the thing up—what a queer thought!—we would have the story written here in the snow.'

" 'Then,' said Long, 'it must have gone on through the air.'

" 'Humph!' White ejaculated. 'Well, Sklokoyum said that the thing has wings—the bat wings of the devil.'

" 'But,' I objected, 'Sklokoyum was so badly scared that he didn't know what he saw.'

" 'I wonder,' said White.

"BEYOND the snowfield, the place was strewn in all directions with rock-fragments. It was comparatively level, however, and the going was not difficult. A tiny stream off to the right, a steep rocky mass before

us. Were soon (having crossed the stream) ascending this. It was a steep climb, but we were not long in getting up it. At this place we passed the last shrub. We figured that we must be near an altitude of 7,000 feet now. Dark clouds forming. At times, in a cloud shadow, the place would have a gloomy and wild aspect. No trail, though at intervals we would find a disturbed stone or faint marks in the earth. Our route lay along a broken ridge of rock. On our left the land fell away toward Kautz's Glacier [the Nisqually] while on the right, coming up close, was another glacier [the Paradise] white and beautiful.

"Ere long we reached a point where the ridge had a width of but a few yards, a small glacier on the left, the great beautiful one on the other side. And here we found it—the trail of the thing and Sklokoyum's angel. They had come up along the edge of the ice on our left (to avoid the climb up over the rocks) crossed over the ridge (very low at this point) and held steadily along the glacier, keeping close to the edge. And in that dense fog! And just to the right the ice went sweeping down, like a smooth frozen waterfall. A single false step there, and one would go sliding down, down into yawning crevasses. How had they done it? And where had they been going, in this region of barren rock and eternal snow and ice, through that awful fog and with night drawing on?

"There was but one way to get the answer to that, and that was to follow. And so we followed.

"And how can I set down the weird mystery, the horror that succeeded? I can not. Not that it matters, for it can never, in even the slightest feature, fade from my mind.

"Clouds grew larger, thicker, blacker. The change was a sudden, sinister one; there was something uncanny about it even. Our surroundings became gloomy, indescribably dreary and savage. We halted, there in the tracks of the thing and the angel, and looked about us, and we looked with a growing uneasiness and with an awe that sent a chill to the heart—at any rate, I know that it did to mine.

"White and Long wanted to turn back. Clouds had fallen upon the summit of Rainier and were settling lower and lower. Viewed from a distance, they are clouds, but, when you find yourself in them, they are fog; and to find our way back in fog would be no easy matter. However, so I objected, it would be by no means impossible. There would be no danger if we were careful.

" 'There's that pile of rocks,' said I, pointing ahead. 'Let's go on to that at any rate. The trail seems to lead straight toward it. I hate even to think of turning back now, when we are so near.'

"Still the others hesitated, their minds, I suppose, a prey to feelings for which they could not have found a rational explanation. That, however, was not strange, for it was truly a wild and weird place and hour. At length, in an evil moment, we moved forward.

"Yes, soon there could be no doubt about it: the trail led straight toward those rocks. What would we find there? If we had only known that—well, we would never have gone on to find it. But we did not know, and so we moved forward.

"So engrossed were we that we did not see it coming. There was a sudden exclamation, we halted, and there was the fog—the dreaded fog that we had forgotten—drifting about us. The next moment it was gone, but more was drifting after. We resumed our advance. It was not far now. Why couldn't the fog have waited a little longer? But what did it matter? It could affect but little our immediate purpose; and, though

I knew that it would be difficult, surely we could find our way back to the camp.

"The fog thinned, and the rocks loomed up before us, dim and ghostly but close at hand. Then the vapor thickened, and they were gone. We were in the midst of crevasses now and had to proceed with great caution.

How it happened none of us knew; but of a sudden we saw that we had lost the trail. But we did not turn back to find it. It didn't matter, really. The demon and the angel had gone to those rocks. Of that we were certain. And the rocks were right before us, though we couldn't see them now.

"We went on. Minutes passed. And still there were no rocks. At length we had to acknowledge it: in the twistings and turnings we had been compelled to make among those cursed crevasses, we had missed our objective, and now we knew not where we were.

"But we knew that we were not far. White and Long cursed and wanted to know how we were ever going to find our way back through this fog, since we had failed to find the rocks when they had been right there in front of us. 'Twas the crevasses, I told them, that had done it. But it was nothing; we would find that rock mass. We started. Of a sudden Long gave a sharp but low exclamation, and his hand clutched at my arm.

"'*Voices!*' he whispered.

CHAPTER 5

"DROME!"

"WE LISTENED. Not a sound. Suddenly the glacier cracked and boomed, then silence again. We waited, listening. Not the faintest sound. Long, we decided, must have been deceived. But he declared that he had not.

"'I heard voices, I tell you!'

"We listened again.

"'There!' he said. 'Hear them?'

"Yes, there, coming to us from out the fog, were voices, plain, unmistakable, and yet at the same time—how shall I say it?—strangely muffled. I wondered if the fog did that; but it couldn't be the fog. One voice was silvery and strong—that of Sklokoyum's angel doubtless; the other deep and rough, the voice of a man. The woman (or girl) seemed to be urging something, pleading with him. Once we thought there came a third voice, but we could not be sure of that. But of one thing we were sure: they were not speaking in English, in Spanish, French, Siwash or Chinook. And we felt certain, too, that it was not Scandinavian, German or Italian.

"'They are over there,' said Long, pointing.

"'No, there!' whispered White.

"For my part, I was convinced that these mysterious beings were in still a different direction!

"We got in motion, uncertain, though, whether we were really going in the right direction; but we could not be greatly in error. Soon came to a great crevasse. White leaped across, and on the instant the voices ceased.

"Had they heard? We waited, White crouching there on the other side. Soon the sounds came again, whereupon White, in spite of my whispered remonstrance, began stealing forward. Long and I, being less active, did not care to risk that jump, and so we made our way along the edge of the fissure, seeking a place to cross. This we were not long in finding, but by this time, to my profound uneasiness, White had disappeared in the fog.

"We advanced cautiously, and as swiftly as possible. This, however, was not very swiftly. See! There it was—the ghostly loom of the rocks through the vapor. At that instant

the voices ceased. Came a scream—a short, sharp scream from the woman. A cry from White, the crack of his revolver, and then that scream he gave—oh, the horror of that I can never forget! Long and I could not see him, or the others—only the ghostly rocks; and soon, too, they were disappearing, for the fog was growing denser.

"We heard the sound of a body striking the ice and knew that White had fallen. He was still screaming that piercing, blood-curdling scream. We struggled to reach him, but the crevasses—those damnable crevasses—held us up.

"The sound sank—of a sudden ceased. But there was no silence. The voice of the woman rang out sharp and clear. And I thought that I understood it: she was calling to it, to that thing we had seen, down at the camp, squatting beside her, its eyes burning with that demoniacal fire—*calling it off*.

"Came a short silence, broken by a cry of horror from the angel. The man's voice was heard, then her own in sudden, fierce, angry pleading; at any rate, so it seemed to me—she was pleading with him again.

"All this time—which, indeed, was very brief—Long and I were struggling forward. When we got out of that fissured ice and reached the place of the tragedy, the surroundings were as still as death. There lay our companion stretched out on the blood-soaked ice, a gurgle and wheezing coming from his torn throat with his every gasp for breath.

"I knelt down beside him, while Long, poor fellow, stood staring about into the fog, his revolver in his hand. A single glance showed that there was no hope, that it was only a matter of moments.

" 'Go!' gasped the dying man. 'It was Satan, the Fiend himself—and an angel. And the angel, she said: *"Drome!"* I heard her say it. She said: *"Drome."* '

"There was a shudder, and White was dead. And the fog drifted down denser than ever, and the stillness there was as the stillness of the grave.

CHAPTER 6

AGAIN!

"WHAT was that? The angel's voice again, seeming to issue from the very heart of that mass of rocks. Then a loud cry and a succession of sharp cries—cries that, I thought, ended in a sobbing sound. Then silence. But no. What was that—that rustling, flapping in the air?

"Long and I gazed about wildly—overhead, and then I knew a fear that sent an icy shudder into my heart.

"I cried out—probably it was a scream that I gave—and sprang backward. My soles were well calked, but this could not save me, and down I went flat on my back. The revolver was knocked from my hand and went sliding along the ice for many feet. I sprang up. At the instant the thing came driving down at Long.

"He fired, but he must have missed. The thing struck him in the throat and chest and drove him to the ice. I sprang for my weapon. Long screamed, screamed as White had done, and fought with the fury of a fiend. I got the revolver and started back. The thing had its teeth buried in Long's throat. So fierce was the struggle that I could not fire for fear lest I should hit my companion. As I came up, the monster loosened its hold and sprang high into the air, flapping its bat wings, then drove straight at me.

"I fired, but the bullet must have gone wild. Again, and it screamed and went struggling upward. I emptied my revolver, but I fear I missed with every shot—except the second.

A few seconds, and that winged horror had disappeared.

"I turned to Long. I have seen some horrible sights in my time but never anything so horrible as what I saw now. For there was Long, my companion, my friend—there he was raised up on his hands, his arms rigid as steel, and the blood pouring from his throat. And I—I could only weep and watch him as he bled to death. But it did not last long. In God's mercy, the horror was ended soon.

"And then—well, what followed is not very clear in my mind. I know that a madness seemed to come over me. But I did not flee from that place of mystery and horror; the madness was not like that. It was not of myself that I was thinking, of escape. It was as though a bloody mist had fallen. Vengeance was what I wanted—vengeance and blood, vengeance and slaughter. I reloaded my revolver, picked up Long's and thrust it into my pocket, then caught up White's weapon with my left hand and started for the rocks, shouting defiance and terrible curses as I went.

"I reached the pile of stone, found the tracks of the angel and the man and of that winged horror; but, at the edge of the rocks, the tracks vanished, and I could not follow farther. But I did not stop there. I went on, clear around that pile, and again and yet again. I climbed it, clear to the summit, searched everywhere; but I could not find a single trace of them I sought. Once, indeed, I thought that I heard a voice, the angel's voice—thought that I heard that cursed word *'Drome.'*

"But I can not write any more now. Why—oh, why—didn't we listen to Sklokoyum and keep away from this hellish mountain? That, of course, would have been foolish; but it would not have been this horror, which will haunt me to my dying hour."

CHAPTER 7

"AND NOW TELL ME!"

SCRANTON closed the journal, leaned back in his chair and looked questioningly at Milton Rhodes.

"There you are!" he said. "I told you that I was bringing a mystery, and I trust that I have, at least in a great measure, met your expectations."

"Hellish mountain! Hellish mountain! Noble old Rainier a hellish mountain!" said Milton. Then suddenly: "Pardon my soliloquy, and I want to thank you, Mr. Scranton, for bringing me a problem that, unless I am greatly in error, promises to be one of extraordinary scientific interest."

Extraordinary scientific interest! What on earth did he mean by that?

"Still," he added, "I must confess that there are some things about it that are very perplexing, and more than perplexing."

"I know what you mean. And that explains why the story has been kept a secret all these years."

"Your grandfather, Mr. Scranton, seems to have been a well-educated man."

"Yes; he was."

Milton Rhodes' pause was a significant one, but Scranton did not enlighten him further.

"On his return from Old He, did he tell just what had happened up there?"

"He did not, of course, care to tell everything, Mr. Rhodes, for fear he would not be believed. And little wonder. He was cautious, very guarded in his story, but, at that, not a single soul believed him. Perhaps, indeed, his very fear of distrust and suspicion, and his consequent caution and vagueness, hastened and enhanced those dark and sinister thoughts and suspicions of his neighbors, and, indeed, of everyone else who heard the story. There was talk

of insanity, of murder even. This was the cruelest wound of all, and my grandfather carried the scar of it to his grave."

"Probably it would have been better," said Rhodes, "had he given them the whole of the story, down to the minutest detail."

"I do not see how. When they did not believe the little that he did tell, how on earth could they have believed the wild, the fantastic, the horrible thing itself?"

"Well, you may be right, Mr. Scranton. And here is a strange thing, too. It is inexplicable, a mystery indeed. For many years now, thousands of sightseers have every summer visited the mountain—this mountain that your grandfather found so mysterious, so hellish—and yet nothing has ever happened."

"That is true, Mr. Rhodes."

"They have found Rainer," said Milton, "beautiful, majestic, a sight to delight the hearts of the gods; but no man has ever found anything having even the remotest resemblance to what your grandfather saw—has ever even found strange footprints in the snow. I ask you: where has the mystery been hiding all these years?"

"That is a question I shall not try to answer, Mr. Rhodes. It is my belief, however, that the mystery has never been *hiding*,—using the word, that is, in its literal signification."

"Of course," Milton said. "But you know what I mean."

The other nodded.

"And now, Mr. Rhodes, I am going to tell you why I have this day so suddenly found myself anxious to come to you and give you this story."

Milton Rhodes leaned forward, and the look which he fixed on the face of Scranton was eager and keen.

"I believe, Mr. Rhodes, I at one point said enough to give you an idea of what——"

"Yes, yes!" Milton interrupted. "And now tell me!"

"The angel," said Scranton, "has come again!"

CHAPTER 8

"DROME" AGAIN

SCRANTON produced a clipping from a newspaper.

"This," he told us, "is from today's noon edition of the *Herald*. The account, you observe, is a short one; but it is my belief that it will prove to have been (at any rate, the precursor of) the most extraordinary piece of news that this paper has ever printed."

He looked from one to the other of us as if challenging us to doubt it.

"What," asked Rhodes, "is it about?"

"The mysterious death (which the writer would have us believe was not mysterious at all) of Miss Rhoda Dillingham, daughter of the well-known landscape painter, on the Cowlitz Glacier, *at the Tamahnowis Rocks*, on the afternoon of Wednesday last."

"Mysterious?" queried Milton Rhodes. "I remember reading a short account of the girl's death. There was, however, nothing to indicate that there had been anything at all mysterious about the tragedy. Nor was there any mention of the Tamahnowis Rocks even. It only said that she had been killed, by a fall, on the Cowlitz Glacier."

"But there *was* something mysterious, Mr. Rhodes, how mysterious no one seems to even dream. For again we have it, that word which White heard the angel speak—that awful word 'Drome'!"

"Drome!" Milton Rhodes exclaimed.

"Yes," said Scranton. "And you will understand the full and fearful meaning of what has just happened there on Rainier when I tell you that knowledge of that mysterious word has always been held an utter secret by the Scrantons. No living man but

myself knew it, and yet there it is again!"

"This is becoming interesting indeed!" exclaimed Milton Rhodes.

"I was sure that you would find it so. And now permit me to read to you what the newspaper has to say about this poor girl's death."

He held the clipping up to get a better light upon it and read the following:

"The death of Miss Rhoda Dillingham, daughter of Francis Dillingham, the well-known painter of mountain scenery, on the Cowlitz Glacier on the afternoon of last Wednesday, was, it has now been definitely ascertained, a purely accidental one. Victor Boileau, the veteran Swiss guide, has shown that there is not the slightest foundation for the wild, weird rumors that began to be heard just after the girl's death. Boileau's visit to the Tamahnowis Rocks, the scene of the tragedy, and his careful examination of the place, have proved that the victim came to her death by a fall from the rocks; and so once again tragedy has warned visitors to the Park of the danger of venturing out on the mountain without a guide.

"There was no witness to the tragedy itself. Francis Dillingham, the father of the unfortunate girl, was on another part of the rocks at the time, sketching. On hearing the screams, he rushed to his daughter. He found her lying on the ice at the foot of the rock, and on the point of expiring. She spoke but once, and this was to utter these enigmatic words:

" 'Drome!' she said. 'Drome!'

"This is one of those features which gave rise to the stories that something weird and mysterious had occurred at the Tamahnowis Rocks, as if the spot, indeed, was justifying its eery name. Another is that Dillingham declared that he himself, as he made his way over the rocks in answer to his daughter's screams, heard another voice, an unknown voice, and that he distinctly heard that voice pronounce that strange word 'Drome'.

"Victor Boileau, however, has shown that there had been no third person there at the occurrence of the tragedy, that Rhoda Dillingham's death was wholly accidental, that it was caused by a fall, from a height of about thirty feet, down the broken precipitous face of the rocky mass.

"Another feature much stressed by those who see a mystery in everything connected with this tragic accident was the cruel wound in the throat of the victim. The throat, it is said, had every appearance of having been torn by teeth; but it is now known that the wound was made by some sharp, jagged point of rock struck by the girl during her fall.

"It is sincerely to be hoped that this tragic occurrence will add emphasis to the oft-repeated warning that sightseers should not venture forth upon the mountain without an experienced guide."

CHAPTER 9

"TO MY DYING HOUR"

SCRANTON folded the clipping and placed it between the leaves of the journal.

"There!" he said. "My story is ended. You have all the principal facts now. Additional details may be found in this old record—if you are interested in the case and care to peruse it."

Milton Rhodes reached forth a hand for the battered old journal.

"I am indeed interested," he said. "And I wish to thank you again, Mr. Scranton, for bringing to me a problem that promises to be one of extraordinary interest."

"I suppose you will visit the mountain, the Tamahnowis Rocks, as soon as possible."

Rhodes nodded.

"It will take some time—some hours, that is—to make the necessary preparations; for this journey, I fancy, is going to prove a strange one and perhaps a terrible one, too. But tomorrow evening, I trust, will find us at Paradise. If so, on the following morning, we will be at the Tamah-nowis Rocks."

"We?" queried Scranton.

"Yes; my friend Carter here is going along. Indeed, without Bill at my side, I don't know that I would care to face this thing."

"Me?" I exclaimed. "Where did you get that? I didn't say I was going."

"That is true, Bill," Milton laughed; "you didn't say you were going."

A silence ensued, during which Scranton sat in deep thought, as, indeed, did Rhodes and myself. Oh, what was I to make of this wild and fearful thing?

"There is no necessity," Scranton said suddenly, "for the warning, I know; and yet I can't help pointing out that this adventure you are about to enter upon may prove a very dangerous, a very horrible one."

"Yes," Rhodes nodded; "it may prove a dangerous, a horrible adventure indeed."

"Why," I exclaimed, "all this cabalistic lingo and mystery? Why not be explicit? There is only one place that the angel could possibly have come from—this terrible creature that says 'Drome' and has a demon for her companion."

"Yes, Bill," Milton nodded; "there is only one place. And it was from that very place that she came."

"Good heaven! Why, that supposition is absurd—it is preposterous."

"Do you think so, Bill? The submarine, the airplane, radio—all were absurd, all were preposterous, Bill, until men got them. Why, it was only yesterday that the sphericity of this old world we inhabit ceased to be absurd, preposterous. Don't be too sure, old *tillicum*. Remember the oft-repeated observation of Hamlet:

"There are more things in heaven and earth,
Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

"That is true enough. But this ——"

"Awaits us!" said Milton Rhodes. "The question of prime importance to us now is if we can find the way to that place whence the angel and the demon came; for, so it seems to me, there can be little doubt that it is only on rare occasions that these strange beings appear on the mountain."

"It is," Scranton remarked, "as, of course, you know, against the rules to take any firearms into the Park; but, if I were you, I should never start upon this enterprize without weapons."

"You may rest assured on that point," Milton told him: "we will be armed."

"Well," said Scranton, suddenly rising from his chair, "you are doubtless anxious to start your preparations at once, and I am keeping you from them. There is one thing, though, Mr. Rhodes, that I, that——"

He paused, and a look of trouble, of distress, settled upon his pale, pinched features.

"What is it?" Rhodes queried.

"I am glad that you are going, and yet—yet I may regret this day, this visit, to my dying hour. For the thing I have brought you is dangerous—it is awful."

"And probably," said Milton, "very wonderful indeed."

"But," Scranton added, "one should not blink the possibility that ——"

"Tut, tut, man!" Milton Rhodes exclaimed, laughing. "We mustn't find you a bird of ill-omen now. You mustn't think things like that."

"Yet I can't help thinking about them, Mr. Rhodes. I wish I could accompany you, at least as far as the scene of the tragedies; but I am far from strong. Even to drive a car sometimes taxes my strength. I doubt if I could now make the climb even from the Inn as far as Sluiskin Falls."

A silence fell, to be suddenly broken by Milton.

"Let us regard *that* as a happy augury," said he, pointing toward the southern windows, through which the sunlight, bright and sparkling, came streaming in: "the gloom and the storm have passed away, and all is bright once more."

"I pray heaven that *it* prove so!" the other exclaimed.

"For my part, I shall always be glad that you came to me, Mr. Scranton; glad always, even—even," said Milton Rhodes, "if I never come back."

CHAPTER 10

ON THE MOUNTAIN

It was a few minutes past 3 on the afternoon of the day following when Rhodes and I got into his automobile and started for Rainier. When we arrived at the Park entrance, which we did about half-past 6, the speedometer showed a run of one hundred and two miles.

"Any firearms, a cat or a dog in that car?" was the question when Milton went over to register.

"Nope," said Milton.

There was a revolver in one of his pockets, however, and another in one of mine. But there was no weapon in the car: hadn't I got out of the car so that there wouldn't be?

A few moments, and we were under way again, the road, which ran through primeval forest, a narrow one now, sinuous and, it must be confessed, hardly as smooth as glass.

Soon we crossed Tahoma Creek, where we had a glimpse of the mountain, its snowy, rocky heights aglow with a wonderful golden tint in the rays of the setting sun. Strange, wild, fantastic thoughts and fears came to me again, and upon my mind settled gloomy forebodings—sinister nameless forebodings, terrible as a pall. We were drawing near the great mountain now, with its unutterable cosmic grandeur and loneliness, near to its unknown mystery, which Milton and I were perhaps fated to know soon, perhaps to our sorrow.

From these gloomy, disturbing thoughts, which yet had a weird fascination too, I was at length aroused by the voice of Rhodes.

"Kautz Creek," said he.

And the next moment we shot across the stream, which went racing and growling over its boulders, the pale chocolate hue of its water advertising its glacial origin.

"Up about 2,400 feet now," Milton added. "Longmire Springs next. I say, Bill, I wonder where we shall be this time tomorrow, eh?"

"Goodness knows. Sometimes I find myself wondering if the whole thing isn't pure moonshine, a dream. An angel and a demon on the slopes of Rainier! And they say that this is the Twentieth Century!"

Rhodes smiled wanly.

"I think you will find the thing real enough, Billy me lad," said he.

"Too real, maybe. The fact is I don't know what on earth to think."

"The only thing to do is to wait, Bill. And we won't have long to wait, either."

When we swung to the grade out of Longmire, I thought we were at last beginning the real climb to the mountain. But Milton said no.

"When we reach the Van Trump auto park, then we'll start up," said he.

And we did—the road turning and twisting up a forest-clad steep. Then, its sinuosities behind us, it ran along

in a comparatively straight line, ascending all the time, to Christine Falls and to the crossing of the Nisqually, the latter just below the end of the glacier-snout, as they call it. Yes, there it was, the great wall of ice, four or five hundred feet in height, looking, however, what with the earth and boulders ground into it, more like a mass of rock than like ice. There it was, the first glacier I ever had seen, the first living glacier, indeed, ever discovered in all these United States—at any rate, the first one ever reported. Elevation 4,000 feet.

The bridge behind us, we swung sharply to the right and went slanting up a steep rampart of rock, moving now away from the glacier, away from the mountain; in other words, we were heading straight for Longmire but climbing, climbing. At length the road, cut in the precipitous rock, narrowed to the width of but a single auto; and at this point we halted, for descending cars had the way.

The view here was a striking one indeed, down the Nisqually Valley and over its flanking, tumbled mountains, and the scene would probably have been even more striking than I found it had the spot not been one to make the head swim. I had the out side of the auto, and I could look right over the edge, over the edge and down the precipitous wall of rock to the bed of the Nisqually, half a thousand feet below.

The last car rolled by, and we got the signal to come on. This narrow part of the road passed, we swung in from the edge of the rampart, and I confess that I was not at all sorry that we did so.

Silver Forest, Frog Heaven, Narada Falls, Inspiration Point, then Paradise Valley, with its strange tree-forms, its beautiful flower-meadows, and, in the distance, the Inn on its commanding height, 5,500 feet above the level of the sea; and, filling all the background, the great mountain itself, towering 14,400 feet aloft: the end of our journey in sight at last!

The end? Yes—until tomorrow. And then what? The beginning then—the beginning of what would, in all likelihood, prove an adventure as weird as it was strange, a most fearful quest.

Had I been a believer in the oneirocritical science, the things I dreamed that night would have ended the enterprize (as far as I was concerned) then and there: in the morning I would have started for Seattle instanter. But I was not, and I am not now; and yet often I wonder why I dreamed those terrible things—those things which came true.

And, through all the horror, a cowled thing, a figure with bat wings, hovered or glided in the shadows of the background and at intervals, in tones cavernous and sepulchral, gave utterance to that dreaded name: "*Drome!*"

CHAPTER 11

THE TAMAHNOWIS ROCKS

IT WAS very early—in fact, the first rays of the sun, not yet risen, had just touched the lofty heights of Rainier—when Rhodes and I left the Inn.

Besides our revolvers and a goodly supply of ammunition, there were the lights, an aneroid, a thermometer, our canteens, ice-picks; two pieces of light but very strong rope, each seventy-five feet in length; our knives, like those which hunters carry; and food sufficient to last us a week.

Yes, and there were the ice-creepers, which we should need in making our way over the glaciers, the Paradise and the Cowlitz, to that mass of rocks, the scene of those mysterious and terrible tragedies.

We did not take the direct trail up but went over to the edge of the can-

yon that I—for this was my first visit to Rainier—might see the Nisqually Glacier.

And, as we made our way upward through the brightening scene, as I gazed upon the grim cosmic beauty all about me, up into the great cirque of the Nisqually, up to the broad summit of the mountain and (in the opposite direction) out over the Tatoosh Range to distant Mount Adams and Mount St. Helens all violet and gold in the morning sun—well, that strange story which had brought us here then took on the seeming of a mirage or a dream.

"The mountain," said Milton Rhodes, as we stood leaning on our alpenstocks during one of our halts, "once rose to a height of 16,000 feet or more. The dip of the lava layers shows that. The whole top was blown clean off."

"Must have been some fireworks then," was my comment.

"See that line of bare rocks on the very summit, Bill, midway between Point Success up here on the left and Gibraltar on the right?"

"I noticed that. Why isn't there any snow there?"

"Heat, Bill," said Rhodes. "Heat."

"Heat! Great Vesuvius, I thought that Rainier was a dead volcano."

"Not dead, Bill. Only slumbering. Four eruptions are on record.* Whether Old He is to die in his slumber or whether he is one day to awake in mad fury—that, of course, no man can tell us."

"To see it belching forth smoke and sending down streams of lava would be an interesting sight certainly," said I. "And I wonder what effect that would have on this Drome business—that is, if there is any such thing as Drome at all."

"Drome!" Milton echoed.

For some moments he stood there with a strange look of abstraction upon his face.

"Drome! Ah, Bill," said he, "I wish I knew what it means. But come, we'll never reach the Tamahnowis Rocks if we stand here wondering."

And so we resumed our climb. We were the early birds this morning; not a living soul was to be seen anywhere on the mountain. But hark! What was that? Somebody whistling somewhere up there and off to the right. The whistles came in rapid succession—loud and clear and ringing. I stopped and looked but could see nothing.

I should have explained that we had turned aside from the edge of the canyon, had crossed that little stream mentioned by Grandfather Scranton and had begun to climb that steep rocky mass he spoke of.

"What the deuce," said I, "is that fellow whistling like that for? It can't be to us."

"That," Milton Rhodes smiled, "isn't a man, Bill."

"Not a man!"

"It's a marmot," Milton told me.

"A marmot? Well," said I, "we live and we learn. I could have sworn, Milton, that it was a human being."

The ascent was a steep one, and we climbed in silence. The horse-trail, coming from the left, goes slanting and then twisting its way up this rocky rampart. On reaching the path, we paused for some minutes to get our breath, then plodded on.

"I was thinking," said Milton at last, "of what Parkman said."

"What did he say?"

"'I would go farther for one look into the crater of Vesuvius than to see all the ruined temples in Italy.'"

"I wonder," I returned, "how far we shall have to go to see that angel

*"At this time [November, 1843] two of the great snowy cones, Mount Regnier and St. Helens, were in action. On the 23d of the preceding November, St. Helens had scattered its ashes, like a white fall of snow, over the Dalles of the Columbia, 50 miles distant. A specimen of these ashes was given to me by Mr. Brewer, one of the clergymen at the Dalles."—Fremont.

that says 'Drome,' not to mention her demon.''

Rhodes laughed.

''We are getting there, Bill; we're getting there—near the scene of those awful tragedies at any rate.''

Ere long we reached the top. Here we passed the last shrub and in a little space came to a small glacier. The tracks of the horses led straight across it. But our route did not go thither; it led up over the rocks.

Suddenly, as we toiled our way upward, Rhodes, with the remark that Science had some strange stories to tell, asked me if I had ever head of Tartaglia's *slates*. I never had, though I had heard of Tartaglia, and I wanted to know about those slates.

''Tombstones,'' said Milton.

''Tombstones?''

''Tombstones, Bill. What with the terrible poverty, Tartaglia, when educating himself, could not get even a slate, and so he went out and wrote his exercises on tombstones.''

''Gosh!''

''And did you ever hear of Demoivre's death? There is a problem for your psychological sharks.''

''How did the gentleman die?''

''He told them that he had to sleep so many minutes longer each day.''

''And did he do it?''

''That's what he did, Bill.''

''And,'' I asked with growing curiosity, ''when he had slept through the twenty-four hours? Then what?''

''He never woke up,'' said Milton Rhodes.

And did I know what the heart of a man does when his head is cut off? I (who was wondering at his sudden turn to these queer scientific matters) said I supposed that the heart stops beating. But Rhodes said no; the organ continues its pulsations for an hour or longer.

And had I heard of Spallanzani's very curious experiment with the crow? I never had, but I wanted to. Spallanzani, Milton told me, gave a crow a good feed and then chopped off its head. (That decapitation didn't surprize me any, for I knew that Spallanzani was a real scientist.) The body was placed in a temperature the same as that of the living bird and kept there for six hours. Spallanzani then took the body out, opened it and found that the food which he had given the bird was thoroughly digested!

''These scientists,'' was my comment, ''are queer birds themselves.''

Then he told me some strange things about sympathetic vibrations—that a drinking-glass can be smashed by the human voice (I knew that); that an alpine avalanche can be started thundering down by the tinkle of a bell; and so, as Tyndall tells us, the muleteers in the Swiss mountains silence the bells of their animals when in proximity to such danger. And he told me of that musician who came near destroying the Colebrook Dale suspension bridge *with his fiddle!**

Then came the strangest thing of all—the story of Vogt's cricket. The professor severed the body of a cricket (a living cricket, of course) into two pieces, and the fore part turned round and *ate up the hinder!*

''Yes,'' Milton Rhodes said, ''Science has some queer stories to tell.''

''I should say that she has!'' I commented, ''And maybe she'll have a stranger one than ever to tell when we get back—that is, if we ever do.''

We passed McClure's Rock, height about 7,400 feet; made our way along the head of a small glacier, which fell away toward the Nisqually; ascended the cleaver, at this point very low and along the base of which we had been

*''When the bridge at Colebrooke Dale (the first iron bridge in the world) was building, a fiddler came along and said to the workmen that he could fiddle their bridge down. The builders thought this boast a fiddle-de-dee, and invited the itinerant musician to fiddle away to his heart's content. One note after another was struck upon the strings until one was found with which the bridge was in sympathy. When the bridge began to shake violently, the incredulous workmen were alarmed at the unexpected result, and ordered the fiddler to stop.''—Prof. J. Lovering.

moving; and there, on the other side and coming up within a few yards of the spot where we stood, was the Paradise Glacier, white and beautiful in the sunlight.

Milton Rhodes gave me an inquiring look.

"Recognize this spot?" he queried.

"I never saw it before, but, yes, I believe that I do: this is the place where the angel and the demon crossed over, the spot where Scranton, White and Long found the tracks again."

"This is the place."

"And where," I asked, "are the Tamahnowis Rocks?"

"Can't see them from here, Bill. They're right over there, half a mile distant or so, probably three-quarters."

He moved down to the edge of the snow and ice; I followed.

"Now for the creepers," said Milton, seating himself on a rock fragment. "Then we are off."

A few moments, and we had fastened on the toothed soles of steel and were under way again.

Suddenly Rhodes, who was leading, stopped, raised his alpenstock and pointed with it.

"There they are, Bill!"

And there they were! The Rocks of Tamahnowis—the Demon Rocks—in sight at last!

CHAPTER 12

WE ENTER THEIR SHADOW

For a space we stood there in silence looking at that dark mass which reared itself up, like a temple in ruins I thought, in the midst of the crevassed ice.

Then I said: "Who, looking at that pile, would ever dream that there was anything mysterious and weird about it—anything *scientific?*"

"The place," Milton returned, "certainly has an innocent look; but looks, you know, are often deceiving. And how deceiving in this instance, that we know full well. Besides Scranton, yourself and me, not a living soul knows how weird and fearful was the death of that poor girl."

I made no response. Many were the grim, weird thoughts that came and went as I stood there and looked.

For a few moments there was silence, and then I said: "Well, let's *klatawah.*"

"Yes," said he, turning and starting; "let's *klatawah.* And," he added, "that reminds me of Sluiskin's appeal to Stevens and Van Trump, down there at the falls that now bear his name: *'Wake klatawah! Wake klatawah!'* "

"But," said I, "they went, and they *came back.* That's an augury."

"But," he answered, "if it hadn't been for those steam-caves up there in the crater, they might not have come back, might have perished on the summit that night in the bitter cold. And then the Siwash would have been a true prophet."

"Well, there may be something equivalent to those steam-caves somewhere in the place where we are going—I don't mean, of course, in that pile of rock over there."

"Of course not. But that isn't what's troubling me; its the possibility that we may be too late."

"Too late?" I exclaimed.

"Just so. It is only at long intervals—so far as we know, that is—that these strange beings appear on the mountain."

"Well?" I queried.

"Well, Bill, glaciers, you know, move!"

"I know that. But what on earth has the movement of the ice to do with the appearance of this angel on the mountain?"

But Milton wouldn't tell me that. Instead, he told me to think. Think? I did. I thought hard; but I couldn't see it. However, we were drawing close to the rocks now, and soon I

would have the answer. I felt that pocket again. Yes, the revolver was still there!

"Look here!" said I suddenly.

Milton, who was on the point of springing across a fissure, turned and looked.

"How does this come?" I wanted to know. "I thought the Tamahnowis Rocks were on the Cowlitz Glacier."

"This is the Cowlitz, Bill."

"But we haven't left the Paradise yet."

"Oh, yes, we have. There is no cleaver between them, no anything; at this place it is all one continuous sheet of ice."

"Oh, that's it. Well, the ice is pretty badly crevassed before us. Glad it isn't all like this."

We worked our way forward, twisting and turning. Slowly but steadily we advanced, drawing nearer and nearer to that dark, frowning, broken mass, wondering (at any rate, I was) about the secrets we should find there —unless, indeed, we were too late. What had Milton meant by that? How on earth could the apparition of the angel and the demon be in any manner contingent upon the movement of the ice?

Well, we were very near now—so near, in fact, that, if there was anyone, *anything* lurking there in the rocks, it could hear us. We would soon know whether we had come too late!

Ere long we had got over the fissures and were moving over ice unbroken and smooth. I wondered if this was the spot where, so many years ago, White and Long had been killed. But I did not voice that thought. The truth is that this terrible place held me silent. And, when we moved into the shadow cast by the broken, towering pile, the scene became more weird and terrible than ever.

A few minutes, and we halted, so close to the rocky wall, precipitous and broken, that I could have touched it with outstretched hand.

How cold it seemed here, how strange that sinister quality (or was it only my imagination?) of the enveloping shadows!

"Well," said Milton Rhodes, and I noticed that his voice was low and guarded, "here we are!"

I made no response.

The silence there was as the silence of a tomb.

CHAPTER 13

"I THOUGHT I HEARD SOMETHING"

"WHAT," I asked, "is the first thing to do now?"

"Find the spot where Rhoda Dillingham was killed. The snowfall of the day before yesterday covered the stains, of course. I feel confident, however, what with the description that Victor Boileau gave me, that I shall recognize the spot the moment I see it. It's over there on the other side, Bill, in the sunlight."

"Why that precise spot?"

"Because I hope to find something there—something that Victor Boileau himself didn't see."

A cold shiver went through my heart. We were so near now. Yes, so near; but near to what? Or had we come too late?

"Now for it, Bill!" said Milton Rhodes.

He turned and began to work his way down along the base of the rock wall. The ice now sloped steeply, and, from there to the end of the frowning mass of rocks, and for some distance beyond it, the glacier was fissured and split in all directions. The going was really difficult. Had we tried it without the creepers, we should have broken our necks. One consolation was that the distance was a short one. Why on earth had the

artist brought his daughter to this awful place?

But, then, there had been nothing terrible about the scene to Dillingham—until the tragedy. As for the appearance of the rocks—yes, I had to acknowledge that—there was nothing intrinsically terrible about it: it was what one *knew* that made it so. Its weird, its awful seeming would not have been there had I not known what had happened.

We made our way around the end of the rocky pile into the glare of the sunlight and started up the crevassed and split surface there. The slope, however, was not nearly so steep as the one we had descended on the other side.

Sixty feet, and Rhodes stopped and said, looking eagerly, keenly this way and that: "This is the place, Bill. There can be no mistake. Here are the two big crevasses that Boileau described. Yes, it was in this very spot, ten or twelve feet from the base of the wall, that the girl lay when her father came—lay dying, that terrible wound in her throat."

He began to scrape the snow away with his steel-soled shoes. A few moments, and he paused and pointed. I shuddered as I saw that stain he had uncovered.

"There! You see, Bill?"

"I see. Cover it up."

I had my eyes along the base of the rocks; I searched every spot that the eye could reach on the face or in the shadowy recesses of the dark, broken mass, towering there high above us; I looked all around at the fissured ice: but there was nothing unusual to be seen anywhere.

"Where," I asked, and my tones were low and guarded, "did the angel, if the angel was here—where, Milton, could the angel and the demon have vanished so suddenly and without leaving a single trace?"

"There lies our problem, Bill. A very few minutes should find us in possession of the answer—if, that is, we have not come too late. As to the vanishing without leaving a single trace behind them, that no trace was found is by no means tantamount to saying that they left none."

"I know that. But where did they go?"

"Let us," said Rhodes, "see if we can discover the answer."

"I don't think," I observed, "that they could have gone *right into* the rocks: either Dillingham, as he made his way here to the girl, would have seen them, or Boileau would have found the entrance to the way that they took."

"At any rate," Rhodes answered, "we may take that, for the moment, as a working hypothesis, and so we will turn our attention now to another quarter. If we fail there—though, remember, ice *moves*, Bill—we will then give these rocks a complete and careful examination with the object of settling the question whether Boileau really did see everything that is to be found here."

"And so——" I began.

"And so?" he queried.

"Then they—or it—disappeared by way of the ice."

"Precisely," Rhodes nodded; "by way of the ice. And now you see what I meant when I reminded you that the ice here moves."

"Yes; I believe that I do. Great heaven, Milton, what can this thing mean?"

"That is for us to seek to discover. And so we will give our attention to these crevasses."

He moved to the edge of one of those big fissures that have been mentioned, the upper one, and peered down into the bluish depths of it. I followed and stood beside him.

"It couldn't have been into that," he said.

"Impossible," I told him.

He moved along the edge of the crevasse, in the direction of the rocks. I went along after him, my right hand near that pocket which held my revolver.

"They could," said Rhodes at length, stopping within a few yards of the wall of rock, "have gone into the crevasse at this point."

"But where could they have gone? There is no break in the wall here, not even a crack."

"Don't forget, Bill, that ice moves."

"If *that* is the explanation, we shall go back no wiser than we came."

"Let us hope," he returned, "that it doesn't prove the explanation. I have no knowledge as to the rate of the ice-movement here. The Nisqually moves a foot or more a day in summer. The movement here may be very similar, though, on the other hand, there are certain considerations which suggest the possibility that it may be only a few inches per diem."

"It may be so."

"However, Bill, this speculation or surmise will avail us nothing now. So let's give our attention to this other crevasse. And, if it too should reveal nothing—well, there are plenty of others."

"Yes," said I rather dubiously; "there are plenty of others."

"The unusual size of these two," he went on, "and this being the scene of the tragedy, led me to think that it would not be a bad idea to start the examination at this point. The great Boileau—and I learned this with not a little satisfaction, Bill, though I may say 'twas with no colossal surprize—the great Boileau did not give even the slightest attention to any crevasse. He knew before ever he came up here, of course, that the girl's death had been a purely accidental one. However, let us see what we are to find in this other fissure."

We found it even wider than the one which we had just quitted. And scarcely had we come to a pause there on the edge of it, and within a few yards of the rock, when I started and gave a low exclamation for silence.

For some moments we stood listening intently, but all was silent, save for the low, ghostly whisper of the mountain wind.

"What was it?" Rhodes asked in a low voice.

"I don't know. I thought I heard something."

"Where?"

"I can't say. It seemed to come from out of the rock itself or—from this."

And I indicated the crevasse at our feet.

CHAPTER 14

THE WAY TO DROME

THE depth of the fissure here was twelve or fifteen feet. A short distance out, however, it narrowed, and at that point it was almost completely filled with snow. I noticed even then, in that moment of tense uncertainty, that it would be very easy for a person to make his way down that snow to the bottom. A few steps then, and he would be at the real base of that wall of rock. Yes, *that* would explain it!

A strange excitement possessed me, though I endeavored to suppress every sign of it. Yes, the angel and the demon—if the angel had been out upon the ice at the moment of the tragedy—could have disappeared easily enough. 'Tis true, no tracks had been noticed there. That, however, was no proof positive that there had been none. And perhaps, forsooth, there had been no tracks there to discover. The angel might not have been out upon the glacier at all, and the thing might not have left a

(Continued on page 140)

The LAST HORROR

by ELI COLTER



"Then suddenly the mountain seemed to shake and heave, and the whole side of it broke off and slithered down."

YOU wonder what happened to Bleeker? And to Remington? They *aren't* the same men any more, are they?

Bleeker: who once stood straight-limbed, straight-backed and full-fleshed, walked with high-carried head, clear-glowing eyes and ruddy blond skin; Bleeker, who now walks with a bent shuffle, whose cuticle is so tightly drawn over his emaciated features that it looks like dirty white rubber stretched over a skull; Bleeker, whose eyes have gone blank and sunken in their sockets, whose mouth is tightened in the middle and loose at the corners, whose nose is pinched, whose hands tremble when he isn't taking care to hold himself in. I could tell you, something terrible happened to Bleeker.

And Remington: tall and compactly built, extremely fine-looking in rugged, chiseled fashion; Remington with the gift of tongues, with his ready capacity for eloquent speech that might have made of him a top-notch orator: Remington, whose dark skin is now pasty, whose black eyes brood over some inner thing he must see eternally, but does not wish to; Remington, whose black hair is turning gray, whose magnificent tongue is frozen into stark silence. Something terrible happened to Remington, too. Remington saw a man's soul, dragged it out to light and made that man himself look at it. And it is something none of us may ever forget.

I don't know what you think of me. I don't care. Bleeker and Remington and I are bound by a tie that won't allow of our being away from each other long. We all saw something too hideous to believe. But I'd like to have you understand—if you can. Then perhaps you won't fret me any more by asking that harassing question, "What happened to Bleeker and Remington?"

It started in the most prosaic manner. The two of them came up to my cabin, built in the edge of the foothills to give me privacy for my work, and told me I was going on a fishing trip with them back in the mountains. They didn't *ask* me to accompany them, just told me I was going and wouldn't take no for an answer. I didn't demur too much. I'd been applying myself pretty steadily and was rather glad of an opportunity to lay off work and rest. So I said sure, I'd go. We didn't take any guns. I suggested it and Remington laughed at me.

"What do we want of guns, Crickett?" he asked. "None of us cares much about hunting, and there aren't any dangerous animals back in these mountains. Nothing bigger than a few lone deer. Besides, the guns would be too much trouble to pack. We're off for a rest. Let's get going."

Strange, perhaps. But even then, in broad daylight, as I followed them out of my cabin with a pack of grub rolled up in a blanket and strung over my shoulder, I felt an uncanny sense of premonition. I didn't speak of it. Remington would have laughed. Overhead the pine-trees gibbered in the wind. A few feet away the creek chattered insolently at the white moon wheeling across the sky behind the sun. All around us rose the casual everyday sounds that continually kept me company as I worked in my cabin. Yet I felt the prescience of that unnamable thing of mystery which is always just around the corner in the most ordinary surroundings. I shrugged it off and swung into step with Bleeker and Remington as they struck off for the mountains beyond.

We lazed along, casting our flies in the creeks, taking our time for four or five days, before we at last found our ideal camping place. We had got into a distant, very isolated region, but we had come upon a made-to-order spot. It was a good-sized bench on the side of a mountain, well up toward the summit, on the bank of a fine cold creek. We pitched our tent, built a fire and got a hearty meal, congratulating ourselves on such a bully find, settling down to have a high old time fishing and doing nothing.

ALONG about midnight I was awakened by something yowling and screeching hideously up the mountain above us. I sat erect on my blanket and listened.

"What in thunder is that?" Bleeker asked from across the tent.

"Aw, it's a cougar strayed down from somewhere. When he sees our fire he'll give us a wide berth. Maybe you'd better get up and pile another log on the coals." Remington's voice was sleepy and half-scoffing, and Bleeker answered him with the sharpness of suddenly rasped nerves.

"Cougar! No such thing! You know better—and so do I. That ghastly howl was *human.*"

Neither of us answered him. We knew he was right. Remington lay still, rolled up in his blanket, and I knew he was listening, even as I. The yowl came again once or twice. Like the scream of a man in torment. Then it choked off with a queer gurgle and we didn't hear it any more.

We didn't any of us sleep well that night, and in the morning the first thing after breakfast Remington suggested that we take a stroll up the mountain and see if we couldn't locate that cougar. Bleeker and I assented without hesitation—as a matter of fact he'd only beaten us to it by a breath with his idea. We were curious as the very devil over the awful racket we'd heard the night before. So we all set off to investigate it.

Noon came before we reached the summit, and a funny-looking summit

it was. Instead of going up to a peak, the mountain chopped off into a kind of table-land or plateau containing perhaps five square acres. The table-land, at some remote time, had been slashed off, and was now covered only by a thin stand of small second-growth trees, fallen logs and stumps, save for one spot off to the extreme left. There lay a dense copse of first-stand trees occupying at least an acre, so covered with some vining stuff that the whole looked like an immense green block set on the very edge of the plateau, so perilously close to the edge that it seemed the lightest touch would send it toppling down the mountainside.

"There," Remington pointed to the odd acre-thicket, "there's where that infernal screeching came from. Let's give it the once over."

He swung off at a rapid stride, Bleeker and I at his heels. At the edge of the thicket we paused to inspect it closely. The trees themselves were anywhere from eighty to a hundred and fifty feet in height. The vining stuff was plain English ivy. Nothing so terribly suspicious in that, was there? But there was something menacing, ugly, in the air.

We had the devil's own time getting through, but we persisted and finally came out into a cleared space occupying about a quarter-acre in the center of the thicket. Remington stopped short, whistling in amazement, and Bleeker and I stared.

Right in the middle of the cleared space was a low brick building, square as a box, all on one floor, flat-topped like those old adobe houses in the South. The small strip of yard surrounding it was absolutely bare. Not a shrub, bush or sapling; hardly any grass. There was an iron fence around the yard at least ten feet high and a row of sharp spikes ran along the top. At the rear of the building a short chimney stuck up, and from it rose a thin thread of smoke.

But the queerest thing about that brick box was the utter absence of any windows. A huge steel door broke the blank face of the wall next us, and there was a big iron gate in the fence directly opposite the door. We stood there speculating on what the place could be, and Bleeker suggested that it might serve as some weird kind of vault. I pointed to the smoke rising from the chimney and shook my head. Driven on by overwhelming curiosity I stepped to the gate and tried it. To my surprize it wasn't even latched; swung right open.

Remington strode eagerly into the yard and we after him. We walked all around the building, but there wasn't a sign of a window and not another door appeared. I decided I'd had enough of it. Evil shrouded it. I told Remington I was ready to go any time he was. He looked at me in astonishment and said he was going to see what was inside if he could open that door. Said he hadn't followed that ghastly yell up there merely to turn around and go back without learning a solitary thing about it. So he went around to the door and tried it. It wasn't locked, either. Swung in as easily as had the gate. We all walked through, leaving it standing wide-open behind us.

Before we were eight feet beyond it, the steel door swung shut almost noiselessly. I leaped and grabbed it, tugging with all my might. I might as well have tried to move a tank. It wouldn't budge. I turned to Remington with an involuntary shiver. Something alien and sinister caused me to strain my ears for the least sound. In plain English, I was scared stiff.

"We're trapped!" I ejaculated in consternation.

"Ah, it's just stuck or something." Remington had paused to look back as I leaped for the door, and I saw something in his eyes that was un-

easy, apprehensive, as he answered me; something that belied the lightness of his words. "Come on, let's see what's in here."

I nodded, walked on to join him and Bleeker, and tried to throw off that sense of premonition.

THE interior of the brick building encompassed but one huge room, lighted by four enormous gasoline lamps suspended from the ceiling, one in each corner. They gave out a clear white glow that made the room bright as day. Against the far wall stood a great cage built of close-set steel bars. The floor was cement. On one side of the cage enclosure was a sunken tank almost full of water. Across from the tank an open tunnel led into the mountain at a steep angle. There was no detectable opening into the cage, and so far as we could see, it lacked an occupant. Otherwise the cement-floored room was empty.

We walked up to the cage and looked through the bars. We brought up short, stared, glanced at each other aghast, and stared again. There, scattered all over the floor inside, was a litter of bones. Human bones! Human skulls scattered among them! Most of them were old and dry; but some, enough to accommodate one body, were still green, with small particles of flesh adhering to them and marrow showing where they had been cracked and chewed in two. Remington went white and sprang back, grabbing my arm and letting out a startled curse.

"For the love of Christ, what kind of a place is this?"

Bleeker and I were too shocked and nauseated to move. But we knew we'd found the source of that ghastly yowl. For a full minute we three stood there staring at that mess, revolted at the sight and the foul stench that rose from it. Then we wheeled with one accord and started for the steel door. But the start was as far as we got. We made that, and there we stopped.

A man (I guess you would call it a man—God knows) stood between us and that door. He was of huge stature—six feet and seven inches, we found out later. He towered above us like a mighty Adonis. Were looks to serve, he was no ogre. He wore a dark gray business suit of excellent material, and ordinary English walking shoes. Around his throat was draped a thick silk muffler of dull blue. His hands were encased in kid gloves. On his head he wore a tight-fitting skull cap, silk also, that reached almost down to his brows and completely covered his ears. His features were finely formed, symmetrical, really handsome to a striking degree. And his face was as black as the ace of spades.

"How do you do, gentlemen?" he greeted us, showing perfectly matched teeth in a flashing smile. "I'm very glad to see you. Callers drop in here all too seldom."

I shivered involuntarily. In spite of his really splendid appearance something emanated from him that was sinister, foul, unholy. Bleeker glared at him and fell back a step, but Remington eyed him up and down and asked coolly, "Where in thunder did *you* come from?"

"I was here when you entered." the black informed us quietly. "Down in my private apartment. The entrance is rather unnoticeable. Come along. I'll show you."

He turned back toward the door, swung to his left and walked to the wall, pausing before a small white button set into the brick. The cement floor was laid off in squares about treble the size of those in a concrete sidewalk. The black pushed the button and the square nearest the wall raised noiselessly; a cleverly concealed and operated trap-door that lifted to reveal a flight of stone steps

descending through a tunnel into the mountain. Glad to get away from that grisly pile of stinking bones, we had followed him part-way to the wall. As the trap-door rose and came to rest against the brick, Remington stepped forward a pace or two and glanced down into the tunnel.

"You see," the big black explained, "the trap makes no sound. I heard you come in, and when you passed up to inspect the boneyard I came out, dropped the trap behind me and approached you. That's all there is to it. If you gentlemen will be so kind as to come down into my apartment I should like to talk business to you."

Well, what could *we* do? I ask you! Bleeker and I glanced at Remington, instinctively waiting for him to make the first move. Remington is that kind of man. He glanced back at the steel door, then at Bleeker and me, and I knew he was thinking of the fact that we were completely unarmed. The black smiled and went on with mild persuasiveness.

"You might as well come peaceably, gentlemen. You can't possibly get out, you know. No more than you could have got in if I hadn't wanted you to, and set the levers to loosen both gate and door. And if you don't come without objection I shall be forced to have you carried down."

He shoved back his coat suggestively, and we saw that he carried a heavy bore automatic strapped around his waist. "I shouldn't want to use the gun, you understand. Nor should I need to. I could manage all three of you single-handed." Which was no lie!

Remington shrugged, gestured toward the trap with a flick of his fingers, beckoned with his head and started down the stairway. We weren't far behind him.

As we descended we examined the tunnel minutely. Gasoline lamps were strung along the roof at short intervals, and the cement walls had been painted and frescoed artistically. Bleeker and I looked at Remington's straight back, and at each other. Obviously we were to find ourselves compelled to rely on our wits in getting us out of that place.

At the foot of the stairs, which proceeded for some fifty feet or more, we came to another huge steel door. Remington reached out and shoved it lightly. It opened into a cavernous underground chamber hewn out of the solid rock. Animal skins, velvet and silk scarfs and brilliant cushions were strewn about over the numerous pieces of modern furniture dotting the thick carpet. Gas lamps of intricate design were hung from the vaulted roof. In one corner stood a phonograph, and a finely carved upright piano stood in another. Curtains of exquisite fabric covered what I judged to be two openings into the room. On the smoothly chiseled and finely decorated walls hung two great paintings of genuine beauty. A large coal-burner at one side answered for the warmth and dryness of the underground chamber, and also for the smoke rising from the chimney in the brick building upstairs.

It really looked bright, cheerful and inviting down there. But something ghastly and horrible hung over the place: something hideous and sinister breathed a foul breath into every cranny and spoiled the sumptuous appearance of luxurious elegance.

WE THREE paused just inside the door and scrutinized the room, waiting to see what was coming next. The black walked on to a broad oak table littered with books of the most meticulous choice, stopped, turned and faced us.

"Gentlemen," he said courteously, "as I told you up-stairs, I am glad to see you. And I am very glad you were so wise as to make no resistance

when I proposed your coming down to my apartment. Only I can let you out of here. Whether or not you *ever* go depends solely upon yourselves. At the least I must ask you to remain for some time. I have a proposition to make you, and if you see my position coolly and sanely, accede to my request reasonably, and give me your word to forget what takes place here, in a few weeks I shall send you on your way with a hearty Godspeed. If you allow yourselves to be swayed by any prejudice and silly sentimentality, I fear you will have to pay the price of the small-souled. But be seated. Make yourselves comfortable, and I will outline my history and elucidate what it is I have to ask."

Bleeker and I looked at each other again, struck by the black's excellent use of English. Remington promptly seated himself in a comfortable leather chair. We took seats not too far from him. With a smile of gratified approval, the black stepped to a big brass gong suspended from the wall near the piano, picked up a wooden mallet lying by it on a small tabouret, and again turned to face us.

"First I shall introduce you to my household. I have eight men down here with me. No women. Women talk."

He raised the mallet and struck four quick blows on the gong. It reverberated, a deep, hollow tone that seemed to fill the room and creep down into the earth. Before it had died away the curtains beyond the piano opened and seven huge negroes entered and bowed respectfully to the man with the gloves. Not a one of them was under six feet two inches. The black pointed at us, nodding to his men.

"Boys, these gentlemen have just dropped in via the box upstairs. I fancy we are about to see the end of our experiment. May I ask your names, gentlemen?"

"Remington," Remington said succinctly, nodding at us in turn; "Bleeker, Crickett."

"Thank you, Mr. Remington. Boys, Mr. Remington, Mr. Bleeker, Mr. Crickett. Gentlemen, these boys are my friends and co-workers. Their names will not interest you. Their stature, their strength and their loyalty to me—will. You may go, boys. But hurry dinner along, will you? Thanks."

The seven herculean blacks turned and disappeared, and the man with the gloves struck the gong again, once. The curtains at the other entrance swayed apart, and a small white man entered the room, pausing at sight of us, and the black master introduced him with an air that held something of pride: "Mr. Remington, Mr. Bleeker and Mr. Crickett—I should like you to know Dr. Straub."

Bleeker and I gasped simultaneously, and Remington sat up in his chair to stare sharply at the man who had just appeared before us. Dr. Straub! We all knew him, by name. Straub, the crack surgeon who had disappeared shortly after the war and was never heard of again. Well, there he was! I remembered his face from a number of pictures exploited by the press at the time he dropped out of sight. He had undergone a radical change. He still wore his pointed gray beard and close-cropped grizzled mustache, and he peered at us through thick glasses as he came forward, taking us in swiftly.

At the time of his disappearance his pictures had shown him to be a man still young, vigorous and in his prime. Now he was old, stooped, thin and haggard, and he looked as though he had seen seventeen different kinds of hell. But he came forward, poised and at ease, spoke our names precisely, tabulating our faces in his mind, and shook hands as casually as though we stood in the king's ballroom. He

didn't, however, say he was glad to see us, and the expression of his sharp gray eyes seemed to declare that nothing mattered much so far as he was concerned.

"Sit down and join the company, doctor," the black invited, leaving the gong, approaching us and sinking into a chair with arresting grace for so huge a man. "I am about to make clear to these gentlemen what I wish of them."

Straub shrugged, sighed slightly, and sat down half facing us, his weary eyes playing alertly among us three. He did not look at the black, and not again did he speak.

"Well, we may as well begin at the beginning. But first, let's be comfortable. Will you smoke, gentlemen?"

The black leaned over to get a box of cigars from the table, opened it and offered it to us. Bleeker and I refused, I couldn't say why, but Remington chose a cigar, lit it from the same match with the black, and leaned back in his chair with the air of a man perfectly at home. I envied him his nerve!

THE black looked at each of us, slowly, then went on. "My name is Richard Ballymair—Rick for short. And this is the beginning."

Holding his cigar firmly in one corner of his mouth, he raised his hands, stripped off his gloves, tossed them to the table, and held both hands extended toward us, fingers slightly spread, watching us intently as he did so. He had a love of the dramatic, that devil! Remington never turned a hair, but Bleeker and I sat up in astonishment and caught our breaths. *His hands were as white as ours!*

"Yes," he answered our dumfounded stare, taking his cigar in his well-formed fingers, "from the neck down I am white. From the neck up —well, you see how it is. I must be so quick as not to weary you with any tedious explanation. By a strange freak of pre-natal influence, a fright visited upon my mother, I was born with white hands. I dare say you have never heard of a parallel case. Neither have I, but that is what happened to me. As I grew up it was both a curse and an incentive to me. The curse of being born black, and the incentive to become white.

"I realized early that I was favored with a high intelligence—an intelligence that placed me far above the level of my people. I determined to make the most of it and do something worth-while with my life. I studied hard, and came off with top grades both in public and high school. My teachers predicted that I would go far. I determined not to fail their belief in my capacity. I decided that I would become a genuinely great man, one who should give something of value to the world.

"But by the time I was twenty-one I realized how insurmountable a barrier lay between me and the fulfilment of my dreams. I was a negro. No matter what respect I might command from white men because of my intelligence and abilities, no matter to what heights I might rise, the wall of race reared between. It drove me frantic. I wanted to meet other great men on a common level, to be one of them. And I could not.

"Then came the war. I enlisted and went overseas as orderly to a white captain who was one of the finest men I have ever known. Overseas I had the privilege of being given opportunity to save his life. He was grateful for my act. When the armistice was signed and we were transported home, he insisted on rewarding me. He owned forty acres of land in Oklahoma's best oil section. He gave me ten acres of that land, had it duly deeded and the deed executed. The day we went to the courthouse to have the deed recorded, we

came out to the street and ran into Dr. Straub, here.

"The captain and the doctor were the best of friends, they'd been through the thick of it together over there. They shook hands, as I stepped back respectfully, and began cursing the awful restlessness that was the aftermath of the war.

"'By God, I've got to get away somewhere for a while and push it out of my mind,' the captain told Dr. Straub. 'Let's go down to Papua and shoot a lion.'

"'Ass!' the doctor retorted with rather a wan grin, 'there are no lions in Papua. Nothing bigger than pigs and crocodiles. If you want to shoot a lion you'd better go to the Congo Basin. Yes, I'll go with you. When?'

"'All right, we'll go to the Congo and shoot a lion,' the captain agreed cheerfully. 'Then we'll go to Papua and catch a wild pig. We start next week. Want to come along, Rick? I could use you on a trip like that.'

"Of course, I went. Over there in the forests of the Congo I was impressed with the idea that had taken root in my brain years before. I compared myself to those negroids over there. Cannibals! Living in crude rectangular houses, tattooed in weird designs with scars, carrying bows with cane strings and packing wooden shields, wearing bark-cloth—or nothing—believing in their fetishism and witchcraft, chipping their teeth and letting the women do all the work. Was I like them? Was I of that race? Only in color! Outside I was black, but inside I was as purely Caucasian as either the captain or Dr. Straub. I lived, talked, thought and dreamed like the white men in my own land. I cursed all the gods who had wished a black hide on me and raved because I couldn't be white. Inwardly, of course. The doctor and the captain never knew of that.

"Then the captain shot his lion, but didn't kill it. Again I was privileged to save his life, killed the beast and got pretty badly torn up. One of my legs was ripped to shreds. Dr. Straub fixed me in pretty good shape, but said he'd have to graft some skin on that mauled leg. With all the negro people around us, there was no place we could beg, buy or steal a patch of black skin. The captain came forward like a prince, said he'd give me a piece himself, jollied me and suggested that I shouldn't mind a patch on my thigh to match my hands.

"I *didn't* mind, of course. That at least, I told him, would be out of sight. And I jollied back, and told the doctor it would soon turn dark to match the rest of me.

"Soberly, he assured me it *wouldn't*. I stared, and he went on to explain in detail that the skin is composed of two main layers, the scarf skin or *epidermis*, and under that the true skin, technically the *dermis* or *corium*. The *epidermis* or outer skin consist of five layers: i. e. —the *stratum corneum*, made up of layers of scalelike cells—the *stratum lucidum*, another layer of scalelike cells—the *stratum granulosum*, containing granules and less flattened cells—the *stratum mucosum* or *stratum Malphighii*, with polygonal cells connected by fine pricklelike processes —and the *stratum germinativum* which lies next to the second, or true, skin.

"Now: he went on to impress me with the fact that it is deep in the cells of the *stratum Malphighii*, the fourth layer of the *epidermis*, that the pigment is found which makes the color of the negro's skin. Under that stratum I was like all other human beings. In other words, *I was black only from the second skin out!*

"From then on I could think of nothing but the blinding fact that the doctor had told me. I would sit and stare at that patch of white on my healing thigh, and think wild

thoughts. Those wild thoughts focused down, ultimately, to one inevitable conclusion. *If I could be skinned, literally, bit by bit, and the removed pieces replaced by white skin, I should become a white man!* Unable to contain myself, I approached the doctor with the idea, cautiously, making a half-jest of it. Always deeply interested in the progress attained by experimentation, like all skilled, advanced and highly scientific men, he took me seriously and talked it over at length. He said he had no doubt it could be done, and he fancied it might be accomplished in six or seven years—if one could procure the white skin.

"WE CAME back to America shortly after that, and I, still half-stunned by the monumental possibilities within my grasp, set to work formulating ways and means. I was determined to become a white man before I should pass my thirty-fifth birthday. I had ten years in which to accomplish it.

"I went straight to Oklahoma and looked over that ten acres of land the captain had given me. All around it were spouting wells, pouring out liquid gold for other men. I needed gold. I went to another part of the state, hunted up a lawyer of the type to suit my purpose, and told him what I wanted.

"I proposed leasing my land to an oil syndicate for drilling purposes. I wanted it done through this lawyer, and I did not want the syndicate to know I was a colored man. I guaranteed the lawyer half of the cash bonus I would receive from the syndicate and ten cents on every barrel of oil taken from the ground. I would go away, and communicate with him twice a year. His duty was to keep my identity a secret, receive my income and pile it up in the bank at four per cent interest, keep his mouth shut and ask no questions. He agreed readily, and I knew he would keep his word, for I know men. The syndicate paid me a cash bonus of twenty thousand. I divided it with my lawyer and set out to find a suitable place to work out my plan in seclusion.

"Well, we struck a gusher right off the bat. A big one. Out of flush production in the first three months I netted around a half million and the lawyer was fifty thousand to the good. (I might add that that was six years ago. I had a few more wells drilled, and now have something like eight million dollars piled up waiting for me. My lawyer, including a bonus I give him every year for honest service, has two million. Pretty good price for keeping his mouth shut, isn't it?)

"But that's aside from the point. I found up here in this mountain an old abandoned mine. It had never amounted to much, the pay streak pinched out and it was closed years ago. But it suited my purposes perfectly. Quietly, through my lawyer, I purchased twenty acres covering the site of the old mine, timbered up all the entrances to the tunnels and filled them in with earth. Then I cut a new tunnel down from the summit to connect with the stopes inside the mountain. This is an old stope in which we now sit, gentlemen. Over the opening to my new tunnel I built that brick building, which we call the box.

"Of course, before I set to work I accrued a company of men, selected from my own race, selected for their physical strength, loyalty and reliability. I gave my word to be fair to them, considerate, and pay well for good work. I kept my word. Money will do much, you understand. Inside of a year I had finished this place, and made certain that it was done so expertly, so secretly, that none outside even dreamed of its existence.

"Then I kidnaped Dr. Straub. I brought him here and explained that

he was to stay till he had made me a white man. At first he was furious with what he was pleased to term my impertinence. But after much talking and arguing over the matter, he became impressed with my understanding of what could be done, my insatiable ambition and my determination to succeed. Also, he himself was avidly curious, from the scientist's angle, to see how the experiment would mature. Then again, I promised him a quiet, orderly life of considerate treatment and a cool million when the thing was done. It is astonishing what money can accomplish, isn't it?

"Of course, I *did* show Dr. Straub the fierce young puma I keep penned in an adjoining stope with the freedom of that cage you saw. I figured I might need some powerful persuasion to aid me as I went along. And of course, the doctor knew he could never leave this place unless he acceded to my request. But I give him the credit to suppose that such things had nothing to do with his decision. He agreed to give me the benefit of his utmost skill. The next thing was to find the white skin we needed.

"We watched events closely—outside events. One of my men, at my instructions, had a daily paper mailed to an isolated rural box—a year's subscription paid in advance. He went to the box three times a week and got the papers. One man killed another and, as we saw by the press, hid out in the hills near here. My men trailed him, captured him and brought him here. He was a good type—tall, very blond, with fine yellow hair and pink-white skin. We explained to him what was wanted. We gave him the choice of exchanging his skin with me, patch by patch, or being turned over to the authorities and electrocuted for murder. He concluded he had rather go back to the world a few years hence wearing a good disguise than not to go at all.

"Dr. Straub first transferred his fine blond scalp and ears to my head. You see, gentlemen?"

Ballymair raised his hand and whipped off the skull cap. Under it, thick blond hair, straight and sleek, and well-formed white ears stood out grotesquely from his black face. Bleeker and I could only stare, but Remington whistled, and Dr. Straub sat back in his chair eyeing us with a peculiarly jaded disinterest. Ballymair went on evenly.

"Then we started to work upon the body. Bit by bit the doctor transferred white skin to me and my black skin to the murderer. But he was much smaller than I, and of course there wasn't half enough skin available, since there were only certain portions we could use. By that time I was mad over the sureness of our ultimate success, and Dr. Straub was wild with excited interest. We knew we had to find more white skin.

"I sent my men out to capture and kidnap unattached men from the lower walks of life. I counseled them to choose wasters, ne'er-do-wells, derelicts who were in good condition and still youthful, and yet who would not be missed by other men. I had little trouble in persuading them to be reasonable. Most men, even the least intelligent, would rather live with a few black patches on their bodies, serving me here, than be fed to a panther. By that time I was so certain of my ultimate success that nothing could have stopped me. What were the lives of a few derelicts in the face of a monumental plan like mine? One's intelligence is insulted by refusal to recognize the relativity of values.

"Well, let us finish quickly. Six years have passed, as I said before. And again as I have said before, I am white from the neck down. I left my face to the last purposely. I haven't looked in a mirror for six years. When I do look again I shall look into the face of a white man. I have lain

awake nights dreaming of that thing. To look into my own face again, and know I am white. See how little I lack!''

Ballymair pulled from his throat the blue silk muffler. From ears and hairline down, his neck was white. Only the face from the ears outward, from the blond hair down, was black. He looked weirdly like a white man wearing a black mask. He smiled at the expressions he saw on our features.

''So now we come to the end. The five fellows I picked up haven't been too amenable to persuasion. Two of them died of fever. One killed himself. The others I had to put out of the way for my own safety. But they were of different status from you three. I know I shall have no argument with either of you gentlemen. I fancy you won't mind a few black stripes down your legs? After we have finished our task I shall blow this place to kingdom come. I have three hundred pounds of dynamite cached at a safe distance for the purpose. Right now the question is: which one of you gentlemen shall I find most suitable for my purpose? I am anxious to be done and out of here. Hmmm—which one of you, now?''

''By God, none of us!'' Remington exploded, and Bleeker and I gripped ourselves rigid in our chairs. ''Of all the damned fiendishness! We'll get out of here in some way, and I'll turn you over to——''

''Pardon,'' Ballymair interrupted mildly. ''You can not possibly get out of here. If you ever hope to go at all, I warn you for the last time to make no resistance. You are a pretty healthy-looking specimen, Mr. Remington, but you are much too dark. Mr. Crickett is too old. But I quite fancy Mr. Bleeker's fine blond skin. He will not suffer at all, and neither of you other two will have anything to do but sit around and wait till the job is finished. You may as well grant my request gracefully, since you will have to submit anyhow.''

BLEEKER went ghastly white, and I clenched my teeth, but Remington had got hold of himself again, and he never moved a muscle. He turned his head and looked at Bleeker straight in the eye.

''Bleeker, we're caught fair. We've got to rely on our wits. We'll have to submit to what this Ballymair demands—but only so long as we fail to find any way of retaliation or escape. And now it's I warning you, Ballymair''—he turned to face the black and half rose in his chair—''that we shall not rest one moment in striving to find some way of besting you. We have as much intelligence as you, and there is a way, don't forget that fact. There's always a way.''

''Not in this case. I will not be thwarted at the eleventh hour.'' Ballymair rose, shaking his head and smiling deprecatingly. ''I signaled the boys when they stood right here before you, to destroy utterly the levers and buttons working the steel door and gate above—to destroy even the small electric plant that drove the levers and buttons. I don't need it any more. None of us can possibly get out that way now, not even I. There is but one passage of exit, an underground passage, and only four of us know where it is—two of my most trusted men, Dr. Straub, and myself. There is no way out, and no way for you to escape or frustrate me. Mr. Bleeker, will you come this way, please?''

''No! Damned if I will! None of my skin is going on your hell-begotten face!'' Bleeker spat out defiantly, leaping to his feet and seizing a heavy straight-backed chair. Remington and I sprang to abet him, but the black only smiled, drew his gun and backed to the gong. Straub did not

move. Ballymair struck the gong three times, and five of the big negroes rushed into the room.

"Kindly take Mr. Bleeker to the surgery, boys." Ballymair waved a hand at Bleeker. "Leave the other two gentlemen here, and see that they stay. I am sorry you saw fit to make trouble for yourselves, gentlemen."

The blacks crossed the room in a wild rush, and though we fought with all our strength to protect Bleeker, we might as well have tried to stop a steam train. In ten seconds they had collared all of us. Three of them picked up Bleeker, and carried him, kicking, squirming and cursing, toward the curtained entrance, while the other two held Remington and me with our hands gripped cross-wristed behind us.

"Come, doctor." Ballymair beckoned to Straub, and the surgeon rose without a backward glance to follow him out behind the three blacks carrying Bleeker. We saw then that another steel door stood behind the curtains, for Ballymair paused, waited till Straub had passed, then went on, closing the door after himself.

"You may as well take it easy." The black who had been holding Remington released him and stepped away, motioning the other to release me. "It'll be a lot better for all concerned if you don't pull any more of this stuff. Come on, Brace, let's go see to the eats."

The two of them hurried out through the doorway through which Straub had entered, and before the curtains had stopped swaying behind them Remington and I made a rush for the opening. There was no door behind the curtains at this entrance, and we went on through into a long, wide hall. But at the other end of the hall there was a steel door, and it clanged to as we appeared, and the laugh of the negro Brace came back to us. We hurried down and tried the door, foolishly, since we knew before we touched it that we would find it locked.

We turned back and examined the hall. Two doors opening from it led into a large, well-appointed bathroom and into a bedroom containing two full-sized beds. There was no other opening off the hall, and no other rooms. Remington and I looked at each other, shook our heads in resignation and returned to the room to which Ballymair had first taken us, sat down, and tried to think sanely.

"It's no use fighting, Crickett." Remington's voice was cool and level. He leaned back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head, staring at the ceiling. "We've got to keep quiet and use our heads. We can't save Bleeker, but we *can* get out of here. I tell you, man, there's always a way out. Always a way out of everything, if we just stand pat long enough and give our brains time to work."

I didn't answer. So far as coherent thought was concerned, I was down and out, for the time being at least. In my mind's eye I could see poor old Bleeker strapped to a table, the skin being sliced from his thighs to mold that negro's face. I hadn't the least idea how skin-grafting was done, didn't know how long it might take, or to what extent Bleeker would suffer. But the very thought of it gave me a grisly nausea.

Remington and I sat there in helpless silence, striving furiously to think, and, like everybody else, finding ourselves powerless to think when we most needed to do so, when the black named Brace returned bearing a tray that held an appetizing dinner. Remington and I hardly touched it, and Brace started to carry it away again. Just as he reached the door Remington called to him.

"Say, Brace: what are those men doing out there?"

"They are operating," Brace answered shortly, slipping quickly through the smallest opening he dared

allow himself with the tray and slamming the self-locking door behind him.

THERE'S absolutely no good going over the hell of the next six weeks. After the first few days of horror we two began to feel somewhat resigned and strove to accustom ourselves to the business of waiting. Penned up in that room, with access to the bath and beds, of course, but never even allowed to go up-stairs again to the box (not that we wanted to!), we thought and talked till we were dizzy, trying to formulate some possible method of escape. But in spite of Remington's doggedly reiterated assertion that there was always a way, we failed to find one. We saw nothing of Bleeker, Ballymair or Straub again in all that time. We saw no one but Brace, who came in every day to bring us our meals and to furnish us with clean linen, or to attend to our personal wants. Remington tried to draw the negro into conversation once or twice, but Brace refused to talk and advised us to mind our own business. We nearly went insane with the awful suspense of knowing nothing. Worse still, no sound of any kind came to us from the rooms outside of the ones where we were imprisoned.

Then, at the end of the six weeks, Ballymair walked into the room and bowed to us with pompous courtesy. Remington and I stared at him incredulously. His face was white and smooth, save for the odd patchwork of thin, rapidly fading scars. The transformation was startling. He made a magnificent figure with that white skin molded over his finely chiseled features.

"Good God!" Remington said under his breath. "That damned Straub's a wonder! I've got to admit it."

"Yes indeed," Ballymair agreed pleasantly. "Mr. Bleeker and the doctor will be in presently, and we shall come to a settlement of this little affair. I have some important work to do immediately, but we will talk afterward. Ah—Dr. Straub! Come in, Mr. Bleeker."

I sprang to my feet and gripped my hands behind me at sight of Bleeker, but Remington sat coolly in his chair, his black eyes straining toward the face of the man forcefully separated from us six weeks before. As Bleeker stepped into the room Remington cursed sharply, but I was tongue-tied. It was the Bleeker you see now that came slowly across the room toward us. White as an animated ghost he was, his eyes blank with the horror of what he had undergone, heard and seen, his once straight body bent, his swinging walk turned into a shuffle. He came toward us without a pause, then stopped within two feet of Remington.

"See what those devils did," he said roughly, throwing back the lounging robe that covered his nude body. "You've got to get 'em some way. You've got to! I can't. I'm done."

Up and down his thighs ran ugly patches of black skin, and raw red scars widened where the insufficient covering from the black's face had not yet grown together with the white. I shivered and dropped back into my chair, sick to the spine. Remington turned his head.

"Cover it up," he said curtly. "Cover it up and sit down here. I'm going to get him." He made no attempt to lower his voice, and Ballymair glanced at Straub, smiled and shrugged his massive shoulders,.

"Well, we'll excuse a little excitement, gentlemen. Naturally you feel a bit upset. Now the doctor and I must attend to some important business, and I will leave you for the present. Come, doctor."

"The fiends!" Bleeker sat down on the edge of a chair and a spark of

wild anger blazed in his blank, horror-ridden eyes as the door clanged after Ballymair and Straub. Bleeker lowered his voice and went on in a mad rush of words, leaning toward Remington and me. "The hell-begotten fiends! You know what their important business is, Remington? No, of course you don't know. You can't hear a thing out here. But I know. I've heard enough to send me mad, for that surgery is right under the stope where they have that panther penned."

"Yes? What do you mean?" Remington's black eyes narrowed.

"One by one Ballymair's been feeding the blacks to it. He poisoned them through their food. They'd just get sick and take cramps and kick out. Then the others got suspicious and he did for 'em all at once. Brace was the last to go. He didn't associate much with the others and had no way of knowing they were all gone. He kicked in this morning just after he brought your breakfast —about an hour ago. Their important business is to throw him into the den. God—I've heard that damned brute growling and chewing and cracking bones——"

"Pull up!" Remington cut in sharply. "Cut it! I've told you I was going to get him, and I am—or I never read a man in my life!"

His declaration was so confident, so positive in its assurance of achievement, that Bleeker and I turned our heads to scrutinize him in amazement. I'd long ago given up hope of any kind.

I guess I hadn't realized the kind of man Remington was. And when he said that, I remembered that of all the fellows in our set nobody was so accurate a judge of other men as Remington. He could read a fellow like a book, take him to pieces, tell you just what he'd do in a given situation and call the turn every time.

I felt a sudden returning surge of crazy hope, and asked eagerly, "What are you going to do?"

"Get him." Remington's eyes traveled over Bleeker, and they went hard as black flint. "I've been thinking night and day for six weeks, Bleeker, and I've found the one way to hit him where he lives. I've got one weapon he can't stand up to: one weapon he doesn't know exists: one sure shot he can't escape. You two keep still and watch. I'll get him as surely as God made little apples."

HE HAD hardly ceased speaking when the door opened and Straub and Ballymair strode in briskly. For the first time Straub gave some evidence of an interest in life. Ballymair waved him to a chair, dropped into one himself, and faced us, fairly shining in exultation.

"Well, gentlemen, the deed is done. I come to talk business. I am so delighted with the excellent work Dr. Straub has done that I have decided to give him a bonus of another million. That leaves me six, and thousands pouring out of my wells every day. Now, the doctor and I have arranged that charge of dynamite so nicely set that it will blow this place to atoms and leave nothing to tell the tale. Three hundred pounds is a whaling charge. It will shave off the whole side of the mountain. If you three men had considered my proposition sanely and reasonably, I should be glad to take you out with us. But you were so foolish as to fight and make a nuisance of yourselves, and I dare not trust you. The doctor and I will go out and leave you locked in here. We have arranged a very long fuse, one that will give us at least twenty minutes to attain a safe distance. I shall be sorry to leave you gentlemen to such an untimely demise, but I can not endanger my future out of any silly sentimentality."

He paused, waiting for a comeback evidently, but none of us spoke. We were so numbed by what we had already endured that nothing could jar us further. Not even the pleasant prospect of being blown to pieces. If Ballymair sensed the status of our feelings, he gave no sign, but went on speaking rapidly, too on fire with the exultance of his triumph to remain calm.

"I have spent a great deal of money and effort. I have suffered almost continually for six years: suffered a hundred horrors, horrors of suspense and delay. The last horror would have been to fail. I have gone to extreme lengths, but the magnificent end justified the means. Think of what it means to me, and you may not blame me utterly. Think!" Ballymair leaned toward us, and his eyes flamed under his smooth blond hair. "How would you like it if you were doomed to walk among other men, set aside and held at arm's length because you were black—black from the second skin out?

"White the rest of the way in. White in brain, white in heart, white in ideals, ambitions, loves and desires. I tell you the skin doesn't matter one little bit. It's what's inside a man. Trite truism, yes. And yet the world judges by the veneer. Well, I changed my veneer!

"I'm going out into the world, take my place as a respected white man in a respected community, and live a full life, with wealth to back me and intelligence to carry me forward. I'm going to show the world how little the veneer counts. I've fulfilled my life's dream. Success! Success! Think of it! I'm thirty-one years old, I have six million dollars, and I'm *white!*"

"*Where?*" Remington's voice cut into the heat of his exultation as cold as the North Pole and as sharp as a two-edged sword.

Ballymair quivered, caught himself and shrank back in his chair as though Remington had struck him in the face. And Remington's voice went on, as cool, as steady, as merciless as destiny.

"White? *Where!* You may change your skin, Ballymair, but you can't change your heart. You're quite right. The skin does not matter. One of the best friends I have is a negro. A man with a clear brain and a fine soul, satisfied to hold his place in the world. Look at your hands, Ballymair."

"My *hands?*" Ballymair's eyes leaped to them involuntarily, and he frowned, mystified by Remington's tone. "My hands were always white."

"Exactly!" Remington's voice rose, full, resonant, flowing out like the tones of an organ. "Why didn't you keep them that way? What a fine symbol that would have been, Ballymair, to go on through life forever with your hands white! What an incentive to your boasted intellect! But now they're red, and you can't ever wash them clean again. And your heart's black, and you can't ever change it at all. It's a foul, black, stinking hole, filled with rotten memories and dead men's bones. Use your vaunted intelligence, Ballymair, and your white skin will be dust and ashes in your mouth."

Ballymair stared at him like a man hypnotized. And then I knew what Remington meant by his one weapon. He meant his tongue. He was using his mighty gift of speech, shooting straight at the intelligent brain that really lay within Ballymair's skull. He did not raise a finger nor move in his chair. He was straight and immobile, his face set and stern, his black eyes intent on Ballymair's face, and his marvelous voice rolled out like the tones of a denunciating god.

"So—to fail would be the last horror for you, Ballymair? Well, look

your last horror in the face. You have failed. You sit there and tell me the skin doesn't matter one single bit, you sneer at the world for considering the veneer, and you are a living example of a man who has existed solely to prove that nothing mattered to him *but* the veneer. The lives of twelve men have gone to perfect your fiendish plan. It doesn't matter who or what they were: derelicts, down-and-outers, they were still human and they had a right to their lives. Even a dog has a right to his life—unless he goes mad. You went mad, Ballymair. You became a monomaniac. One-pointed as any insane inmate of a madhouse. You thought of nothing on earth but acquiring that white veneer.

"There's something else to reckon with. You wanted to become great, to give something of value to the world. You had a mighty opportunity to do just that. Think what a man of your intelligence, power and personality could have done for his race. Look, Ballymair! Look!"

Remington rose to his feet like a released spring, leaned toward Ballymair and pointed to the smooth expanse of the wall. Ballymair rose, half crouching, and stared where Remington pointed. All our eyes followed, riveted on the wall—but the wall did not remain blank. In the compelling flow of Remington's words things and people grew, stood and walked before our eyes.

"Look! There's a silver sheet! The big movie of life is on it. The life of a race. The negro! Look! There's Harlem. Sixty million dollars worth of property owned by the negro there today. A negro capital, man, just so surely as you stand there. Some day it will be a center where culture, intelligence and high achievement shall gather and spread an influence over the earth. There's proof for you of how the negro has risen in the last twenty-five years. On every hand he is rising to better things, attaining a higher stature of manhood. He is giving something to the world, lifting his race to the place where men shall some day see that, regardless of the outer superficialities, real men are brothers under the skin —that the veneer is not!

"Yesterday we saw the negro performer much in the same light as we saw the trick dancing bear. Even at his best we accorded him only the recognition of a flash-in-the-pan risen to freak eminence, incapable of sustained effort, unequal to the intelligent creative ability which produces group coherence. But he refused to remain one with a race of standardized dummies. He exhibited a determined passion for individual expression, he found his own art, his own music, he reached an eminence of achievement that has commanded the admiration of the whole white world.

"Look, Ballymair, look! There stands Roland Hayes. Do you realize that he is the greatest American lyric tenor? Do you realize that he has bound the whole world with the spell of his silver voice? There stands Charles Gilpin. Do you realize he reached a pinnacle of artistic ability, when he brought to life with rare histrionic skill the tragic figure of the Emperor Jones? There stands Countee Cullen. Do you realize his poetry is real, fine, drawn from his heart-strings—as he has drawn tears from mine? Do you realize that these men are *great?* And that there are a dozen more like them?

"Not too many, perhaps. One in a million, maybe. But do you realize that they are the splendid vanguard blazing the way for the dark race into high places? Do you realize that they have razed racial obstacles and don't propose to be told where they shall stop? Do you realize that they haven't even scratched the surface of their incalculable potentialities?

"And look—look now! There stands Abraham Lincoln! The man who made all this possible for you and your race. He's staring straight at you! And what does he see? You, who could have been one of that glorious vanguard! You, who could have been one in a million! You, who could have carried your race a step farther! You, who lost sight of something truly great in the lure of a treacherous mirage! You perverted that fine intelligence of yours, you lost your stride, you wasted the opportunity of a hundred years!

"Lincoln! Lincoln, whom your race reveres. See in his face the loathing, the horror, the real sorrow. For you! You, who could have been a man. You, who are nothing. An anomaly. You're not white, fool! You may be white from the second skin out, but your blood runs true to form. Whatever pigment lies in the cells of that first skin to make the negro black still flows in your veins! Go ahead and marry! Find out how white you are. Look—there you are! A white man, having taken his place in the world, wealthy, perhaps respected for his brain and his polish, in social intercourse with his seeming kind. With black children around his knees. There you stand, the broken victim of your own folly, of ostracism, suspicion and disgrace! Look!"

REMINGTON swayed toward Ballymair, his face white, exalted in the flow of his thundering thoughts made vocal, his eyes blazing like twin comets. Ballymair drooped, backing from the picture Remington had brought to terrible life, shrinking, his gaze wide and stark, swinging to meet Remington's eyes. Remington half raised his hands, clenched into fists, and he stood tense and rigid as his rolling voice flamed on:

"Go ahead! Go on out into the world! Anomaly! Neither black nor white. Once you were an honest black, and at least you could have been a man. An example of high incentive to all your race. Why didn't you go on and *prove* to the world that the color of the skin doesn't matter? You can't now! You're only a sham white man with black blood in your veins. You'll have to live in celibate bachelorhood to save your face. And even that won't do it. You're riding to a fall, Ballymair! God pity you, you're riding to an awful fall!

"Lincoln! See—he has covered his face! He knows what a terrible mess you've stirred up for yourself. He knows you've got to pay. You've exacted the lives of a dozen men—your hands are dripping red. You'll never be able to forget it. It will be with you night and day. And you'll never be able to forget what you accomplished, hideous and warped as it was. You'll grow proud of it! You'll tell! Your brain can't carry the load! You'll tell! And they'll put you in a madhouse—for no man would believe such a thing had he not seen. In a madhouse!

"And then what kind of an example will you be for your race? *They'll* believe! They'll be afraid not to. They'll be ashamed of you. They'll disown you. No race will own you at all. Neither black nor white. And the whole world that was beginning to recognize and honor your race will shun them and be afraid to trust them for fear another fiend might rise like you! For when you come face to face with a real *white* man, Ballymair, white dominance will show! A black man, honest and clean of heart, could shake hands with a white brother. But you've got to bow your head and sink into oblivion. Pervert, fiend, fool, sham! White? *Where?*"

Remington's voice filled the great rocky chamber and held us in a trance of stupefied wonder. Ballymair

slumped before him like a beaten dog carved in stone. The weapon had gone home. Remington had read him true, shot true, and hit him in his one vulnerable spot—his undeniable super-intellect. As the magnificent voice died away in the last stark, one-worded question, a stillness settled over the room that turned me cold and pinched the breath from my lungs.

For a long time no one moved a muscle, and Remington stood straight and rigid, his head high, his black eyes piercing to Ballymair's naked soul. Then slowly the huge man raised his head, straightened his shoulders and drew himself to his enormous height. He looked levelly into Remington's eyes, and Remington never flinched, though I hope to God I never again see the look on any man's face that was written on Ballymair's. He was looking his last horror in the eye. He was looking into hell. He had followed Remington every foot of the way. He had been stunned by the revelation Remington had spread in a blinding light before his sight. Then for the first time something fine emanated from him, and settled over his features. With it there settled a calm dignity and the man stood like a statue.

"White!" Remington repeated, his voice like a harp under a fathom of water. "Where?"

With a movement quick as light Ballymair whipped out his automatic and raised it, pointing straight at Remington. Bleeker and I caught our breaths as his long forefinger curved over the trigger. But Remington never turned a hair, and his black eyes held the other's in an unwinking stare.

"*White!*" Ballymair said, gently, and he turned to the wall, half-turned, his eyes swerving from Remington's face. We all knew, instinctively, that he was seeing clearly the tall gaunt form of Abraham Lincoln, ghostly in his sight, staring at him. Then he spoke again, raising his left hand in a stiff military salute and his voice was clear—proud.

"*White—through!*" With the words he whipped the gun around, turned it squarely to his own heart and jerked the trigger. For a moment he swayed, his head high, as we others crouched motionless in our seats, then he fell forward on his face.

"By God—I don't know! He was white somewhere!" Remington dropped into his chair like a wet rag and covered his face with his hands.

God knows how long we all sat tense and still, yet under the spell of Remington's rolling voice, stunned by the reaction it had worked upon Ballymair—knowing that was exactly what Remington had planned. Then Straub rose slowly to his feet, meticulously keeping his eyes from the dead Ballymair, and spoke in a queerly hushed tone:

"My God, man, but you can talk! Come on, let's get out of here! Let's make time, light the fuse and get away as fast as God'll let us!" He turned toward the steel door, took a key from his pocket and opened it, and we three rose and forced our legs to follow him. In the hall beyond he took some candles from a box in a cupboard and handed one to each of us. "Here, light these. It's dark as a pocket in these tunnels."

Stumbling, because our muscles were not yet co-ordinated to our wills, we walked at his heels, down a long labyrinth of tunnels, and swerved off sharply at last in one that turned to the right. It ended at last in a big slab of stone laid against a queer-looking lever. The doctor seized the lever, thrust a key in a lock at the base of it, turned the key and jerked the lever down. The slab swung aside and we all stepped out

(Continued on page 143)

A Short Ghost Story

The Night Rider

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

"UP, Madonna!"

There was a silence.

"Bah! The old crone has fallen asleep."

Messer Morini rose, walked over to the sleeper, and shook her vehemently.

"Up, Madonna Lucrezia, up!"

"Eh? eh? What is it, Messer Morini?"

"Up, Madonna. Can you not hear the hoof-beats of some rider in the distance on the highway?"

"You dream, Messer. There is nothing. Away with you. Let me sleep."

He moved away, grumbling. Madonna Lucrezia's head sank upon her breast and she drowsed. Messer Morini vanished through the heavy curtains at one extremity of the room. He walked through an ill-lighted passageway to where a heavily paneled door loomed before him. He unlatched the door and walked quietly out into the still, summer night, through the court to the iron paling separating him from the highway, which stretched itself far in the distance on either side, a ghastly white in the moonlight. The sound of hard riding came to him and he stood still, listening. The sound came nearer and nearer, and he wondered who rode so close to the hour of midnight. There was a low mumbling sound behind him, and he heard the heavy door swing softly to. He turned. Madonna Lucrezia had followed him. The hoof-beats sounded nearer. He turned to the old woman at his side.

"Now tell me that I was in error, Madonna!"

"You dream," she answered, and smothered a yawn.

"Dream, Madonna! Bah! You are yet in your sleep."

And he turned away and looked up the road to where he could discern a dark speck moving swiftly toward him.

"There, Madonna," he indicated the rider, "there, can you deny the evidence of your eyes?"

The woman stared at him suspiciously and remained silent.

"Dreaming? I, dreaming? Now say that I dream, Madonna."

Still the old woman did not answer. She frowned and glanced up at him, her thin, bloodless lips twisted into a sullen grin. The rider was almost up to them.

"See the superb white steed he rides, Madonna. And his wondrous silver cloak! His doublet, too, is silver, but there is a stain, as of blood, upon it. His face I can not see. It seems a mist is before it."

The rider swept by, but still the old woman said nothing, staring at Messer Morini gesticulating and pointing at the night rider fast disappearing down the road.

Messer Morini swore softly under his breath.

"By the Madonna, but he looked like my son, my Alessandro. If it were not that I could not see his face!

Did he not resemble my son, Madonna?''

The old woman made no answer, but turned and entered the house, crooning softly to herself. He followed her, grumbling.

''Bah! The old hag walks in her sleep.''

In the house she sat again by the fireplace, still crooning as she watched the flames lick at the stones to the sides. Messer Morini sat near.

''I wonder, Madonna.''

He lapsed into silence. The old woman chuckled a bit, but gave no hint of having heard Messer Morini, and went on with her crooning.

''I wonder what my son could be doing riding near here. Could he have deserted the army? Or could the invader, Charles, have defeated and routed our troops? It is not likely so.''

He mused.

IT WAS high noon. The hot sun beat down upon the court, wilting even the blades of grass. Messer Morini dozed in the shade of a huge tree near the iron paling. A bird chirped shrilly as it hopped merrily about on the sun-dial near by. No breath of air stirred the leaves above Messer Morini's head.

Suddenly the distant clatter of hoofs resounded in the courtyard. The bird ceased its chirping and stood quite still in the shadow on the dial. Messer Morini raised his head. A breath of air came and rustled the leaves of the tree. The hoof-beats sounded louder. From somewhere in the house came a muffled sound. The horseman came nearer. Messer Morini rose and leaned over the gate to stare up the road. A sharp edge caught and tore his doublet a little. Madonna Lucrezia stood in the doorway. The rider appeared up the road. The bird on the sun-dial flew up into the tree and hid itself among the leaves. Madonna Lucrezia moved forward and took her stand at Messer Morini's side. The rider came on, slackening his pace as he approached the two leaning over the gate.

''He is of the army,'' Messer Morini whispered.

Madonna Lucrezia grunted in reply.

The horseman pulled to a stop before the two.

''Ho, Messer. Is this the house of Messer Morini?''

''You address him.''

''I am instructed to inform you that your son, Alessandro, was killed last night just before the midnight hour in an encounter with the invading Charles. He received a poniard stab in the breast.''

He bowed to Messer Morini, put the spurs to his horse and turned away in a cloud of dust.

''My son! Alessandro! Dead!''

Messer Morini shook his fist at the fast-vanishing figure.

''Bearer of ill tidings. A curse on you!''

He turned to the woman.

''You heard him, Madonna?''

The old woman nodded assent.

''Aye, I heard him.''

''I would have sworn it was my son who rode last night!''

The woman turned on him.

''You were mad last night, Messer Morini.''

''How, mad?''

''Mad! For, while you pointed, gesticulated, shouted descriptions into my ears of some rider who you affirmed passed, I neither heard nor saw a solitary living thing upon the road!''

And she moved toward the house, chuckling.

The FOURTH VICTIM

by

Gordon Philip England



"Ramda Das sprang into the room, a drawn knife in his hand."

THESE are the last words I, Henry Reeves Grayson, shall ever pen.

Physically, I am in almost perfect condition. I could pass an army service examination with colors flying. Yet within a few short hours I shall die. Nor shall I commit suicide, though I'm afraid the coroner will believe this the explanation. But I shall not kill myself; I am to be murdered. Yet were all the law machinery thoroughly greased and set into action, my murderer would still escape justice.

Probably not many people will credit my story; yet hoping a few analytical, level-headed citizens will grasp the facts and understand, I will write the tale. As soon as I have finished, I shall be killed.

ALTHOUGH six years have elapsed since the following events took place, yet they are still indelibly impressed upon my memory.

Late one afternoon my friends, John Sparling and Robert Comstock, prominent businessmen of our native Redvale, were walking with me along a country lane not far from town. Comstock was a little ahead of Sparling and me.

Suddenly a dark figure slipped from back of a hedge, and flourishing a heavy walking stick, rushed up behind our unsuspecting friend.

"Look out, Comstock!"

"Take care, old fellow!"

Sparling and I shouted our warnings frantically, at the same time dashing to intercept the assaulter.

Like a flash, Comstock whirled about, and raising an arm, deflected a blow from head to shoulder. Then, with lightninglike rapidity, he wrenched the thick cane from his assailant and tossed it over the hedge.

We now saw his attacker was James Ralston, owner of The Lodge, a fine house set like a castle at the top of a high cliff overhanging the town.

"Damn you, Comstock!" Ralston yelled furiously. "You will interfere with my affairs, will you? Then take that!"

Beside himself with rage, he dashed his fist full into Comstock's face. Comstock staggered; then, quickly recovering, went into action.

The fighters moved so swiftly that our eyes could scarcely follow them. But when after some minutes they stopped, panting for breath, we saw with elation that our friend had by far the best of it. He was almost unmarked, while Ralston's nose was spurting blood, his lips were puffed and bleeding, and his left eye badly blackened.

"Have you—had enough?" Comstock asked jerkily.

Ralston's face contorted with passion. "Damn you, no!"

Again he rushed at Comstock, and again they engaged.

The end came suddenly. Blocking cleverly a hook to the face, Comstock shot forward his left with tremendous force, catching Ralston squarely on the jaw. Collapsing like a broken balloon, Ralston sank huddled at our friend's feet.

Sparling and I had meanwhile stood fascinated, watching the combatants. We had expected something like this ever since Comstock's marriage to Edith Bentley five days before. Ralston had loved her passionately, and had vowed to settle accounts with his successful rival. But we had hoped it might be only an idle threat. Yet now, this!

Going forward, we congratulated the victor.

"Believe me, I was lucky!" Comstock returned. "I had no idea the fellow was after me till you yelled. If it hadn't been for you, things would have gone mighty hard with me."

Then he turned again to the injured Ralston.

"We can't leave him like this," he remarked quickly. "You will have to help me take him home."

The beaten man had meanwhile slowly been regaining consciousness. Now uttering a curse, he crawled to his feet. He mumbled an indistinct threat, shook his fist weakly, and turning away, staggered up the road toward The Lodge.

Except for a lame arm where the heavy cane had struck him, and a few minor bruises, Comstock was unhurt. His assailant, however, had severely suffered. A week after the fight, a servant from The Lodge reported in Morrison's barber shop that his master was just getting around again.

Ten days afterward, Ralston packed his trunks; discharged all servants except his caretaker, old Simon Dawson; and departed bag and baggage, his destination secret.

Two years later, Jerry Mason, an acquaintance of mine who had just returned from India, told me he had met Ralston in Madras, at the entrance to a Buddhist temple, in the company of jugglers and magicians. Mason had held little conversation with Ralston, but believed the fellow had been studying magic.

REDVALE heard no more of Ralston for six years.

Then, four months ago, when I was in the office getting my mail, the door flew open and young Charley Kilburn, a book agent who had been

selling *Useful Hints on Etiquette* in our locality, rushed in wild-eyed.

"Gee! but I've had a scare, Grayson!" he exclaimed.

He certainly did look frightened.

"What's happened?" I demanded.

Kilburn pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped the sweat from his forehead.

"You know old Simon Dawson, the caretaker at The Lodge," he answered. "Well, I stopped up there half an hour ago to try to sell the old fellow a book. I rang three times, then heard something coming. It didn't sound like a human being, though. The footfalls seemed padded like an animal's.

"I felt something was wrong, knowing old Simon never keeps pets, but I surely wanted to sell my book, so rang again. Then I heard a man's voice, and the door swung open.

"I almost jumped out of my boots. You won't believe me, Grayson, but it's gospel truth." Kilburn came nearer me and spoke very earnestly. "There was a big Hindoo standing in front of me. He had on heathenish clothes, and a big scarf wound round his head. And he had a long knife stuck in his girdle, and had hold of the handle of it, too. Crouched beside him, all ready to spring, was a huge tawny brute that looked like first cousin to tigers I've seen at circuses, only bigger and uglier."

I laughed incredulously. "Oh, go on, Kilburn," I complained; "you're always trying to pull off a joke. But you can't make me swallow that stuff!"

Kilburn reddened. "I'm not trying to put anything over," he angrily retorted. "This is straight goods."

"Oh, of course," I sarcastically replied. "But never mind, get on with the yarn, Kilburn."

"Well," the agent continued, "when I saw that beast, I wished I was a million miles away. I didn't dare run, though, for fear the Hindoo would sic the brute on me. I felt sure it could run faster than I could. So I just stood there, endeavoring to look cool and self-possessed, as if I saw sights like that every day.

"The Hindoo glared at me a moment, and then asked: 'What does the *sahib* desire?' Then he added, and I didn't half like the way he said it: 'My lord does not like to be disturbed.'

"That didn't sound one bit encouraging, but all the same I pulled out *Useful Hints on Etiquette* and began telling about it.

"Well sir, that native looked disgusted. 'Books, *sahib?*' he scornfully flung at me. 'My lord needs no more books. The Sahib Ralston has knowledge which is not in books!'"

"Well, Kilburn, what did you do then?" I laughingly inquired.

"What did I do then?" repeated Kilburn. "Well sir, I did just what you'd have done. I politely thanked him for his information, and didn't lose any time getting out of there. I was afraid if I stopped longer, the master himself might come along. And I'd seen enough for one morning. So I came right on here. But if you ask me, there's something not according to Hoyle at The Lodge!"

Kilburn's story sounded incredible; but that afternoon, when I was in Knapp's store after groceries, Old Simon, the caretaker, came toddling in, shaking all over, and white as a sheet.

"What's happened?" asked Knapp curiously. "You look as though you had seen a ghost, Old Simon!"

The old man tried to answer, but for a moment could not articulate. Then, moistening dry lips with the tip of his tongue, he replied: "Master is back."

"Ralston back!" Knapp ejaculated in astonishment. "Well! that *is* news! When did he come?"

"Last night," Old Simon answered in a hollow voice. "About midnight I woke up, and there, bending over me, I saw the master. 'Gracious, Mr. Ralston!' I exclaimed. 'Is this really you, master, after all these years?'

"Master coldly stared at me some moments without speaking. Then he told me: 'I'm through with you, Old Simon. I want you to get your traps and leave here at once. I will see you later, to arrange about your pension.'

"Mr. Knapp, I never once thought of arguing with him; his voice sounded so commanding I knew I'd have to obey. I jumped out of bed, sir, and grabbed a few clothes. I didn't stop to dress, even, but ran in pajamas over to Mr. Darby's, my nearest neighbor. I stayed there all night.

"About half an hour ago, master came and handed me a check. He looked at me queerly, and remarked: 'I've no use for you any longer, Old Simon, but if you'll steer clear of The Lodge I'll give you a check like this every month.'

"I examined the check, Mr. Knapp, and it was a fat one. Then I raised my eyes to the master. He didn't seem like my old master at all. He had a kind of foreign look, an ugly, dangerous one.

" 'I promise to keep away, master,' I quickly agreed.

"He stared at me a minute longer. 'Very well, Old Simon, but,' his voice grew menacing, 'be sure you remember your promise.'

Old Simon ceased speaking, and turned toward the door. With hand on latch, he paused, and uttered a warning:

"Keep away from The Lodge, Mr. Knapp. And you, too, Mr. Grayson. It isn't safe!"

Shaking his head lugubriously, he stepped into the street.

During the next week, truckload after truckload of sealed packing boxes arrived at Redvale station, and later were delivered at The Lodge.

None of the carriers saw the master. They were obliged to deal with Ramda Das, his Hindoo servant, whom they found shrewd and canny. When they demanded speech with Ralston, Ramda coldly replied: "My lord is busy; he has no time to chatter with underlings."

As he made the remark, Ramda caressed his knife-handle in a manner that sent a shiver down the spines of the carriers. They complained no more, but silently went to work.

Perhaps had Ramda been alone, they might have become bolder, but close at his heels stood the omnipresent tiger. So they deemed discretion the better part of valor.

The knowledge that Ralston hid himself from public view, together with the sight of Ramda Das and the tiger, made deep impression upon our Redvale citizens. We soon became convinced all was not right at The Lodge, and few cared to pass it after dark.

THREE weeks after Ralston's arrival, while Sparling was smoking a cigar with me at my home, Comstock unceremoniously entered, waving a sheet of note-paper.

"What do you think, fellows!" he began. "Ralston's servant, Ramda Das, came to me just now and handed me this. After reading it, I looked up to question the Hindoo, but he had vanished. But here's the note, Grayson." And he thrust it beneath my nose.

I took the paper.

"Read it to Sparling," Comstock urged.

The note ran:

Dear Comstock:

I trust you have forgotten our foolish quarrel some years ago. I know I was in the wrong, and that the best man won. Won't you forgive the past, and be friends again? If you can, come to dinner at The Lodge tomorrow night. Bring Sparling and Grayson with you.

Very sincerely,

JAMES RALSTON.

I returned the note to Comstock, who pocketed it and lighted a cigarette.

"Of course you won't go, Bob," I said. "That damned Hindoo, Ramda Das, would as soon stick a knife in you as look at you. And we all know what Ralston's like."

"What Ralston used to be like," quietly corrected Comstock. "He may have reformed."

"Black may be white," I sarcastically observed. "Only—it isn't."

"Can the leopard change his spots?" Sparling cynically added.

Comstock puffed an instant at his fag, then tossed it aside with an air of finality. "That's what I intend finding out," he coolly returned. "You and Grayson can suit yourselves, but I will accept the invitation."

We argued with him a long time, but he remained immovable as the famous Rock itself. The upshot of it was, we agreed to go with him. We believed three might stand a better chance than one with the mysterious Ralston.

Yet nevertheless, I felt sure we were making a mistake that might cost us dear. My suspicions were only too well-founded, as you shall soon learn.

At 5 o'clock the following afternoon, we went up to The Lodge. Ramda Das ushered us through a long hall, threw open a door, and announced us.

The room was a library. Our host was sitting beside a bookcase, and on the floor at his feet lay the tiger. Despite what Ramda had told Kilburn, the book agent, Ralston was reading. With his free hand he patted the immense head of the big brute as though it were a dog.

As Ramda Das announced us, Ralston rose in greeting. The tiger leaped up, also, fiercely watching.

"Down, Sultan!" Ralston sharply commanded. The beast obediently dropped back upon the rug.

"Glad to see you, old chaps," Ralston cordially welcomed. He waved his hand toward some chairs.

Then, seeing us eye his tiger speculatively, he smiled oddly and continued: "Don't worry about Sultan. I've had him for years and he wouldn't injure anybody unless I commanded it."

While Ralston spoke, I observed him closely. Eight years in the Orient had marvelously changed his appearance. The Indian sun had tanned his white skin a parchment yellow, with which his heavy black beard strangely contrasted. But his eyes were unusually clear and white; they spoke of an uncommon intelligence; a dominant personality. Uncanny eyes, his were; yet, despite that, wonderfully fascinating.

Now my glance fell upon the book he had been reading, and noting the title, I felt a strange quiver of apprehension. It was a book of necromancy.

Ralston noticed my looks. "That's rather an interesting book, by the way," he remarked, "and I've got others equally so. After dinner, if you care for that sort of thing, I may be able to amuse you."

Then, abruptly changing the subject, he began pointing out trophies of the hunt that decorated the library walls, and telling us incidents connected with these.

Soon Ramda Das came to announce dinner.

That was a sumptuous meal. Ramda was a splendid chef, and the liquors were pre-Volstead in quality. Ralston seemed the very genius of hospitality. By the time the meal was over, I was ready to admit that the leopard, for once, had changed his spots.

Dinner ended, Ralston rose and remarked: "Now, if you're interested in the occult, I can show you something surprizing."

Following him up a flight of stairs, we passed through another hall,

finally stopping before a closed door. Opening it, Ralston stepped back, inviting us to enter.

The room was Eastern in appearance. Rich Kazak and Daghestan rugs covered the floor; Indian idols grinned from stations at the sides of the chamber; and every article of furniture spoke of the tropics. Wherever we looked, implements of magic met our view, and on a table before us stood a crystal-gazing bowl.

We could see only a portion of the room. It was divided in its center by heavy curtains reaching from ceiling to floor.

Ralston stood intently watching us for several moments. I thought a sinister expression came into his eyes, but this was only a fleeting impression, and I might have been mistaken. Then he spoke.

"This, friends," he explained slowly and with apparent pride, "is my Oriental Room."

RALSTON now entertained us with magical feats that made us almost ready to doubt our own eyesight. Then he commenced reading our fortunes, beginning with Comstock's. By aid of his crystal, he told Bob facts about past and present that simply staggered him. Then Bob inquired concerning his future.

Ralston hesitated. "The future is not always pleasant," he ominously remarked. "Better be content with what I've already shown you."

Comstock, however, insisted. Finally Ralston yielded.

"You must come into the interior chamber, then," he quietly informed him, "and I must ask both Sparling and Grayson to wait outside. Their presence might hinder the vision."

Comstock became excited. "You hear that, you fellows?" he exclaimed. "You stay here, both of you. I never believed in fortune-telling before, but I do now. And I'm going to find out what the future holds in store for me!"

Together Comstock and Ralston disappeared within the veil. Fifteen minutes drifted away without a sound from the enclosed alcove. At length Sparling grew nervous.

"There's something mighty queer about this," he whispered. "I don't like it one little bit, and if old Bob doesn't come out pretty soon, I'm going to discover what's behind those curtains."

I agreed with Sparling. "Wait five minutes longer," I whispered back, "and then we'll——"

Before I could finish the sentence, the curtains parted, and the two men came out.

Comstock looked pale as milk. We showered him with questions, but he wouldn't reply. He appeared dazed.

We turned questioning eyes upon Ralston. He shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm afraid your friend's future is rather unpromising," he explained darkly. "Evidently he doesn't want to talk about it."

Then Comstock spoke. "I'm all right, fellows," he told us thickly. "Saw things I wasn't expecting to, though. Let's talk about something else."

My curiosity became piqued. I urged Ralston to tell my fortune also, but he steadily refused.

"You've seen quite enough for one night," he warned. "You notice how this affected our friend. Who knows what the effect on you might be?"

Leaving the Oriental Room, we walked out on the balcony to smoke a cigar.

Soon Sparling consulted his watch. "It's 12 o'clock, fellows," he remarked.

Comstock accepted the hint, and rose. I did likewise.

"Come again," Ralston hospitably invited. "I seldom go out myself, but your company this evening has been a real pleasure to me."

I often thought of his words afterward; I am thinking of them while writing tonight.

We walked back to town in silence. Comstock still seemed confused by his experience; and Sparling and I were thinking over the strange events of the evening.

Approaching Comstock's home, we saw his lights were still burning.

"You're due for a curtain lecture, old man," I jestingly remarked.

Comstock didn't answer. Turning abruptly away, he went into the house.

BUZZ, buzz, buzz!

I had just switched off the electrics and climbed into bed, when the telephone rang.

"Now what does anyone want at this time of night?" I asked irritably, as I stumbled toward the instrument. "Hullo," I yelled, yanking down the receiver. "Henry Grayson speaking! What's wanted?"

"Is that you, Harry?" screamed a hysterical voice I recognized as Edith Comstock's. "Come over right away! Bob has ——"

The sentence abruptly broke off. I heard the clatter of the receiver as it dropped from her hand, and directly afterward the sound of a heavy fall.

Hastily donning a few clothes, I rushed over to the house.

On the floor beneath the telephone lay Edith Comstock. Bob was not visible. Running up-stairs, I threw open his bedroom door, and looked in.

Comstock was lying sprawled across his bed in a pool of blood, which dripped from his gashed throat. His right hand still gripped the razor.

How I got down-stairs again I don't know. I've only a hazy remembrance of what I did afterward. I dimly remember going to the telephone to summon Sparling. I also remember picking up Mrs. Comstock, and laying her on a sofa.

Then the picture fades. But Sparling told me later that when he burst into the room a few minutes after I'd 'phoned I was kneeling beside the sofa trying to determine whether or not Mrs. Comstock's heart was beating.

If so, I was attempting a useless task. Her heart was forever stilled. The shock had killed her.

Investigation showed Comstock's business had been prosperous. There apparently had been no motive for his awful act, and the coroner was puzzled. No doubt, however, existed that Comstock had killed himself, so the verdict was "wilful suicide."

The generally accepted theory in Redvale was that Bob had slain himself during a fit of suicidal insanity.

SEVERAL weeks after Comstock's death, I again went with Sparling to visit Ralston.

After arriving at The Lodge, we talked of commonplaces for some minutes. Then Sparling and Ralston began discussing the latest findings of Egyptologists.

Not being interested in these matters, I became bored; and excusing myself, went out on the cliff to watch the sunset.

The evening was a glorious one. Slowly the sun sank down behind the western horizon, tinting the sky pink, blue and crimson with its setting rays.

I watched for some time, spellbound. Then, turning away, I started back toward the house.

An instant later, Ralston, Sparling, and Ramda Das came out of the house and approached me.

Sparling was in advance of the others. As he drew nearer I saw he looked ill, walking as though in a stupor, with face drawn and white.

I called out to him. Taking no notice, he passed me without a word, and went on toward the cliff-edge.

I started after him, amazed. He walked still closer to the brink. And

then, without hesitation, *he stepped over* the precipice.

It was a forty-foot drop, and jagged rocks lay beneath. I distinctly heard the crack of the bones as the body crashed upon the stones below.

Then I saw Ralston and Ramda Das running toward me.

THE suicide of Comstock and Sparling were a seven days Redvale wonder. After the second tragedy, people commenced closely watching me. Once, on the street, I heard two citizens whisper: "He will be the next!"

I suppose when those men hear of my death tonight they will congratulate themselves on their powers of discernment.

Discernment! Ye gods! what fools they are! If they knew what I know; understood what I understand!

But I am straying from my narrative, and my time is limited.

After Sparling's death, I went frequently to The Lodge, for I had been cursed from birth with insatiable curiosity. Even though suspecting that my friends had slain themselves because of terrible visions of the future, I yet desired to delve into the hidden mysteries myself. The thought that with Ralston's aid I might break the veil of the future and learn the truth, entrancingly fascinated me.

I fully believed Ralston possessed power to reveal my future. That his was an unholy power, gained by association with jugglers and sorcerers, I believed also. This, however, in no way deterred me from making the attempt.

One afternoon Ralston granted my request, and we entered the inner chamber.

Oriental brass lamps, suspended from the ceiling, cast a flickering light over the room. As in the outer appartment, numerous idols formed decorations.

My eyes focused, almost immediately, upon the center of the alcove. A tall altar stood there; and upon it I saw a small brazier filled with yellow powder. A cushioned divan occupied a corner.

By a sign, Ralston ordered me to seat myself. When I had done so, he drew a wax taper from his pocket. Lighting the candle, he applied the flame to the powder. Instantly a strong Oriental perfume clouded the atmosphere.

Ralston had stationed himself on the other side of the altar. For some moments the smoke wreaths concealed him from view.

Suddenly the smoke-screen lifted, and I saw my host staring fixedly at me, a fanatical, deadly glare in his uncanny eyes, the pupils of which glowed like points of living fire.

I tried to rise; tried to spring up, to run from the room; but I was powerless. Ralston slowly came nearer, with horrid eyes still fastened upon mine. I sought to avert my gaze from his, but I could not stir my eyes even a hair's breadth.

Then my mind went utterly blank.

OPENING my eyes, I again found myself in the anteroom. Ralston was supporting me with one hand; with the other, he held a glass of brandy to my lips. I greedily gulped down the life-restoring liquor.

"What happened?" I asked stupidly.

"You fainted," Ralston smoothly began. "I think——"

At that moment, a low growl sounded from the doorway. There, lashing his tail from side to side, stood Sultan the tiger. Flecks of snowy froth dripped from his open mouth. He had gone mad.

Ralston went chalk-white beneath his tan. But his voice held no note of fear as he commanded: "Down, Sultan!" The tiger did not obey. With a roar, he leaped upon his master,

knocking him across the room. Thrown by the force of the tiger's rush, I fell to the floor, and horror-stricken I watched the appalling spectacle.

The tiger's jaws closed upon Ralston's right shoulder and the beast shook him as a dog would shake a rat.

Then came the sound of a man running. A moment later, Ramda Das sprang into the room, a drawn knife in his hand. Without hesitation, the devoted servant flung himself upon the tiger, and plunged the weapon into the creature's throat. Then drawing out the blade, he again drove it into the jugular vein.

The tiger turned upon Ramda, releasing his first victim. I saw a mighty steel-shod paw strike with incredible swiftness at the Hindoo's head.

Ramda Das went down as though poleaxed. He never moved again. His neck was broken.

Again the beast attacked Ralston, ripping him with cruel claws, and sinking sharp white fangs into his flesh. But the Hindoo's weapon had done its work well, though too late to save its owner from destruction. A stream of blood, gushing from the tiger's throat, poured over Ralston's lacerated form. Suddenly collapsing, the powerful brute gave a few spasmodic struggles, then lay motionless.

I waited a few minutes to assure myself that the yellow horror was really dead, then crawled over to Ralston.

The tiger had torn him frightfully, and his eyes were closed. I supposed him dead, but suddenly reviving, he fixed piercing eyes upon me, and exclaimed: "Henry Grayson! I will be with you again on the first of June!"

His lips curled in an inscrutable smile of dreadful mystery, his head fell back, and his eyes shut again, this time in death.

TODAY is the first of June.

This morning, I woke with a feeling of uneasiness, an impression that strange events were impending. All day an unwholesome dread has oppressed me. Four hours ago, thinking the companionship of others might drive away these unusual sensations, I went to the door, intending to go over to a neighbor's. But when I reached the door, instead of opening it, I turned the key.

Then I did another equally inexplicable thing. Crossing the room, I took my automatic from off the mantel, loaded it, and placed it on the table.

I had not wanted to do any of these things. I had absolutely no reasonable excuse for doing them. Yet I did them.

Nor had I performed these acts voluntarily. During the last few hours, I have felt myself held in the grip of an unseen power. But although invisible, I can sense the personality of this presence, and it is the personality of James Ralston.

I am struggling against its influence, but my efforts are unavailing. It is driving me on, nor have I any ability to break from it, or resist its will.

I have been thinking profoundly these last four hours. And I have reached a conclusion, which, though eery and terrifying, is, I am sure, correct.

Now I know Ralston never forgot his enmity, and that his profession of friendship was a blind to lure us into a false sense of security. Yet all the time, he hated us more intensely than ever. And I understand now why Comstock and Sparling died. That fiend Ralston hypnotized them, and then ordered his poor victims to lay violent hands upon themselves.

Think of the utter fiendishness of it. And the demoniac cleverness. The murderer at no time stood in danger of the law. No one could associate

him with the death of my friends. All Redvale has believed them suicides.

Nor is that all. I know now that Ralston also hypnotized me that afternoon in his Oriental Room. I can not remember what occurred. Doubtless he willed I should forget.

But I realize now that I am about to obey the commands given me when in that trance. I can not resist these commands. Although Ralston's body is dead, his will is living, and I am bound to obey that will.

I have been fighting, desperately fighting, during these past four hours. All in vain. I can not win. I am completely helpless.

Knowing I am doomed, I am writing this in an endeavor to explain the truth. But who will ever believe me? Yet I am relating only facts; of this I am convinced. I know my friends Comstock and Sparling were murdered by Ralston, who also deserves blame for the death of Edith Comstock. And I—I am the fourth victim!

Men will call me a suicide. Yet, dear God! I do not want to die. I am not an old man; I am happy and prosperous; I want to live. But I can not resist this damnable force which is urging me to destruction.

I am afraid I shall not be able to write much longer. The power is becoming stronger. Yet how I hate to die!

My left hand is creeping toward my automatic. I am struggling to hold it back, but steadily it moves. Very, very slowly, but irresistibly.

Can no power save me? I do not want to die. How horrible is death!

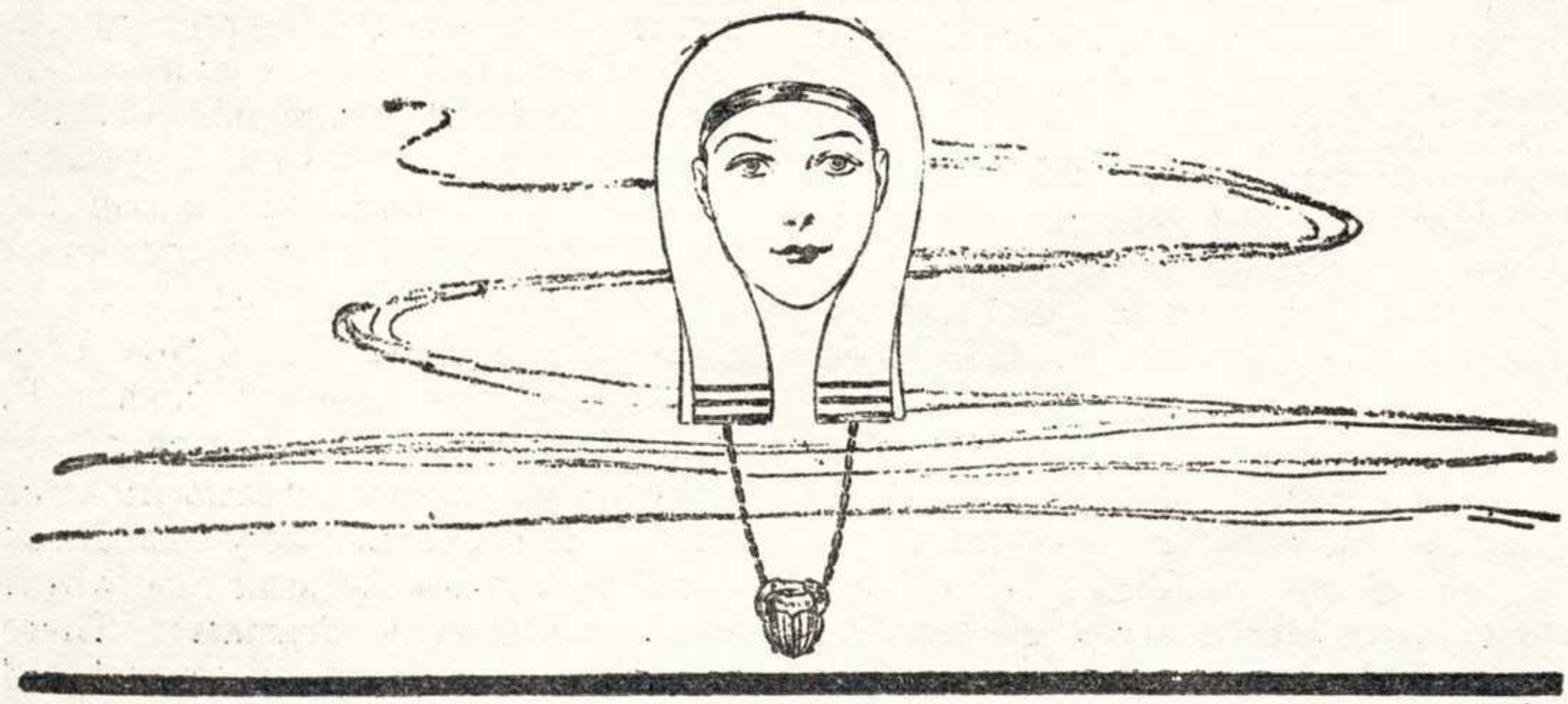
Great heavens! I can feel the cold steel! My hand is clutching the automatic—is raising it——

[*Clipping from the Redvale Morning News, June 2, 1924.*]

We have a tragic event to report this morning: the suicide of Henry Reeves Grayson, the merchant, at his home, 137 Grant Avenue.

At 10:15 last night, George Maxwell MacKenzie, the optician, who lives at 139 Grant Avenue, heard a cry of terror from Grayson's home. Immediately following the scream he heard a pistol-shot.

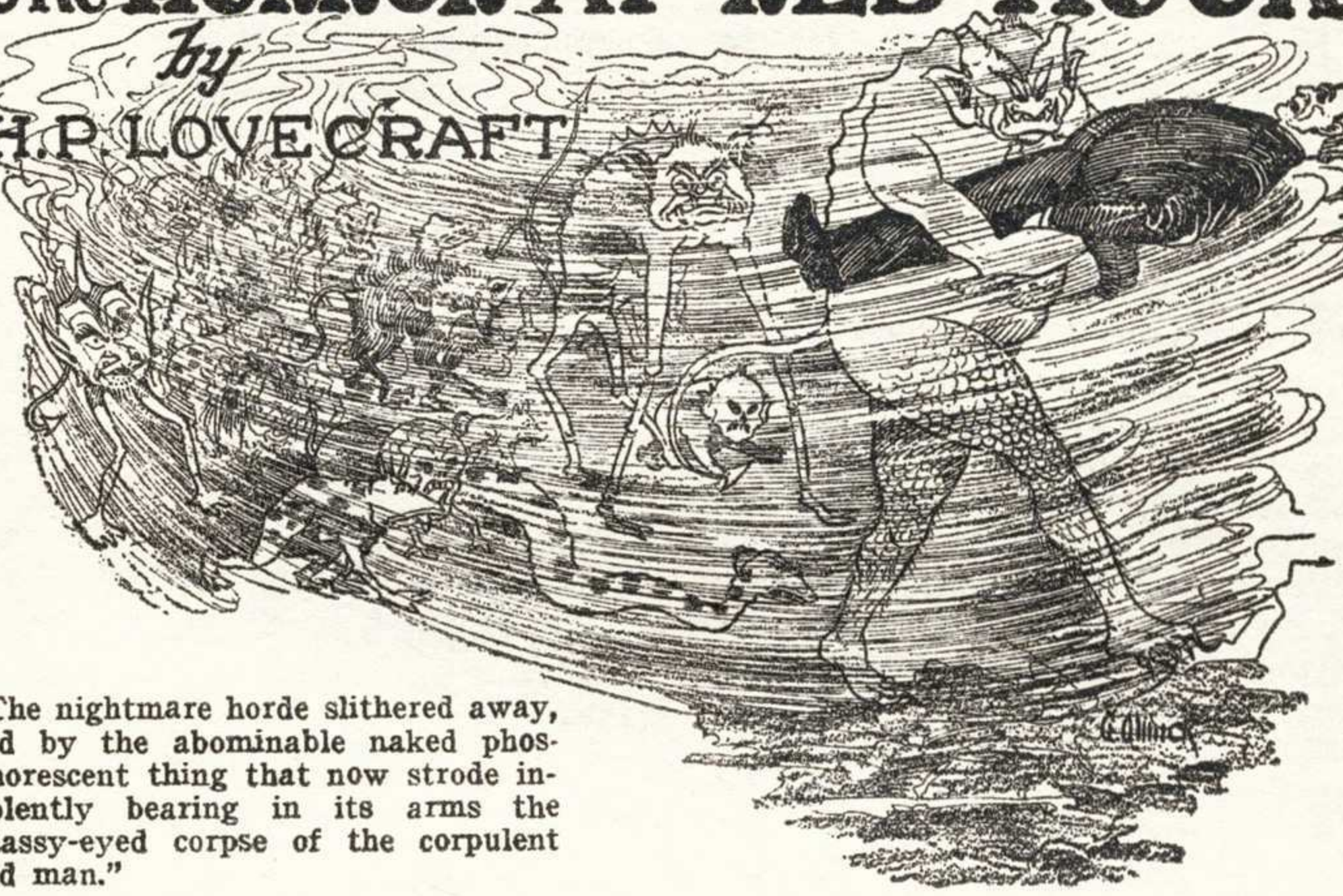
MacKenzie ran to Grayson's house, broke in the door and entered. He found Grayson's body in a chair at his library table. His head had fallen forward on a mass of papers before him. Blood, still flowing from a wound in the head, was staining them crimson. Grayson's left hand gripped an automatic pistol; the other still held his pen. The ink on the last page he had been writing was still wet.



The HORROR AT RED HOOK

by

H. P. LOVECRAFT



"The nightmare horde slithered away, led by the abominable naked phosphorescent thing that now strode insolently bearing in its arms the glassy-eyed corpse of the corpulent old man."

There are sacraments of evil as well as of good about us, and we live and move to my belief in an unknown world, a place where there are caves and shadows and dwellers in twilight. It is possible that man may sometimes return on the track of evolution, and it is my belief that an awful lore is not yet dead.

—*Arthur Machen.*

NOT many weeks ago, on a street corner in the village of Pascoag, Rhode Island, a tall, heavily built, and wholesome-looking pedestrian furnished much speculation by a singular lapse of behavior. He had, it appears, been descending the hill by the road from Chepachet; and encountering the compact section, had turned to his left into the main thoroughfare where several modest business blocks convey a touch of the urban. At this point, without visible provocation, he committed his astonishing lapse; staring queerly for a second at the tallest of the buildings before him, and then, with a series of terrified, hysterical shrieks, breaking into a frantic run which ended in a stumble and fall at the next crossing. Picked up and dusted off by ready hands, he was found to be conscious, organically unhurt, and evidently cured of his sudden nervous attack. He muttered some shamefaced explanations involving a strain he had undergone, and with downcast glance turned back up the Chepachet road, trudging out of sight without once looking behind him. It was a strange incident to befall so large, robust, normal-featured, and capable-looking a man, and the strangeness was not lessened by the remarks of a bystander who had recognized him as the boarder of a well-known dairyman on the outskirts of Chepachet.

He was, it developed, a New York police detective named Thomas F. Malone, now on a long leave of absence under medical treatment after some disproportionately arduous work on a gruesome local case which accident had made dramatic. There had been a collapse of several old

brick buildings during a raid in which he had shared, and something about the wholesale loss of life, both of prisoners and of his companions, had peculiarly appalled him. As a result, he had acquired an acute and anomalous horror of any buildings even remotely suggesting the ones which had fallen in, so that in the end mental specialists forbade him the sight of such things for an indefinite period. A police surgeon with relatives in Chepachet had put forward that quaint hamlet of wooden Colonial houses as an ideal spot for the psychological convalescence; and thither the sufferer had gone, promising never to venture among the brick-lined streets of larger villages till duly advised by the Woonsocket specialist with whom he was put in touch. This walk to Pascoag for magazines had been a mistake, and the patient had paid in fright, bruises, and humiliation for his disobedience.

So much the gossips of Chepachet and Pascoag knew; and so much, also, the most learned specialists believed. But Malone had at first told the specialists much more, ceasing only when he saw that utter incredulity was his portion. Thereafter he held his peace, protesting not at all when it was generally agreed that the collapse of certain squalid brick houses in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn, and the consequent death of many brave officers, had unseated his nervous equilibrium. He had worked too hard, all said, in trying to clean up those nests of disorder and violence; certain features were shocking enough, in all conscience, and the unexpected tragedy was the last straw. This was a simple explanation which everyone could understand, and because Malone was not a simple person he perceived that he had better let it suffice. To hint to unimaginative people of a horror beyond all human conception—a horror of houses and blocks and cities leprous and cancerous with evil dragged from elder worlds—would be merely to invite a padded cell instead of a restful rustication, and Malone was a man of sense despite his mysticism. He had the Celt's far vision of weird and hidden things, but the logician's quick eye for the outwardly unconvincing; an amalgam which had led him far afield in the forty-two years of his life, and set him in strange places for a Dublin University man born in a Georgian villa near Phœnix Park.

And now, as he reviewed the things he had seen and felt and apprehended, Malone was content to keep unshared the secret of what could reduce a dauntless fighter to a quivering neurotic; what could make old brick slums and seas of dark, subtle faces a thing of nightmare and eldritch portent. It would not be the first time his sensations had been forced to bide uninterpreted—for was not his very act of plunging into the polyglot abyss of New York's underworld a freak beyond sensible explanation? What could he tell the prosaic of the antique witcheries and grotesque marvels discernible to sensitive eyes amidst the poison cauldron where all the varied dregs of unwholesome ages mix their venom and perpetuate their obscene terrors? He had seen the hellish green flame of secret wonder in this blatant, evasive welter of outward greed and inward blasphemy, and had smiled gently when all the New-Yorkers he knew scoffed at his experiment in police work. They had been very witty and cynical, deriding his fantastic pursuit of unknowable mysteries and assuring him that in these days New York held nothing but cheapness and vulgarity. One of them had wagered him a heavy sum that he could not—despite many poignant things to his credit in the *Dublin Review*—even write a truly interesting story of

New York low life; and now, looking back, he perceived that cosmic irony had justified the prophet's words while secretly confuting their flippant meaning. The horror, as glimpsed at last, could not make a story—for like the book cited by Poe's German authority, *"er lässt sich nicht lesen"* —it does not permit itself to be read.

2

TO MALONE the sense of latent mystery in existence was always present. In youth he had felt the hidden beauty and ecstasy of things, and had been a poet; but poverty and sorrow and exile had turned his gaze in darker directions, and he had thrilled at the imputations of evil in the world around. Daily life had for him come to be a fantasmagoria of macabre shadow-studies; now glittering and leering with concealed rottenness as in Aubrey Beardsley's best manner, now hinting terrors behind the commonest shapes and objects as in the subtler and less obvious work of Gustave Doré. He would often regard it as merciful that most persons of high intelligence jeer at the inmost mysteries; for, he argued, if superior minds were ever placed in fullest contact with the secrets preserved by ancient and lowly cults, the resultant abnormalities would soon not only wreck the world, but threaten the very integrity of the universe. All this reflection was no doubt morbid, but keen logic and a deep sense of humor ably offset it. Malone was satisfied to let his notions remain as half-spied and forbidden visions to be lightly played with; and hysteria came only when duty flung him into a hell of revelation too sudden and insidious to escape.

He had for some time been detailed to the Butler Street station in Brooklyn when the Red Hook matter came to his notice. Red Hook is a maze of hybrid squalor near the ancient waterfront opposite Governor's Island, with dirty highways climbing the hill from the wharves to that higher ground where the decayed lengths of Clinton and Court Streets lead off toward the Borough Hall. Its houses are mostly of brick, dating from the first quarter to the middle of the Nineteenth Century, and some of the obscurer alleys and byways have that alluring antique flavor which conventional reading leads us to call "Dickensian." The population is a hopeless tangle and enigma; Syrian, Spanish, Italian, and negro elements impinging upon one another, and fragments of Scandinavian and American belts lying not far distant. It is a babel of sound and filth, and sends out strange cries to answer the lapping of oily waves at its grimy piers and the monstrous organ litanies of the harbor whistles. Here long ago a brighter picture dwelt, with clear-eyed mariners on the lower streets and homes of taste and substance where the larger houses line the hill. One can trace the relics of this former happiness in the trim shapes of the buildings, the occasional graceful churches, and the evidences of original art and background in bits of detail here and there—a worn flight of steps, a battered doorway, a wormy pair of decorative columns or pilasters, or a fragment of once green space with bent and rusted iron railing. The houses are generally in solid blocks, and now and then a many-windowed cupola arises to tell of days when the households of captains and ship-owners watched the sea.

From this tangle of material and spiritual putrescence the blasphemies of an hundred dialects assail the sky. Hordes of prowlers reel shouting and singing along the lanes and thoroughfares, occasional furtive hands suddenly extinguish lights and pull down curtains, and swarthy, sin-pitted faces disappear from windows when visitors pick their way through.

Policemen despair of order or reform, and seek rather to erect barriers protecting the outside world from the contagion. The clang of the patrol is answered by a kind of spectral silence, and such prisoners as are taken are never communicative. Visible offenses are as varied as the local dialects, and run the gamut from the smuggling of rum and prohibited aliens through diverse stages of lawlessness and obscure vice to murder and mutilation in their most abhorrent guises. That these visible affairs are not more frequent is not to the neighborhood's credit, unless the power of concealment be an art demanding credit. More people enter Red Hook than leave it—or at least, than leave it by the landward side—and those who are not loquacious are the likeliest to leave.

Malone found in this state of things a faint stench of secrets more terrible than any of the sins denounced by citizens and bemoaned by priests and philanthropists. He was conscious, as one who united imagination with scientific knowledge, that modern people under lawless conditions tend uncannily to repeat the darkest instinctive patterns of primitive half-ape savagery in their daily life and ritual observances; and he had often viewed with an anthropologist's shudder the chanting, cursing processions of blear-eyed and pockmarked young men which wound their way along in the dark small hours of morning. One saw groups of these youths incessantly; sometimes in leering vigils on street corners, sometimes in doorways playing eerily on cheap instruments of music, sometimes in stupefied dozes or indecent dialogues around cafeteria tables near Borough Hall, and sometimes in whispering converse around dingy taxicabs drawn up at the high stoops of crumbling and closely shuttered old houses. They chilled and fascinated him more than he dared confess to his associates on the force, for he seemed to see in them some monstrous thread of secret continuity; some fiendish, cryptical and ancient pattern utterly beyond and below the sordid mass of facts and habits and haunts listed with such conscientious technical care by the police. They must be, he felt inwardly, the heirs of some shocking and primordial tradition; the sharers of debased and broken scraps from cults and ceremonies older than mankind. Their coherence and definiteness suggested it, and it showed in the singular suspicion of order which lurked beneath their squalid disorder. He had not read in vain such treatises as Miss Murray's *Witch Cult in Western Europe;* and knew that up to recent years there had certainly survived among peasants and furtive folk a frightful and clandestine system of assemblies and orgies descended from dark religions antedating the Aryan world, and appearing in popular legends as Black Masses and Witches' Sabbaths. That these hellish vestiges of old Turanian-Asiatic magic and fertility-cults were even now wholly dead he could not for a moment suppose, and he frequently wondered how much older and how much blacker than the very worst of the muttered tales some of them might really be.

3

IT WAS the case of Robert Suydam which took Malone to the heart of things in Red Hook. Suydam was a lettered recluse of ancient Dutch family, possessed originally of barely independent means, and inhabiting the spacious but ill-preserved mansion which his grandfather had built in Flatbush when that village was little more than a pleasant group of Colonial cottages surrounding the steepled and ivy-clad Reformed Church with its iron-railed yard of Netherlandish gravestones. In this

lonely house, set back from Martense Street amidst a yard of venerable trees, Suydam had read and brooded for some six decades except for a period a generation before, when he had sailed for the Old World and remained there out of sight for eight years. He could afford no servants, and would admit but few visitors to his absolute solitude; eschewing close friendships and receiving his rare acquaintances in one of the three ground-floor rooms which he kept in order—a vast, high-ceiled library whose walls were solidly packed with tattered books of ponderous, archaic, and vaguely repellent aspect. The growth of the town and its final absorption in the Brooklyn district had meant nothing to Suydam, and he had come to mean less and less to the town. Elderly people still pointed him out on the streets, but to most of the recent population he was merely a queer, corpulent old fellow whose unkempt white hair, stubbly beard, shiny black clothes and gold-headed cane earned him an amused glance and nothing more. Malone did not know him by sight till duty called him to the case, but had heard of him indirectly as a really profound authority on medieval superstition, and had once idly meant to look up an out-of-print pamphlet of his on the Kabbalah and the Faustus legend, which a friend had quoted from memory.

Suydam became a "case" when his distant and only relatives sought court pronouncements on his sanity. Their action seemed sudden to the outside world, but was really undertaken only after prolonged observation and sorrowful debate. It was based on certain odd changes in his speech and habits; wild references to impending wonders, and unaccountable hauntings of disreputable Brooklyn neighborhoods. He had been growing shabbier and shabbier with the years, and now prowled about like a veritable mendicant; seen occasionally by humiliated friends in subway stations, or loitering on the benches around Borough Hall in conversation with groups of swarthy, evil-looking strangers. When he spoke it was to babble of unlimited powers almost within his grasp, and to repeat with knowing leers such mystical words or names as "Sephiroth," "Ashmodai" and "Samaël." The court action revealed that he was using up his income and wasting his principal in the purchase of curious tomes imported from London and Paris, and in the maintenance of a squalid basement flat in the Red Hook district where he spent nearly every night, receiving odd delegations of mixed rowdies and foreigners, and apparently conducting some kind of ceremonial service behind the green blinds of secretive windows. Detectives assigned to follow him reported strange cries and chants and prancing of feet filtering out from these nocturnal rites, and shuddered at their peculiar ecstasy and abandon despite the commonness of weird orgies in that sodden section. When, however, the matter came to a hearing, Suydam managed to preserve his liberty. Before the judge his manner grew urbane and reasonable, and he freely admitted the queerness of demeanor and extravagant cast of language into which he had fallen through excessive devotion to study and research. He was, he said, engaged in the investigation of certain details of European tradition which required the closest contact with foreign groups and their songs and folk dances. The notion that any low secret society was preying upon him, as hinted by his relatives, was obviously absurd; and showed how sadly limited was their understanding of him and his work. Triumphing with his calm explanations, he was suffered to depart unhindered; and the paid detectives of the Suydams,

Corlears, and Van Brunts were withdrawn in resigned disgust.

It was here that an alliance of Federal inspectors and police, Malone with them, entered the case. The law had watched the Suydam action with interest, and had in many instances been called upon to aid the private detectives. In this work it developed that Suydam's new associates were among the blackest and most vicious criminals of Red Hook's devious lanes, and that at least a third of them were known and repeated offenders in the matter of thievery, disorder, and the importation of illegal immigrants. Indeed, it would not have been too much to say that the old scholar's particular circle coincided almost perfectly with the worst of the organized cliques which smuggled ashore certain nameless and unclassified Asian dregs wisely turned back by Ellis Island. In the teeming rookeries of Parker Place—since renamed—where Suydam had his basement flat, there had grown up a very unusual colony of unclassified slant-eyed folk who used the Arabic alphabet but were eloquently repudiated by the great mass of Syrians in and around Atlantic Avenue. They could all have been deported for lack of credentials, but legalism is slow-moving, and one does not disturb Red Hook unless publicity forces one to.

These creatures attended a tumble-down stone church, used Wednesdays as a dance-hall, which reared its Gothic buttresses near the vilest part of the waterfront. It was nominally Catholic; but priests throughout Brooklyn denied the place all standing and authenticity, and policemen agreed with them when they listened to the noises it emitted at night. Malone used to fancy he heard terrible cracked bass notes from a hidden organ far underground when the church stood empty and unlighted, whilst all observers dreaded the shrieking and drumming which accompanied the visible services. Suydam, when questioned, said he thought the ritual was some remnant of Nestorian Christianity tinctured with the Shamanism of Tibet. Most of the people, he conjectured, were of Mongoloid stock, originating somewhere in or near Kurdistan—and Malone could not help recalling that Kurdistan is the land of the Yezidees, last survivors of the Persian devil-worshipers. However this may have been, the stir of the Suydam investigation made it certain that these unauthorized newcomers were flooding Red Hook in increasing numbers; entering through some marine conspiracy unreached by revenue officers and harbor police, overrunning Parker Place and rapidly spreading up the hill, and welcomed with curious fraternalism by the other assorted denizens of the region. Their squat figures and characteristic squinting physiognomies, grotesquely combined with flashy American clothing, appeared more and more numerously among the loafers and nomad gangsters of the Borough Hall section; till at length it was deemed necessary to compute their number, ascertain their sources and occupations, and find if possible a way to round them up and deliver them to the proper immigration authorities. To this task Malone was assigned by agreement of Federal and city forces, and as he commenced his canvass of Red Hook he felt poised upon the brink of nameless terrors, with the shabby, unkempt figure of Robert Suydam as archfiend and adversary.

4

Police methods are varied and ingenious. Malone, through unostentatious rambles, carefully casual conversations, well-timed offers of hip-pocket liquor, and judicious dialogues with frightened prisoners, learned many isolated facts about the movement whose aspect had be-

come so menacing. The newcomers were indeed Kurds, but of a dialect obscure and puzzling to exact philology. Such of them as worked lived mostly as dock-hands and unlicensed pedlers, though frequently serving in Greek restaurants and tending corner news stands. Most of them, however, had no visible means of support; and were obviously connected with underworld pursuits, of which smuggling and bootlegging were the least indescribable. They had come in steamships, apparently tramp freighters, and had been unloaded by stealth on moonless nights in rowboats which stole under a certain wharf and followed a hidden canal to a secret subterranean pool beneath a house. This wharf, canal and house Malone could not locate, for the memories of his informants were exceedingly confused, while their speech was to a great extent beyond even the ablest interpreters; nor could he gain any real data on the reasons for their systematic importation. They were reticent about the exact spot from which they had come, and were never sufficiently off guard to reveal the agencies which had sought them out and directed their course. Indeed, they developed something like acute fright when asked the reason for their presence. Gangsters of other breeds were equally taciturn, and the most that could be gathered was that some god or great priesthood had promised them unheard-of powers and supernatural glories and rulerships in a strange land.

The attendance of both newcomers and old gangsters at Suydam's closely guarded nocturnal meetings was very regular, and the police soon learned that the erstwhile recluse had leased additional flats to accommodate such guests as knew his password; at last occupying three entire houses and permanently harboring many of his queer companions. He spent but little time now at his Flatbush home, apparently going and coming only to obtain and return books; and his face and manner had attained an appalling pitch of wildness. Malone twice interviewed him, but was each time bruskly repulsed. He knew nothing, he said, of any mysterious plots or movements; and had no idea how the Kurds could have entered or what they wanted. His business was to study undisturbed the folk-lore of all the immigrants of the district; a business with which policemen had no legitimate concern. Malone mentioned his admiration for Suydam's old brochure on the Kabbalah and other myths, but the old man's softening was only momentary. He sensed an intrusion, and rebuffed his visitor in no uncertain way; till Malone withdrew disgusted, and turned to other channels of information.

What Malone would have unearthed could he have worked continuously on the case, we shall never know. As it was, a stupid conflict between city and Federal authority suspended the investigation for several months, during which the detective was busy with other assignments. But at no time did he lose interest, or fail to stand amazed at what began to happen to Robert Suydam. Just at the time when a wave of kidnappings and disappearances spread its excitement over New York, the unkempt scholar embarked upon a metamorphosis as startling as it was absurd. One day he was seen near Borough Hall with clean-shaved face, well-trimmed hair, and tastefully immaculate attire, and on every day thereafter some obscure improvement was noticed in him. He maintained his new fastidiousness without interruption, added to it an unwonted sparkle of eye and crispness of speech, and began little by little to shed the corpulence which had so long deformed him. Now frequently taken for less than his age, he acquired an elasticity of step and buoyancy of demeanor to

match the new tradition, and showed a curious darkening of the hair which somehow did not suggest dye. As the months passed, he commenced to dress less and less conservatively, and finally astonished his few friends by renovating and redecorating his Flatbush mansion, which he threw open in a series of receptions, summoning all the acquaintances he could remember, and extending a special welcome to the fully forgiven relatives who had so lately sought his restraint. Some attended through curiosity, others through duty; but all were suddenly charmed by the dawning grace and urbanity of the former hermit. He had, he asserted, accomplished most of his allotted work; and having just inherited some property from a half-forgotten European friend, was about to spend his remaining years in a brighter second youth which ease, care, and diet had made possible to him. Less and less was he seen at Red Hook, and more and more did he move in the society to which he was born. Policemen noted a tendency of the gangsters to congregate at the old stone church and dance-hall instead of at the basement flat in Parker Place, though the latter and its recent annexes still overflowed with noxious life.

Then two incidents occurred—wide enough apart, but both of intense interest in the case as Malone envisaged it. One was a quiet announcement in the *Eagle* of Robert Suydam's engagement to Miss Cornelia Gerritsen of Bayside, a young woman of excellent position, and distantly related to the elderly bridegroom-elect; whilst the other was a raid on the dance-hall church by city police, after a report that the face of a kidnapped child had been seen for a second at one of the basement windows. Malone had participated in this raid, and studied the place with much care when inside. Nothing was found—in fact, the building was entirely deserted when visited—but the sensitive Celt was vaguely disturbed by many things about the interior. There were crudely painted panels he did not like—panels which depicted sacred faces with peculiarly worldly and sardonic expressions, and which occasionally took liberties that even a layman's sense of decorum could scarcely countenance. Then, too, he did not relish the Greek inscription on the wall above the pulpit; an ancient incantation which he had once stumbled upon in Dublin college days, and which read, literally translated:

"O friend and companion of night, thou who rejoicest in the baying of dogs and spilt blood, who wanderest in the midst of shades among the tombs, who longest for blood and bringest terror to mortals, Gorgo, Mormo, thousand-faced moon, look favorably on our sacrifices!"

When he read this he shuddered, and thought vaguely of the cracked bass organ-notes he fancied he had heard beneath the church on certain nights. He shuddered again at the rust around the rim of a metal basin which stood on the altar, and paused nervously when his nostrils seemed to detect a curious and ghastly stench from somewhere in the neighborhood. That organ memory haunted him, and he explored the basement with particular assiduity before he left. The place was very hateful to him; yet after all, were the blasphemous panels and inscriptions more than mere crudities perpetrated by the ignorant?

By the time of Suydam's wedding the kidnapping epidemic had become a popular newspaper scandal. Most of the victims were young children of the lowest classes, but the increasing number of disappearances had worked up a sentiment of the strongest fury. Journals clamored for action from the police, and once more the Butler Street station sent its men over Red Hook for clues, discoveries, and criminals. Malone was glad to be on the trail again, and took pride

in a raid on one of Suydam's Parker Place houses. There, indeed, no stolen child was found, despite the tales of screams and the red sash picked up in the areaway; but the paintings and rough inscriptions on the peeling walls of most of the rooms, and the primitive chemical laboratory in the attic, all helped to convince the detective that he was on the track of something tremendous. The paintings were appalling—hideous monsters of every shape and size, and parodies on human outlines which can not be described. The writing was in red, and varied from Arabic to Greek, Roman, and Hebrew letters. Malone could not read much of it, but what he did decipher was portentous and cabalistic enough. One frequently repeated motto was in a sort of Hebraized Hellenistic Greek, and suggested the most terrible demon-evocations of the Alexandrian decadence:

HEL. HELOYM. SOTHER. EMMANVEL. SABAOTH. AGLA. TETRAGRAMMATON. AGYROS. OTHEOS. ISCHYROS. ATHANATOS. IEHOVA. VA. ADONAL. SADY. HOMOVSION. MESSIAS. ESCHEREHEYE.

Circles and pentagrams loomed on every hand, and told indubitably of the strange beliefs and aspirations of those who dwelt so squalidly here. In the cellar, however, the strangest thing was found—a pile of genuine gold ingots covered carelessly with a piece of burlap, and bearing upon their shining surfaces the same weird hieroglyphics which also adorned the walls. During this raid the police encountered only a passive resistance from the squinting Orientals that swarmed from every door. Finding nothing relevant, they had to leave all as it was; but the precinct captain wrote Suydam a note advising him to look closely to the character of his tenants and protegés in view of the growing public clamor.

5

THEN came the June wedding and the great sensation. Flatbush was gay for the hour about high noon, and pennanted motors thronged the streets near the old Dutch church where an awning stretched from door to highway. No local event ever surpassed the Suydam-Gerritsen nuptials in tone and scale, and the party which escorted bride and groom to the Cunard pier was, if not exactly the smartest, at least a solid page from the Social Register. At 5 o'clock adieux were waved, and the ponderous liner edged away from the long pier, slowly turned its nose seaward, discarded its tug, and headed for the widening water spaces that led to Old World wonders. By night the outer harbor was cleared, and late passengers watched the stars twinkling above an unpolluted ocean.

Whether the tramp steamer or the scream was first to gain attention, no one can say. Probably they were simultaneous, but it is of no use to calculate. The scream came from the Suydam stateroom, and the sailor who broke down the door could perhaps have told frightful things if he had not forthwith gone completely mad—as it is, he shrieked more loudly than the first victims, and thereafter ran simpering about the vessel till caught and put in irons. The ship's doctor who entered the stateroom and turned on the lights a moment later did not go mad, but told nobody what he saw till afterward, when he corresponded with Malone in Chepachet. It was murder—strangulation—but one need not say that the claw-mark on Mrs. Suydam's throat could not have come from her husband's or any other human hand, or that upon the white wall there flickered for an instant in hateful red a legend which, later copied from memory, seems to have been nothing less than the fearsome Chaldee letters of the word "LILITH." One need not

mention these things because they vanished so quickly—as for Suydam, one could at least bar others from the room until one knew what to think oneself. The doctor has distinctly assured Malone that he did not see *IT*. The open porthole, just before he turned on the lights, was clouded for a second with a certain phosphorescence, and for a moment there seemed to echo in the night outside the suggestion of a faint and hellish tittering; but no real outline met the eye. As proof, the doctor points to his continued sanity.

Then the tramp steamer claimed all attention. A boat put off, and a horde of swart, insolent ruffians in officers' dress swarmed aboard the temporarily halted Cunarder. They wanted Suydam or his body—they had known of his trip, and for certain reasons were sure he would die. The captain's deck was almost a pandemonium; for at the instant, between the doctor's report from the stateroom and the demands of the men from the tramp, not even the wisest and gravest seaman could think what to do. Suddenly the leader of the visiting mariners, an Arab with a hatefully negroid mouth, pulled forth a dirty, crumpled paper and handed it to the captain. It was signed by Robert Suydam, and bore the following odd message:

> In case of sudden or unexplained accident or death on my part, please deliver me or my body unquestioningly into the hands of the bearer and his associates. Everything, for me, and perhaps for you, depends on absolute compliance. Explanations can come later—do not fail me now.
>
> ROBERT SUYDAM.

Captain and doctor looked at each other, and the latter whispered something to the former. Finally they nodded rather helplessly and led the way to the Suydam stateroom. The doctor directed the captain's glance away as he unlocked the door and admitted the strange seamen, nor did he breathe easily till they filed out with their burden after an unaccountably long period of preparation. It was wrapped in bedding from the berths, and the doctor was glad that the outlines were not very revealing. Somehow the men got the thing over the side and away to their tramp steamer without uncovering it.

The Cunarder started again, and the doctor and a ship's undertaker sought out the Suydam stateroom to perform what last services they could. Once more the physician was forced to reticence and even to mendacity, for a hellish thing had happened. When the undertaker asked him why he had drained off all of Mrs. Suydam's blood, he neglected to affirm that he had not done so; nor did he point to the vacant bottle-spaces on the rack, or to the odor in the sink which showed the hasty disposition of the bottles' original contents. The pockets of those men—if men they were—had bulged damnably when they left the ship. Two hours later, and the world knew by radio all that it ought to know of the horrible affair.

6

THAT same June evening, without having heard a word from the sea, Malone was desperately busy among the alleys of Red Hook. A sudden stir seemed to permeate the place, and as if apprized by "grapevine telegraph" of something singular, the denizens clustered expectantly around the dance-hall church and the houses in Parker Place. Three children had just disappeared—blue-eyed Norwegians from the streets toward Gowanus—and there were rumors of a mob forming among the sturdy vikings of that section. Malone had for weeks been urging his colleagues to attempt a general clean-up; and at last, moved by conditions more obvious to their common sense than the conjectures of a Dublin dreamer, they had agreed upon a final

stroke. The unrest and menace of this evening had been the deciding factor, and just about midnight a raiding party recruited from three stations descended upon Parker Place and its environs. Doors were battered in, stragglers arrested, and candle-lighted rooms forced to disgorge unbelievable throngs of mixed foreigners in figured robes, miters, and other inexplicable devices. Much was lost in the mêlée, for objects were thrown hastily down unexpected shafts, and betraying odors deadened by the sudden kindling of pungent incense. But spattered blood was everywhere, and Malone shuddered whenever he saw a brazier or altar from which the smoke was still rising.

He wanted to be in several places at once, and decided on Suydam's basement flat only after a messenger had reported the complete emptiness of the dilapidated dance-hall church. The flat, he thought, must hold some clue to a cult of which the occult scholar had so obviously become the center and leader; and it was with real expectancy that he ransacked the musty rooms, noted their vaguely charnel odor, and examined the curious books, instruments, gold ingots, and glass-stoppered bottles scattered carelessly here and there. Once a lean, black-and-white cat edged between his feet and tripped him, overturning at the same time a beaker half full of a red liquid. The shock was severe, and to this day Malone is not certain of what he saw; but in dreams he still pictures that cat as it scuttled away with certain monstrous alterations and peculiarities. Then came the locked cellar door, and the search for something to break it down. A heavy stool stood near, and its tough seat was more than enough for the antique panels. A crack formed and enlarged, and the whole door gave way—but from the *other* side; whence poured a howling tumult of ice-cold wind with all the stenches of the bottomless pit, and whence reached a sucking force not of earth or heaven, which, coiling sentiently about the paralyzed detective, dragged him through the aperture and down unmeasured spaces filled with whispers and wails, and gusts of mocking laughter.

Of course it was a dream. All the specialists have told him so, and he has nothing tangible to prove the contrary. Indeed, he would rather have it thus; for then the sight of old brick slums and dark foreign faces would not eat so deeply into his soul. But at the time it was all horribly real, and nothing can ever efface the memory of those nighted crypts, those titan arcades, and those half-formed shapes of hell that strode gigantically in silence holding half-eaten things whose still surviving portions screamed for mercy or laughed with madness. Odors of incense and corruption joined in sickening concert, and the black air was alive with the cloudy, semi-visible bulk of shapeless elemental things with eyes. Somewhere dark sticky water was lapping at onyx piers, and once the shivery tinkle of raucous little bells pealed out to greet the insane titter of a naked phosphorescent thing which swam into sight, scrambled ashore, and climbed up to squat leeringly on a carved golden pedestal in the background.

Avenues of limitless night seemed to radiate in every direction, till one might fancy that here lay the root of a contagion destined to sicken and swallow cities, and engulf nations in the fetor of hybrid pestilence. Here cosmic sin had entered, and festered by unhallowed rites had commenced the grinning march of death that was to rot us all to fungous abnormalities too hideous for the grave's holding. Satan here held his Babylonish court, and in the blood of stainless childhood the leprous limbs of phosphorescent Lilith were laved. Incubi

and succubæ howled praise to Hecate, and headless mooncalves bleated to the Magna Mater. Goats leaped to the sound of thin accursed flutes, and Ægipans chased endlessly after misshapen fauns over rocks twisted like swollen toads. Moloch and Ashtaroth were not absent; for in this quintessence of all damnation the bounds of consciousness were let down, and man's fancy lay open to vistas of every realm of horror and every forbidden dimension that evil had power to mold. The world and nature were helpless against such assaults from unsealed wells of night, nor could any sign or prayer check the Walpurgis-riot of horror which had come when a sage with the hateful key had stumbled on a horde with the locked and brimming coffer of transmitted demon-lore.

Suddenly a ray of physical light shot through these fantasms, and Malone heard the sound of oars amidst the blasphemies of things that should be dead. A boat with a lantern in its prow darted into sight, made fast to an iron ring in the slimy stone pier, and vomited forth several dark men bearing a long burden swathed in bedding. They took it to the naked phosphorescent thing on the carved gold pedestal, and the thing tittered and pawed at the bedding. Then they unswathed it, and propped upright before the pedestal the gangrenous corpse of a corpulent old man with stubbly beard and unkempt white hair. The phosphorescent thing tittered again, and the men produced bottles from their pockets and anointed its feet with red, whilst they afterward gave the bottles to the thing to drink from.

All at once, from an arcaded avenue leading endlessly away, there came the demoniac rattle and wheeze of a blasphemous organ, choking and rumbling out of the mockeries of hell in a cracked, sardonic bass. In an instant every moving entity was electrified; and forming at once into a ceremonial procession, the nightmare horde slithered away in quest of the sound—goat, satyr, and Ægipan, incubus, succuba, and lemur, twisted toad and shapeless elemental, dog-faced howler and silent strutter in darkness—all led by the abominable naked phosphorescent thing that had squatted on the carved golden throne, and that now strode insolently bearing in its arms the glassy-eyed corpse of the corpulent old man. The strange dark men danced in the rear, and the whole column skipped and leaped with Dionysiac fury. Malone staggered after them a few steps, delirious and hazy, and doubtful of his place in this or any world. Then he turned, faltered, and sank down on the cold damp stone, gasping and shivering as the demon organ croaked on, and the howling and drumming and tinkling of the mad procession grew fainter and fainter.

Vaguely he was conscious of chanted horrors and shocking croakings afar off. Now and then a wail or whine of ceremonial devotion would float to him through the black arcade, whilst eventually there rose the dreadful Greek incantation whose text he had read above the pulpit of that dance-hall church.

"O friend and companion of night, thou who rejoicest in the baying of dogs [*here a hideous howl burst forth*] and spilt blood, [*here nameless sounds vied with morbid shriekings*] who wanderest in the midst of shades among the tombs, [*here a whistling sigh occurred*] who longest for blood and bringest terror to mortals, [*short, sharp cries from myriad throats*] Gorgo, [*repeated as response*] Mormo, [*repeated with ecstasy*] thousand-faced moon, [*sighs and flute notes*] look favorably on our sacrifices!"

As the chant closed, a general shout went up, and hissing sounds nearly drowned the croaking of the cracked bass organ. Then a gasp as from

many throats, and a babel of barked and bleated words—"Lilith, Great Lilith, behold the Bridegroom!" More cries, a clamor of rioting, and the sharp, clicking footfalls of a running figure. The footfalls approached, and Malone raised himself to his elbow to look.

The luminosity of the crypt, lately diminished, had now slightly increased; and in that devil-light there appeared the fleeing form of that which should not flee or feel or breathe—the glassy-eyed, gangrenous corpse of the corpulent old man, now needing no support, but animated by some infernal sorcery of the rite just closed. After it raced the naked, tittering, phosphorescent thing that belonged on the carven pedestal, and still farther behind panted the dark men, and all the dread crew of sentient loathsomenesses. The corpse was gaining on its pursuers, and seemed bent on a definite object, straining with every rotting muscle toward the carved golden pedestal, whose necromantic importance was evidently so great. Another moment and it had reached its goal, whilst the trailing throng labored on with more frantic speed. But they were too late, for in one final spurt of strength which ripped tendon from tendon and sent its noisome bulk floundering to the floor in a state of jellyish dissolution, the staring corpse which had been Robert Suydam achieved its object and its triumph. The push had been tremendous, but the force had held out; and as the pusher collapsed to a muddy blotch of corruption the pedestal he had pushed tottered, tipped, and finally careened from its onyx base into the thick waters below, sending up a parting gleam of carven gold as it sank heavily to undreamable gulfs of lower Tartarus. In that instant, too, the whole scene of horror faded to nothingness before Malone's eyes; and he fainted amidst a thunderous crash which seemed to blot out all the evil universe.

7

MALONE'S dream, experienced in full before he knew of Suydam's death and transfer at sea, was curiously supplemented by some odd realities of the case; though that is no reason why anyone should believe it. The three old houses in Parker Place, doubtless long rotten with decay in its most insidious form, collapsed without visible cause while half the raiders and most of the prisoners were inside; and of both the greater number were instantly killed. Only in the basements and cellars was there much saving of life, and Malone was lucky to have been deep below the house of Robert Suydam. For he really was there, as no one is disposed to deny. They found him unconscious by the edge of the night-black pool, with a grotesquely horrible jumble of decay and bone, identifiable through dental work as the body of Suydam, a few feet away. The case was plain, for it was hither that the smugglers' underground canal led; and the men who took Suydam from the ship had brought him home. They themselves were never found, or at least never identified; and the ship's doctor is not yet satisfied with the simple certitudes of the police.

Suydam was evidently a leader in extensive man-smuggling operations, for the canal to his house was but one of several subterranean channels and tunnels in the neighborhood. There was a tunnel from this house to a crypt beneath the dance-hall church; a crypt accessible from the church only through a narrow secret passage in the north wall, and in whose chambers some singular and terrible things were discovered. The croaking organ was there, as well as a vast arched chapel with wooden benches and a strangely figured altar. The walls were lined with small cells, in seventeen of which—hideous to relate—solitary prisoners in a state of

complete idiocy were found chained, including four mothers with infants of disturbingly strange appearance. These infants died soon after exposure to the light; a circumstance which the doctors thought rather merciful. Nobody but Malone, among those who inspected them, remembered the somber question of old Delrio: "*An sint unquam daemones incubi et succubae, et an ex tali, congressu proles nasci queat?*"

Before the canals were filled up they were thoroughly dredged, and yielded forth a sensational array of sawed and split bones of all sizes. The kidnapping epidemic, very clearly, had been traced home; though only two of the surviving prisoners could by any legal thread be connected with it. These men are now in prison, since they failed of conviction as accessories in the actual murders. The carved golden pedestal or throne so often mentioned by Malone as of primary occult importance was never brought to light, though at one place under the Suydam house the canal was observed to sink into a well too deep for dredging. It was choked up at the mouth and cemented over when the cellars of the new houses were made, but Malone often speculates on what lies beneath. The police, satisfied that they had shattered a dangerous gang of maniacs and man-smugglers, turned over to the Federal authorities the unconvicted Kurds, who before their deportation were conclusively found to belong to the Yezidee clan of devil-worshipers. The tramp ship and its crew remain an elusive mystery, though cynical detectives are once more ready to combat its smuggling and rum-running ventures. Malone thinks these detectives show a sadly limited perspective in their lack of wonder at the myriad unexplainable details, and the suggestive obscurity of the whole case; though he is just as critical of the newspapers, which saw only a morbid sensation and gloated over a minor sadist cult when they might have proclaimed a horror from the universe's very heart. But he is content to rest silent in Chepachet, calming his nervous system and praying that time may gradually transfer his terrible experience from the realm of present reality to that of picturesque and semi-mythical remoteness.

Robert Suydam sleeps beside his bride in Greenwood Cemetery. No funeral was held over the strangely released bones, and relatives are grateful for the swift oblivion which overtook the case as a whole. The scholar's connection with the Red Hook horrors, indeed, was never emblazoned by legal proof; since his death forestalled the inquiry he would otherwise have faced. His own end is not much mentioned, and the Suydams hope that posterity may recall him only as a gentle recluse who dabbled in harmless magic and folk-lore.

As for Red Hook—it is always the same. Suydam came and went; a terror gathered and faded; but the evil spirit of darkness and squalor broods on amongst the mongrels in the old brick houses, and prowling bands still parade on unknown errands past windows where lights and twisted faces unaccountably appear and disappear. Age-old horror is a hydra with a thousand heads, and the cults of darkness are rooted in blasphemies deeper than the well of Democritus. The soul of the beast is omnipresent and triumphant, and Red Hook's legions of blear-eyed, pockmarked youths still chant and curse and howl as they file from abyss to abyss, none knows whence or whither, pushed on by blind laws of biology which they may never understand. As of old more people enter Red Hook than leave it on the landward side, and there are already rumors of new canals running underground to certain centers of traffic in liquor and less mentionable things.

The dance-hall church is now mostly a dance-hall, and queer faces have appeared at night at the windows. Lately a policeman expressed the belief that the filled-up crypt has been dug out again, and for no simply explainable purpose. Who are we to combat poisons older than history and mankind? Apes danced in Asia to those horrors, and the cancer lurks secure and spreading where furtiveness hides in rows of decaying brick.

Malone does not shudder without cause—for only the other day an officer overheard a swarthy squinting hag teaching a small child some whispering patois in the shadow of an areaway. He listened, and thought it very strange when he heard her repeat over and over again:

"O friend and companion of night, thou who rejoicest in the baying of dogs and spilt blood, who wanderest in the midst of shades among the tombs, who longest for blood and bringest terror to mortals, Gorgo, Mormo, thousand-faced moon, look favorably on our sacrifices!"

FAME

***By* A. LESLIE**

High and cold, the tapers
    Burn with a wheat-white fire,
And the silver stands are clotted
    With the ash of dead desire.

Bleak as the flameless altar
    Of the "god without a name,"
Stands 'mid the sweeping star-winds
    The lonely shrine of Fame.

Stilled is the song of laughter,
    Frozen the warmth of tears,
Sound only grand cadenzas—
    The Heart Song of the spheres.

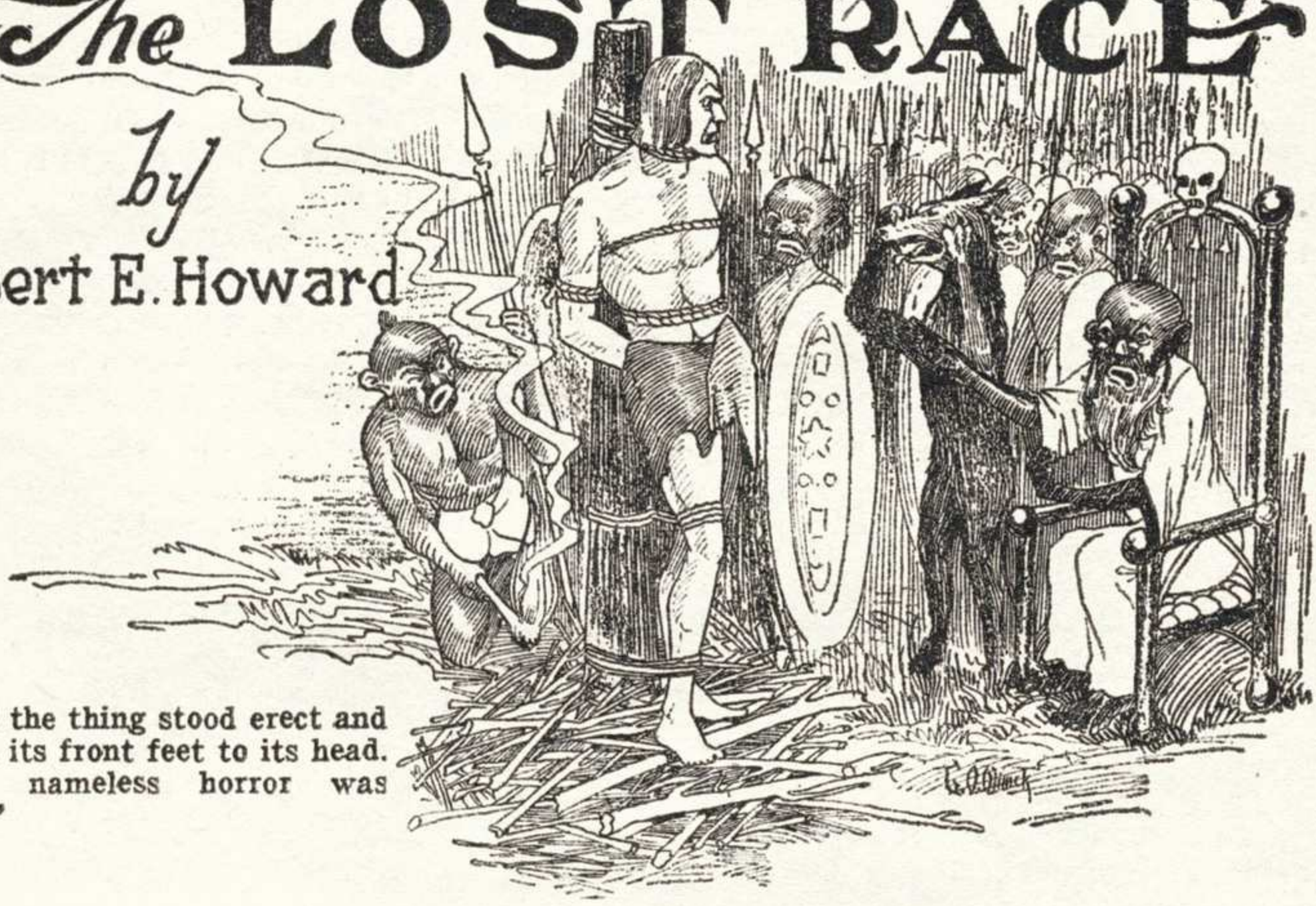
Rugged the way and narrow,
    Pale with the bleach of bones,
Riming of sweat in the furrows,
    Black'ning of blood on the stones.

And they who kneel at the chancel
    Gaze forward, they dare not look back,
For white are the "pillars," and bitter,
    That warn by the soul-clutching track.

The LOST RACE

by

Robert E. Howard



"Then the thing stood erect and raised its front feet to its head. What nameless horror was that?"

CORORUC glanced about him and hastened his pace. He was no coward, but he did not like the place. Tall trees rose all about, their sullen branches shutting out the sunlight. The dim trail led in and out among them, sometimes skirting the edge of a ravine, where Cororuc could gaze down at the tree-tops beneath. Occasionally, through a rift in the forest, he could see away to the forbidding hills that hinted of the ranges much farther to the west, that were the mountains of Cornwall.

In those mountains the bandit chief, Buruc the Cruel, was supposed to lurk, to descend upon such victims as might pass that way. Cororuc shifted his grip on his spear and quickened his step. His haste was due not only to the menace of the outlaws, but also to the fact that he wished once more to be in his native land. He had been on a secret mission to the wild Cornish tribesmen; and though he had been more or less successful, he was impatient to be out of their inhospitable country. It had been a long, wearisome trip, and he still had nearly the whole of Britain to traverse. He threw a glance of aversion about him. He longed for the pleasant woodlands, with scampering deer, and chirping birds, to which he was used. He longed for the tall white cliff, where the blue sea lapped merrily. The forest through which he was passing seemed uninhabited. There were no birds, no animals; nor had he seen a sign of a human habitation.

His comrades still lingered at the savage court of the Cornish king, enjoying his crude hospitality, in no hurry to be away. But Cororuc was not content. So he had left them to follow at their leisure and had set out alone.

Rather a fine figure of a man was Cororuc. Some six feet in height, strongly though leanly built, he was, with gray eyes, a pure Briton but not a pure Celt, his long yellow hair revealing, in him as in all his race, a trace of Belgæ.

He was clad in skilfully dressed deerskin, for the Celts had not yet

perfected the coarse cloth which they made, and most of the race preferred the hides of deer.

He was armed with a long bow of yew wood, made with no especial skill but an efficient weapon; a long bronze broadsword, with a buckskin sheath, a long bronze dagger and a small, round shield, rimmed with a band of bronze and covered with tough buffalo hide. A crude bronze helmet was on his head. Faint devices were painted in woad on his arms and cheeks.

His beardless face was of the highest type of Briton, clear, straightforward, the shrewd, practical determination of the Nordic mingling with the reckless courage and dreamy artistry of the Celt.

So Cororuc trod the forest path, warily, ready to flee or fight, but preferring to do neither just then.

The trail led away from the ravine, disappearing around a great tree. And from the other side of the tree, Cororuc heard sounds of conflict. Gliding warily forward, and wondering whether he should see some of the elves and dwarfs that were reputed to haunt those woodlands, he peered around the great tree.

A few feet from him he saw a strange tableau. Backed against another tree stood a large wolf, at bay, blood trickling from gashes about his shoulder; while before him, crouching for a spring, the warrior saw a great panther. Cororuc wondered at the cause of the battle. Not often the lords of the forest met in warfare. And he was puzzled by the snarls of the great cat. Savage, blood-lusting, yet they held a strange note of fear; and the beast seemed hesitant to spring in.

Just why Cororuc chose to take the part of the wolf, he himself could not have said. Doubtless it was just the reckless chivalry of the Celt of him, an admiration for the dauntless attitude of the wolf against his far more powerful foe. Be that as it may, Cororuc, characteristically forgetting his bow and taking the more reckless course, drew his sword and leaped in front of the panther. But he had no chance to use it. The panther, whose nerve appeared to be already somewhat shaken, uttered a startled screech and disappeared among the trees so quickly that Cororuc wondered if he had really seen a panther. He turned to the wolf, wondering if it would leap upon him. It was watching him, half crouching; slowly it stepped away from the tree, and still watching him, backed away a few yards, then turned and made off with a strange shambling gait. As the warrior watched it vanish into the forest, an uncanny feeling came over him; he had seen many wolves, he had hunted them and had been hunted by them, but he had never seen such a wolf before.

He hesitated and then walked warily after the wolf, following the tracks that were plainly defined in the soft loam. He did not hasten, being merely content to follow the tracks. After a short distance, he stopped short, the hairs on his neck seeming to bristle. *Only the tracks of the hind feet showed: the wolf was walking erect.*

He glanced about him. There was no sound; the forest was silent. He felt an impulse to turn and put as much territory between him and the mystery as possible, but his Celtic curiosity would not allow it. He followed the trail. And then it ceased altogether. Beneath a great tree the tracks vanished. Cororuc felt the cold sweat on his forehead. What kind of place was that forest? Was he being led astray and eluded by some inhuman, supernatural monster of the woodlands, who sought to ensnare him? And Cororuc backed away, his sword lifted, his courage not allowing him to run, but greatly desiring to do so. And so he came again to the tree where he had first seen the wolf. The trail he had fol-

lowed led away from it in another direction and Cororuc took it up, almost running in his haste to get out of the vicinity of a wolf who walked on two legs and then vanished in the air.

THE trail wound about more tediously than ever, appearing and disappearing within a dozen feet, but it was well for Cororuc that it did, for thus he heard the voices of the men coming up the path before they saw him. He took to a tall tree that branched over the trail, lying close to the great bole, along a wide-flung branch.

Three men were coming down the forest path.

One was a big, burly fellow, vastly over six feet in height, with a long red beard and a great mop of red hair. In contrast, his eyes were a beady black. He was dressed in deerskins, and armed with a great sword.

Of the two others, one was a lanky, villainous-looking scoundrel, with only one eye, and the other was a small, wizened man, who squinted hideously with both beady eyes.

Cororuc knew them, by descriptions the Cornishmen had made between curses, and it was in his excitement to get a better view of the most villainous murderer in Britain that he slipped from the tree branch and plunged to the ground directly between them.

He was up on the instant, his sword out. He could expect no mercy; for he knew that the red-haired man was Buruc the Cruel, the scourge of Cornwall.

The bandit chief bellowed a foul curse and whipped out his great sword. He avoided the Briton's furious thrust by a swift backward leap and then the battle was on. Buruc rushed the warrior from the front, striving to beat him down by sheer weight; while the lanky, one-eyed villain slipped around, trying to get behind him. The smaller man had retreated to the edge of the forest. The fine art of the fence was unknown to those early swordsmen. It was hack, slash, stab, the full weight of the arm behind each blow. The terrific blows crashing on his shield beat Cororuc to the ground, and the lanky, one-eyed villain rushed in to finish him. Cororuc spun about without rising, cut the bandit's legs from under him and stabbed him as he fell, then threw himself to one side and to his feet, in time to avoid Buruc's sword. Again, driving his shield up to catch the bandit's sword in midair, he deflected it and whirled his own with all his power. Buruc's head flew from his shoulders.

Then Cororuc, turning, saw the wizened bandit scurry into the forest. He raced after him, but the fellow had disappeared among the trees. Knowing the uselessness of attempting to pursue him, Cororuc turned and raced down the trail. He did not know if there were more bandits in that direction, but he did know that if he expected to get out of the forest at all, he would have to do it swiftly. Without doubt the villain who had escaped would have all the other bandits out, and soon they would be beating the woodlands for him.

After running for some distance down the path and seeing no sign of any enemy, he stopped and climbed into the topmost branches of a tall tree, that towered above its fellows.

On all sides he seemed surrounded by a leafy ocean. To the west he could see the hills he had avoided. To the north, far in the distance other hills rose; to the south the forest ran, an unbroken sea. But to the east, far away, he could barely see the line that marked the thinning out of the forest into the fertile plains. Miles and miles away, he knew not how many, but it meant more pleasant travel, villages of men, people of his own race. He was surprized that he was able to

see that far, but the tree in which he stood was a giant of its kind.

Before he started to descend, he glanced about nearer at hand. He could trace the faintly marked line of the trail he had been following, running away into the east; and could make out other trails leading into it, or away from it. Then a glint caught his eye. He fixed his gaze on a glade some distance down the trail and saw, presently, a party of men enter and vanish. Here and there, on every trail, he caught glances of the glint of accouterments, the waving of foliage. So the squinting villain had already roused the bandits. They were all around him; he was virtually surrounded.

A faintly heard burst of savage yells, from back up the trail, startled him. So, they had already thrown a cordon about the place of the fight and had found him gone. Had he not fled swiftly, he would have been caught. He was outside the cordon, but the bandits were all about him. Swiftly he slipped from the tree and glided into the forest.

Then began the most exciting hunt Cororuc had ever engaged in; for he was the hunted and men were the hunters. Gliding, slipping from bush to bush and from tree to tree, now running swiftly, now crouching in a covert, Cororuc fled, ever eastward; not daring to turn back lest he be driven farther back into the forest. At times he was forced to turn his course; in fact, he very seldom fled in a straight course, yet always he managed to work farther eastward.

Sometimes he crouched in bushes or lay along some leafy branch, and saw bandits pass so close to him that he could have touched them. Once or twice they sighted him and he fled, bounding over logs and bushes, darting in and out among the trees; and always he eluded them.

It was in one of those headlong flights that he noticed he had entered a defile of small hills, of which he had been unaware, and looking back over his shoulder, saw that his pursuers had halted, within full sight. Without pausing to ruminate on so strange a thing, he darted around a great boulder, felt a vine or something catch his foot, and was thrown headlong. Simultaneously something struck the youth's head, knocking him senseless.

When Cororuc recovered his senses, he found that he was bound, hand and foot. He was being borne along, over rough ground. He looked about him. Men carried him on their shoulders, but such men as he had never seen before. Scarce above four feet stood the tallest, and they were small of build and very dark of complexion. Their eyes were black; and most of them went stooped forward, as if from a lifetime spent in crouching and hiding; peering furtively on all sides. They were armed with small bows, arrows, spears and daggers, all pointed, not with crudely worked bronze but with flint and obsidian, of the finest workmanship. They were dressed in finely dressed hides of rabbits and other small animals, and a kind of coarse cloth; and many were tattooed from head to foot in ocher and woad. There were perhaps twenty in all. What sort of men were they? Cororuc had never seen the like.

They were going down a ravine, on both sides of which steep cliffs rose. Presently they seemed to come to a blank wall, where the ravine appeared to come to an abrupt stop. Here, at a word from one who seemed to be in command, they set the Briton down, and seizing hold of a large boulder, drew it to one side. A small cavern was exposed, seeming to vanish away into the earth; then the strange men picked up the Briton and moved forward.

Cororuc's hair bristled at thought of being borne into that forbidding-looking cave. What manner of men were they? In all Britain and Alba, in Cornwall or Ireland, Cororuc had never seen such men. Small dwarfish men, who dwelt in the earth. Cold sweat broke out on the youth's forehead. Surely they were the malevolent dwarfs of whom the Cornish people had spoken, who dwelt in their caverns by day, and by night sallied forth to steal and burn dwellings, even slaying if the opportunity arose! You will hear of them, even today, if you journey in Cornwall.

The men, or elves, if such they were, bore him into the cavern, others entering and drawing the boulder back into place. For a moment all was darkness, and then torches began to glow, away off. And at a shout they moved on. Other men of the caves came forward, with the torches.

Cororuc looked about him. The torches shed a vague glow over the scene. Sometimes one, sometimes another wall of the cave showed for an instant, and the Briton was vaguely aware that they were covered with paintings, crudely done, yet with a certain skill his own race could not equal: But always the roof remained unseen. Cororuc knew that the seemingly small cavern had merged into a cave of surprizing size. Through the vague light of the torches the strange people moved, came and went, silently, like shadows of the dim past.

He felt the cords or thongs that bound his feet loosened. He was lifted upright.

"Walk straight ahead," said a voice, speaking the language of his own race, and he felt a spearpoint touch the back of his neck.

And straight ahead he walked, feeling his sandals scrape on the stone floor of the cave, until they came to a place where the floor tilted upward. The pitch was steep and the stone was so slippery that Cororuc could not have climbed it alone. But his captors pushed him, and pulled him, and he saw that long, strong vines were strung from somewhere at the top.

Those the strange men seized, and bracing their feet against the slippery ascent, went up swiftly. When their feet found level surface again, the cave made a turn, and Cororuc blundered out into a firelit scene that made him gasp.

The cave debouched into a cavern so vast as to be almost incredible. The mighty walls swept up into a great arched roof that vanished in the darkness. A level floor lay between, and through it flowed a river; an underground river. From under one wall it flowed to vanish silently under the other. An arched stone bridge, seemingly of natural make, spanned the current.

All around the walls of the great cavern, which was roughly circular, were smaller caves, and before each glowed a fire. Higher up were other caves, regularly arranged, tier on tier. Surely human men could not have built such a city.

In and out among the caves, on the level floor of the main cavern, people were going about what seemed daily tasks. Men were talking together and mending weapons, some were fishing from the river; women were replenishing fires, preparing garments; and altogether it might have been any other village in Britain, to judge from their occupations. But it all struck Cororuc as extremely unreal; the strange place, the small, silent people, going about their tasks, the river flowing silently through it all.

Then they became aware of the prisoner and flocked about him. There was none of the shouting, abuse and indignities, such as savages usually heap on their captives, as the small men drew about Cororuc, silently eyeing him with malevolent.

wolfish stares. The warrior shuddered, in spite of himself.

But his captors pushed through the throng, driving the Briton before them. Close to the bank of the river, they stopped and drew away from around him.

Two great fires leaped and flickered in front of him and there was something between them. He focused his gaze and presently made out the object. A high stone seat, like a throne; and in it seated an aged man, with a long white beard, silent, motionless, but with black eyes that gleamed like a wolf's.

The ancient was clothed in some kind of a single, flowing garment. One clawlike hand rested on the seat near him, skinny, crooked fingers, with talons like a hawk's. The other hand was hidden among his garments.

The firelight danced and flickered; now the old man stood out clearly, his hooked, beaklike nose and long beard thrown into bold relief; now he seemed to recede until he was invisible to the gaze of the Briton, except for his glittering eyes.

"Speak, Briton!" The words came suddenly, strong, clear, without a hint of age. "Speak, what would ye say?"

Cororuc, taken aback, stammered and said, "Why, why—what manner of people are you? Why have you taken me prisoner? Are you elves?"

"We are Picts," was the stern reply.

"Picts!" Cororuc had heard tales of those ancient people from the Gaelic Britons; some said that they still lurked in the hill of Siluria, but——

"I have fought Picts in Caledonia," the Briton protested; "they are short but massive and misshapen; not at all like you!"

"They are not true Picts," came the stern retort. "Look about you, Briton," with a wave of an arm, "you see the remnants of a vanishing race; a race that once ruled Britain from sea to sea."

The Briton stared, bewildered.

"Harken, Briton," the voice continued; "harken, barbarian, while I tell to you the tale of the lost race."

The firelight flickered and danced, throwing vague reflections on the towering walls and on the rushing, silent current.

The ancient's voice echoed through the mighty cavern.

"Our people came from the south. Over the islands, over the Inland Sea. Over the snow-topped mountains, where some remained, to stay any enemies who might follow. Down into the fertile plains we came. Over all the land we spread. We became wealthy and prosperous. Then two kings arose in the land, and he who conquered, drove out the conquered. So many of us made boats and set sail for the far-off cliffs that gleamed white in the sunlight. We found a fair land with fertile plains. We found a race of red-haired barbarians, who dwelt in caves. Mighty giants, of great bodies and small minds.

"We built our huts of wattle. We tilled the soil. We cleared the forest. We drove the red-haired giants back into the forest. Farther we drove them back until at last they fled to the mountains of the west and the mountains of the north. We were rich. We were prosperous.

"Then," and his voice thrilled with rage and hate, until it seemed to reverberate through the cavern, "then the Celts came. From the isles of the west, in their rude coracles they came. In the west they landed, but they were not satisfied with the west. They marched eastward and seized the fertile plains. We fought. They were stronger. They were fierce fighters and they were armed with weapons of bronze, whereas we had only weapons of flint.

"We were driven out. They enslaved us. They drove us into the

forest. Some of us fled into the mountains of the west. Many fled into the mountains of the north. There they mingled with the red-haired giants we drove out so long ago, and became a race of monstrous dwarfs, losing all the arts of peace and gaining only the ability to fight.

"But some of us swore that we would never leave the land we had fought for. But the Celts pressed us. There were many, and more came. So we took to caverns, to ravines, to caves. We, who had always dwelt in huts that let in much light, who had always tilled the soil, we learned to dwell like beasts, in caves where no sunlight ever entered. Caves we found, of which this is the greatest; caves we made.

"You, Briton," the voice became a shriek and a long arm was outstretched in accusation, "you and your race! You have made a free, prosperous nation into a race of earth-rats! We who never fled, who dwelt in the air and the sunlight close by the sea where traders came, we must flee like hunted beasts and burrow like moles! But at night! Ah, then for our vengeance! Then we slip from our hiding places, from our ravines and our caves, with torch and dagger! Look, Briton!"

And following the gesture, Cororuc saw a rounded post of some kind of very hard wood, set in a niche in the stone floor, close to the bank. The floor about the niche was charred as if by old fires.

Cororuc stared, uncomprehending. Indeed, he understood little of what had passed. That these people were even human, he was not at all certain. He had heard so much of them as "little people." Tales of their doings, their hatred of the race of man, and their maliciousness flocked back to him. Little he knew that he was gazing on one of the mysteries of the ages. That the tales which the ancient Gaels told of the Picts, already warped, would become even more warped from age to age, to result in tales of elves, dwarfs, trolls and fairies, at first accepted and then rejected, entire, by the race of men, just as the Neandertal monsters resulted in tales of goblins and ogres. But of that Cororuc neither knew nor cared, and the ancient was speaking again.

"There, there, Briton," exulted he, pointing to the post, "there you shall pay! A scant payment for the debt your race owes mine, but to the fullest of your extent."

The old man's exultation would have been fiendish, except for a certain high purpose in his face. He was sincere. He believed that he was only taking just vengeance; and he seemed like some great patriot for a mighty, lost cause.

"But I am a Briton!" stammered Cororuc. "It was not my people who drove your race into exile! They were Gaels, from Ireland. I am a Briton and my race came from Gallia only a hundred years ago. We conquered the Gaels and drove them into Erin, Wales and Caledonia, even as they drove your race."

"No matter!" The ancient chief was on his feet. "A Celt is a Celt. Briton, or Gael, it makes no difference. Had it not been Gael, it would have been Briton. Every Celt who falls into our hands must pay, be it warrior or woman, babe or king. Seize him and bind him to the post."

In an instant Cororuc was bound to the post, and he saw, with horror, the Picts piling firewood about his feet.

"And when you are sufficiently burned, Briton," said the ancient, "this dagger that has drunk the blood of an hundred Britons, shall quench its thirst in yours."

"But never have I harmed a Pict!" Cororuc gasped, struggling with his bonds.

"You pay, not for what you did, but for what your race has done," answered the ancient sternly. "Well do I remember the deeds of the Celts when first they landed on Britain—the shrieks of the slaughtered, the screams of ravished girls, the smokes of burning villages, the plundering."

Cororuc felt his short neck-hairs bristle. When first the Celts landed on Britain! That was over five hundred years ago!

And his Celtic curiosity would not let him keep still, even at the stake with the Picts preparing to light firewood piled about him.

"You could not remember that. That was ages ago."

The ancient looked at him somberly. "And I am age-old. In my youth I was a witch-finder, and an old woman witch cursed me as she writhed at the stake. She said I should live until the last child of the Pictish race had passed. That I should see the once mighty nation go down into oblivion and then—and only then—should I follow it. For she put upon me the curse of life everlasting."

Then his voice rose until it filled the cavern, "But the curse was nothing. Words can do no harm, can do nothing, to a man. I live. An hundred generations have I seen come and go, and yet another hundred. What is time? The sun rises and sets, and another day has passed into oblivion. Men watch the sun and set their lives by it. They league themselves on every hand with time. They count the minutes that race them into eternity. Man outlived the centuries ere he began to reckon time. Time is man-made. Eternity is the work of the gods. In this cavern there is no such thing as time. There are no stars, no sun. Without is time; within is eternity. We count not time. Nothing marks the speeding of the hours. The youths go forth. They see the sun, the stars. They reckon time. And they pass. I was a young man when I entered this cavern. I have never left it. As you reckon time, I may have dwelt here a thousand years; or an hour. When not banded by time, the soul, the mind, call it what you will, can conquer the body. And the wise men of the race, in my youth, knew more than the outer world will ever learn. When I feel that my body begins to weaken, I take the magic draft, that is known only to me, of all the world. It does not give immortality; that is the work of the mind alone; but it rebuilds the body. The race of Picts vanish; they fade like the snow on the mountain. And when the last is gone, this dagger shall free me from the world." Then in a swift change of tone, "Light the fagots!"

CORORUC'S mind was fairly reeling. He did not in the least understand what he had just heard. He was positive that he was going mad; and what he saw the next minute assured him of it.

Through the throng came a wolf; and he knew that it was the wolf whom he had rescued from the panther close by the ravine in the forest!

Strange, how long ago and far away that seemed! Yes, it was the same wolf. That same strange, shambling gait. Then the thing stood erect and raised its front feet to its head. What nameless horror was that?

Then the wolf's head fell back, disclosing a man's face. The face of a Pict; one of the first "werewolves." The man stepped out of the wolfskin and strode forward, calling something. A Pict just starting to light the wood about the Briton's feet drew back the torch and hesitated.

The wolf-Pict stepped forward and began to speak to the chief, using Celtic, evidently for the prisoner's benefit. (Cororuc was surprized to hear so many speak his language, not reflecting upon its comparative simplicity, and the ability of the Picts.)

"What is this?" asked the Pict who had played wolf. "A man is to be burned who should not be!"

"How?" exclaimed the old man fiercely, clutching his long beard. "Who are you to go against a custom of age-old antiquity?"

"I met a panther," answered the other, "and this Briton risked his life to save mine. Shall a Pict show ingratitude?"

And as the ancient hesitated, evidently pulled one way by his fanatical lust for revenge, and the other by his equally fierce racial pride, the Pict burst into a wild flight of oration, carried on in his own language. At last the ancient chief nodded.

"A Pict ever paid his debts," said he with impressive grandeur. "Never a Pict forgets. Unbind him. No Celt shall ever say that a Pict showed ingratitude."

Cororuc was released, and as, like a man in a daze, he tried to stammer his thanks, the chief waved them aside.

"A Pict never forgets a foe, ever remembers a friendly deed," he replied.

"Come," murmured his Pictish friend, tugging at the Celt's arm.

He led the way into a cave leading away from the main cavern. As they went, Cororuc looked back, to see the ancient chief seated upon his stone throne, his eyes gleaming as he seemed to gaze back through the lost glories of the ages; on each hand the fires leaped and flickered. A figure of grandeur, the king of a lost race.

On and on Cororuc's guide led him. And at last they emerged and the Briton saw the starlit sky above him.

"In that way is a village of your tribesmen," said the Pict, pointing, "where you will find a welcome until you wish to take up your journey anew."

And he pressed gifts on the Celt; gifts of garments of cloth and finely worked deerskin, beaded belts, a fine horn bow with arrows skilfully tipped with obsidian. Gifts of food. His own weapons were returned to him.

"But an instant," said the Briton, as the Pict turned to go. "I followed your tracks in the forest. They vanished." There was a question in his voice.

The Pict laughed softly, "I leaped into the branches of the tree. Had you looked up, you would have seen me. If ever you wish a friend, you will ever find one in Berula, chief among the Alban Picts."

He turned and vanished. And Cororuc strode through the moonlight toward the Celtic village.



THE MAJOR'S MENAGERIE

by VICTOR ROUSSEAU



"He felt a fetid breath upon his throat, and the points of brazen fingers closed on his gullet."

MOST of the examples of psychic manifestations that I had hitherto investigated in the company of Dr. Ivan Brodsky were of spiritual possession and the allied phenomena—matters astonishing to laymen but more or less commonplaces to students of the science. I was now to witness one of the darker and more mysterious phases of spirit power.

I remember that Brodsky and I had been reading an account of a so-called "haunted" house in a lonely neighborhood ten or twelve miles distant. The structure, which was a rambling old place, had belonged to a major in the army, who had retired from active service to reside there and spend his declining bachelor days alone. He had seen service in the Philippines, had traveled in India, and brought back with him an assortment of curious animals, including a cheetah, one of the wild cats of Bengal, several large parrots of brilliant plumage, and a young orang-outang, which he had captured in Borneo. He had become greatly attached to this beast and had educated it until it developed almost human intelligence. The major had died suddenly, however, the large ape had refused food and pined away until it followed him, and the old house was now occupied only by a caretaker and his daughter, who tended the surviving animals under the terms of the major's will.

About two months after the owner's death, rumors had spread through the neighborhood that the place was haunted. Pictures had fallen from the walls, crockery had been seen to fly violently across the kitchen, chairs and tables acquired a predilection for waltzing without the application of visible motor power. The neighbors, at first interested spectators of these phenomena, had come to shun the place when it was seen that the player of these pranks was actuated by some malicious motive. A gossiping woman had been struck senseless by a flying tumbler. A

Note—This is the fifth of a series of stories, each complete in itself, dealing with Dr. Ivan Brodsky, "The Surgeon of Souls."

member of a psychical research society, who had volunteered to pass the night in the menagerie, where these manifestations mostly appeared, had been found senseless upon the floor next morning, his body covered with bruises, and three ribs broken. He had been removed to a hospital, where he lay precariously ill and mentally deranged as a result of his fearful experiences.

"What do you make of it, doctor?" I asked, when Brodsky had laid down his paper.

"It's nothing in the world but a poltergeist," the doctor answered. Then, seeing my look of mystification, he continued:

"A poltergeist is one of those elemental, half-human beings that have never achieved incarnation in human form. The universe is a palpitating, crowding mass of soul-stuff, most of it discarnate, a small part exteriorized in various highly heterogeneous physical forms. Whether this elemental being has already gone through millions of progressive incarnations between the unicellular organism and man, and is now waiting for its first appearance in human shape, probably as a degraded savage —whether it is this, or whether the poltergeist is simply a leakage from the universal soul-stuff, I am not prepared to say. At any rate, it possesses a very limited intelligence and strong earthward aspirations, which show themselves mostly in the flinging of crockery and the playing of malicious tricks. This is a well-known phenomenon; the celebrated Cock Lane ghost of Dr. Johnson's day, which perplexed Eighteenth Century London, was undoubtedly a poltergeist. Curiously enough, it is invariably associated with the presence of an imbecile child, the reason probably being that this is the intelligence which draws it earthward and furnishes the source of power.

"Nevertheless," Brodsky continued thoughtfully, "I confess that I should like to make a personal investigation of this matter, for it presents fascinating, but obscure, allied symptoms which might put me on the track of a discovery."

He had hardly concluded when there came a violent ring at the doorbell and a young man hurried into the room.

"Dr. Brodsky," he began, "I am a reporter for the *Wayne County Gazette,* and I have been commissioned to ask you for an interview concerning the haunted house over at Turnerville. You have heard of the two deaths?"

"Nothing beyond what your paper contains," said Brodsky, picking up the sheet.

"That's two days old," said the reporter, glancing at it. "The young man died insane in the hospital last night, just at the time the second one was killed. Another psychical investigator," he continued, "volunteered to pass the night in the menagerie and was found this morning with one side of his body crushed completely in. What do you make of it?"

He had pulled out his pencil and note-book, but Brodsky made no immediate reply. He stepped to a hook where his hat hung and placed it upon his head. "Let's go and find out," he answered.

"To spend the night there?" gasped the reporter.

"If you are willing."

"Willing?" the reporter cried. "Just wait till I telephone over to my editor!"

A FEW minutes later we were on our way to the station to catch the local. Inside the car the reporter plied the doctor with many questions, to which Brodsky replied sympathetically. The young man made copious notes, but after a while ceased to write and seemed to fall under the spell of Brodsky's words. His note-book and pencil rested motionless upon his knees.

"Doctor," he said at last, "I am most grateful to you for the trouble you have taken in telling me all this. But, to be perfectly frank with you, I can't make use of it."

I saw Brodsky smile sympathetically, but he made no rejoinder.

"The fact is," the young man went on, in a lower voice, "my paper wouldn't stand for it. I believe—in fact I *know*—that these things are true. I have had experience of them, and so have many of my acquaintances. But if I wrote what you have told me, I should be thrown out of my job and probably be sent to an asylum. No, doctor, I can't use it."

"Perhaps you can see for yourself tonight and tone the facts down to suit," said Brodsky with the suspicion of a laugh.

The young man looked at him dubiously, but at that moment the train stopped and we got out at Turnerville. It was but five minutes to the house, a large, straggling building dating back to the beginning of the last century, set in an isolated situation upon a hill. The door was opened to us by a surly-looking man, evidently the caretaker.

"What, more of you?" he sneered. "Come to see the haunted house, I suppose. I can't admit you, gentlemen; police orders is very strict. The county sheriff was here this morning, and if I hadn't been able to prove I spent the night in my own cottage down in Turnerville they'd have arrested me for murder. It's as much as my life is worth to let you in; they cautioned me."

The reporter pulled something from his pocket and passed it to the caretaker. The man's hand closed upon it avariciously.

"Well, it ain't my funeral," he grumbled. "It's my time to close up, anyway. All I'll ask of you gentlemen is to take a fifteen minutes' walk until I'm safe down to my home and don't know nothing of your coming. And there, if you should find the side door open and walk in, I guess they can't lay no blame on me. Polly!" he called loudly. "Drat that child! Run away again, I suppose. Now, gentlemen!"

"One minute," interrupted Brodsky. "You're speaking of your daughter?"

"My little gel, yes," grumbled the man. "She ain't strong in her head and takes to running away. She's been worse since they all died, especially Plunk. When Plunk cashed in it nigh broke her heart—the big monkey, gentlemen. Loved him like he was human. She didn't care nothing much about the tiger, though—and glad I was to see him kick the bucket last week. I feared every night he'd get loose and make off into Turnerville. Everybody was afraid of him except the old man, and as for Plunk—why, if he saw the tiger's tail the other end of the garden he'd scream himself sick with fright."

"The big cat's dead, too, eh?" asked Brodsky.

"You'll find his skin over yonder in that outhouse, sir," answered the caretaker. "And now, gentlemen, if you would have the goodness to make off in that direction until I'm gone, I won't be back hunting for no burglars until morning. Better keep together, though, or he'll stave your ribs in separate, as easy as barrels."

"Who?" Brodsky demanded.

The caretaker jeered at him. "No, no, you don't catch me in any affidavits," he answered. "I done my duty by the old man and his animals and he knows it and lets me alone. He was always hot-headed, the old major was, and if he chooses to squeeze your ribs in now that he's dead, why, it's just what he'd have done if he'd been alive." He made a trumpet of his hands. "Polly! Poll! Poll! Poll! Poll!" he yelled.

I saw a diminutive child come swiftly out of the house. She migh

have been fourteen years of age, from her general appearance, though her stature was that of a child half her years. She came up furtively, taking no notice of any of us, and stood still, biting the corner of her apron. The caretaker scolded her for her absence.

"Baby been with Plunk," said the girl in a childish treble. "Plunk good. Baby love Plunk. Plunk no love big cat. Baby no love big cat."

Her father caught her roughly by the hand and pulled her toward him. "Polly, have done with that nonsense," he said sharply. "Plunk's dead and gone and you won't see him again." He turned to us. "We're hoping she'll grow up like any other child," he said more softly, "but the monkey's death has kind of upset her mind a little. Now, Polly, you come home to your ma."

The girl burst into a passion of tears and sobbed as though her heart were broken. We left them there and set off at a brisk pace in the direction which had been indicated.

"You really think it's the spirit of the old major?" queried the reporter, when we had left the house behind us.

"My dear fellow," Brodsky answered, "if I were in the habit of forming hypotheses without a basis of satisfactory evidence I should never have learned what little I know about these things. Never be led into hypotheses, even in your own trade," he continued whimsically. "I can tell you one thing, however: it's almost always the unexpected that happens in everything."

That was all that we could get out of him. We walked on in silence. The sun went down in a burst of splendor, and by the time we got back we had prolonged our walk into a generous half-hour. The place seemed absolutely deserted, but the side door was invitingly ajar, as the caretaker had promised.

We passed through the caretaker's quarters into a long, low room, with lumber, wire netting and bags of animal food piled up around it. Instantly we were startled by harsh, discordant screams. Four giant parrots, or macaws, rather, of splendid tropical plumage, were suspended in four enormous steel cages from the rafters over our heads. They watched us, uttering their ill-sounding cries, their heads bent to one side inquiringly, their large beaks open. Brodsky, whose fondness for animals was almost an obsession, went from cage to cage, stroking the creatures' heads fearlessly. He had soon established himself upon terms of intimacy with them. Suddenly he recalled himself with a start.

"Let's go and look at the cheetah skin," he said.

We found it in an ill-smelling outbuilding—a magnificent furry pelt, newly cured. The animal must have been a beauty when alive.

"We'll take this with us; it may get cold during the night," he said, lifting the skin and carrying it back to the parrot's room. Immediately the birds saw him enter, his head half-hidden beneath the pelt, they set up shrill screams of fear and began to flutter their wings wildly. Brodsky concealed the skin beneath a couple of empty sacks and reassured the creatures.

"Now you boys take a look through the house," he said, "and see if you can find any bedding and eatables. I'll stay here with the macaws."

We passed up-stairs but found nothing of interest. The plainly furnished rooms were evidently in the same condition in which they had been left after the major's death, though dust was everywhere. We dragged down a couple of mattresses, some candles and matches. In the kitchen we found some bread and cold mutton, and we all ate heartily. Then we went back into the menagerie to pass the night.

As we entered, the reporter started back and gripped my shoulder. "Look, look!" he said in a half-scream.

The cage of the macaw on the side most remote from us was swinging rhythmically, as though someone were pushing it, while the bird, with open beak and expanded wings, was chattering—not with fear but with anger. Brodsky went up and steadied it. Almost immediately the cage on the other side began to swing in the same manner. Brodsky stepped back.

"Well, my friend, whoever you are, we won't grudge you your little pastime," he said. He turned to us. "We have nothing to fear from such childish intelligences that take delight in these mischievous pranks," he said with a smile. "And I think the three of us can overcome any manifestations of physical force. Hi! you! Show me how far you can throw."

There was no answer in deed, except that the cage stopped swinging. Evidently the challenge had fallen on deaf ears. We lit the candles, for it had grown dark, and sat down. I looked at the reporter. He was trembling violently. Suddenly the candles went out, one after the other.

"Blown out!" cried the reporter, his voice resounding queerly through the gloom.

"Pinched out," said Brodsky. The glowing ends of the wicks had been cut clean as though with snuffers. He lit them slowly, and instantly the same phenomenon resulted.

"Well, they won't put this one out," he said, lighting the one nearest him and carefully conveying it to where he sat beside the concealed cheetah skin. He set it down upon a packing case, close to the ground.

True to his word, the candle flared steadily. He carried another to the same place and lit it from the flame of the first. Nothing occurred.

"Is this light enough for you?" he asked, and we assented.

The reporter was making a brave attempt to stifle the external signs of his obvious fear, and I was not wholly free from a sickening sensation in the pit of the stomach and a certain weakness of the knees. The low-placed candles cast gigantic shadows before them, throwing the floor of the room into strong illumination, but leaving the rafters of the roof almost entirely concealed in shadows. The macaws still screamed and chattered, moving continually, but always in such a manner that they faced the same side of the room simultaneously. The cages were swinging again.

"Our poltergeist friend evidently enjoys the birds," said Brodsky calmly.

"Why does he come here instead of going home with the girl?" I asked. "Where does he get his power?"

Brodsky made no rejoinder. At my side I felt the reporter shaking like a reed. "Isn't there any remedy?" he whispered. "Can't you pray it away?"

"You can't pray away an elemental," the doctor answered. "It hasn't intelligence enough to understand a prayer, knowing neither good nor evil. I might scare it away——"

"Scare it, scare it," the reporter urged.

"By putting out the lights," Brodsky continued. "Though it tried to extinguish them in its freakish pranks, this sort of spirit, unlike those of a higher order, is really afraid of darkness——"

The reporter leaped up with a scream.

"Something pinched me, I swear!" he cried, trembling.

"Sit over here," said Brodsky, indicating the bags that covered the cheetah skin. "Now, my friend, stay there, no matter what occurs, and nothing will harm you. Draw closer," he added to me. "I'll take your place. Now, silence, please, everyone."

EVERYTHING was silent now. The birds had gone to sleep. Sitting here, I was conscious that my own fear gradually yielded to a sensation of intense sorrow. All the sorrow, the anguish in the world seemed to have been heaped upon me. I felt a longing for light, for human companionship, which even Brodsky's presence was powerless to assuage. I felt the doctor's hand upon my shoulder; instinctively he had divined my grief. And then I could have sworn I heard a sob.

Brodsky did, too. Upon the instant he was on his feet. He sprang into a corner, where lumber and bags were thickly piled, and dragged forth—the idiot girl. She had been weeping bitterly, and her face was yet wet with tears; yet a baleful and malignant light shone through them.

"As I expected," said the doctor, regarding her intently. "You hunt in couples, of course. I suspected that you must be somewhere in the vicinity when your disembodied friend began playing his pranks with the cages and candles." He was silent a moment, regarding her with the ruthless, emotionless expression of some dreadful judge. "Soul," he said, as though the childish body did not exist for him, "you have but a poor fleshly lamp to light upon its way. The senses which you can control are ignorant of the results of their own promptings. Nevertheless, you are the murderer of two men, and would-be murderer of more."

The girl burst into imbecile laughter.

"Bad man, beat me!" she shrieked to the rafters. "Bad man beat Baby. Bad man fall dead. Squeeze bad man. You bad man! He squeeze you dead!"

"So!" said the doctor, loosening his hold and watching her. He seemed nonplussed; or, perhaps, with his innate love for children, even his steel nerves had yielded to the horror of this. But the reporter leaped with a cry from the bags on which he sat. His nerves had broken. He came scrambling toward us, tossing away the bags, the lumber, wildly.

"Put her out! Put her out!" he screamed. "I can't bear it. It's not a child, but a devil!"

Brodsky saw that he was beyond reason. He endeavored to catch him, but the man evaded him and flung himself upon the child like a madman, his eyes gleaming with insanity. He grasped her by the neck of the thin calico pinafore and lifted her bodily from her feet.

"Put her down, fool, put her down!" cried the doctor furiously. "As you value your precious life," he yelled, "release her."

"It's a trap!" I cried involuntarily. In that single instant a light of overpowering possibilities rushed in on my brain. I saw the demon, baiting his trap with the young imbecile child, harm toward whom would arouse into action all its own latent powers for destruction. She had been present at both the former murders; she had been there that evening, waiting for our own, waiting to tempt one of us to violence. But the man made no sign of having heard Brodsky's command; only began dragging the child toward the door. For a moment she made no resistance, uttered no sound; the next she clung to the packing case with all her infantile strength, and a wild shriek of simulated terror broke from her lips. The macaws awoke and added their screams to hers. The case upset; the candles fell to the ground, expiring instantly, and plunging us into almost fathomless darkness.

"Give me a match," I heard Brodsky cry, loudly. "A match, for God's sake!"

But the words were drowned upon his lips in the mad scream that followed. I heard the reporter bellow

like a steer; through the darkness he plunged, releasing the child, staggering, writhing, stumbling toward the door. All the while mad peals of frenzied terror and anguish came from him. Midway in the long dark room he went down, his heels tattooing upon the ground. I leaped toward him, but Brodsky was before me. I seemed to sense a hairy body at my side that stretched forth incredibly long arms wherewith to grip me. Then I felt the doctor grapple with it; and the next moment the three of us were fighting for our lives.

It was no fancied effort now. To and fro we plunged. Now that octopuslike tentacle would come stealing toward me, now I would free myself and plunge my fists into something incredibly hard, yet having the feel of human flesh. Once the thing grasped me round the chest and the breath went hissing through my lips. Then, as I reeled and stumbled, I felt the doctor's strong arm interposed, and once again the tentacle was torn bodily from me, leaving me sick and fainting. I could fight no longer. I sank down; I felt a fetid breath upon my throat and the points of brazen fingers that closed on my gullet—then something furry and soft fell over me and our enemy was gone.

I lay there, hardly breathing. Long afterward, it seemed to me, the doctor lit candles.

"No," said the reporter, thoughtfully, next morning. "No, I shall not write up that story. I shall go home and spend the week-end in bed and tell the editor that I fell down on it." He smiled faintly through his bruised and blackened lips. His face was a mass of wounds.

"And so it was the cheetah skin that saved our lives?" I queried.

The doctor nodded. He looked hardly more presentable than either myself or the reporter. "A happy inspiration, indeed, that led me to bring it into the house," he said. "Surely some good angel was helping us last night. Never have I come so near failure, nor have your lives been saved so miraculously."

"You knew it was not a poltergeist all the while?" I asked.

"It actually was a poltergeist," the doctor answered, "for it had concluded its last incarnation before assuming the body of a man, and will doubtless reappear, some centuries hence, as a human of very degraded order—possibly a native Australian or Andaman Islander. The major's training had undoubtedly assisted the beast in working out the end of its brute births.

"Yet it was no agent of evil," continued Brodsky. "The education it received, which brought it almost up to the verge of human understanding, had kindled in it a world of longing, of appreciation of its outcast state. It wanted human love, companionship, by virtue of its nearly human soul. Consciousness persisted after death, as is common among the anthropoid apes, instead of rushing back into the vast well of eternal consciousness; and it lingered near the child who had befriended it. It knew the caretaker and did not molest him, but when strangers approached the girl it watched them narrowly, and harshness or blows inspired it to a furious defense of her. Yes, I suspected the orang-outang early in the proceedings. I knew it couldn't be the cheetah, for the cat family is too low in the scale to retain any individual memories of life. I was convinced when it made no response to that challenge we hurled at it, which a true poltergeist would have understood and taken up immediately. And luckily I remembered that the big cats are the only enemies feared by these monster apes; that was why it wouldn't go near the candles when I set them beside the skin. And that swinging of the bird-cages—it was

just what an ape would do, wasn't it?"

"But will it not return," I asked, "and injure others?"

"Not for a while," said Brodsky. "And meanwhile, I shall make it my business to see that that child is removed to an institution for the feeble-minded. She has lived too long with the other world; with care and intelligent companionship I am convinced we shall yet succeed in making a fairly rational human being of her."

Note—Next month the Surgeon of Souls solves a terrifying mystery in "The Fetish of the Waxworks."

Ballade of Phantom Ships

***By* WILLIAM JAMES PRICE**

They sailed away before the breeeze
To where the ocean prairies lie,
To search Atlantic's fatal seas
And find the wealth no prince could buy.
Each man his greed would gratify
Though one must hell itself explore;
But currents oft deceive the eye
In phantom seas without a shore!

When lost, they sailed as one who flees
Before some Terror, asking why
Should water now suggest disease
And gaseous mist conceal the sky.
At last, as northern winds blew high,
A ghostly hulk upon them bore,
Which none in darkness could espy
In phantom seas without a shore!

At morning each around him sees
Lost vessels which the years defy—
Like them, the fools of Fate's decrees.
They hear the spirit seamen cry,
And realize that they must die.
Years pass; yet still above the roar
Some say when called their ghosts reply,
In phantom seas without a shore!

ENVOI

Friend, when Sargassos bid you try
To gain the gold they have in store,
Refuse to wander, even as I,
In phantom seas without a shore!

LEONORA

by

Everil Worrell



"She struggled in the first faint rays of dawn, as she felt the earth give way beneath her feet."

I AM writing this because I shall not long be able to write it. Why does one long for the understanding and sympathy of his fellow beings—long to have that, even after the worst has befallen and he has gone from this life to that which awaits him? How many bottles laden with last messages float on lonely, unknown ocean surges, or sink to the bottom of the sea?

It will be so with this, my last message. That is, it will go uncredited, unbelieved, uncomprehended, although it will doubtless be read. But I have told my story many times, and heard them say that I am mad. I know they will say that, after I am gone—gone from behind these bars into the horrors of the fate that will overtake my spirit somewhere out in the open spaces and the blackness of night into which it will go. *He* will be there, one of the shadows that lurk in old cemeteries and sweep across lonely roads where the winds moan and wander homeless and hopeless across the waste spaces of the earth from dusk till dawn. Dawn!

But I will tell my story for the last time.

Even now, my years are those of a young girl. I am only seventeen, and they say I have been mad more than a year. When I was sixteen, my eyes were bright and my cheeks red with a color that did not come off when I washed my face. I lived in the country, and I was an old-fashioned girl in many ways. I roamed freely over the countryside, and my wanderings were shared by my only close friend or else were lonely. The name of my friend was Margaret. Mine was Leonora.

The two of us lived only a quarter of a mile apart, and between us ran a lonely little road crossed by another like it. Our parents believed that it was safe for us, or for any child, to traverse this road between our houses alone at any hour. We had done it from our youngest days. It should have been safe, for we were far from

cities, and malefactors of any sort were utterly unknown in our secluded part of the country. There were disadvantages attendant on living in such isolation, but there were advantages, too. Margaret's family were simple farmer folk of sterling worth. My father was a student of some means, who could afford to let the world go by.

On dark or stormy nights, sundown generally found me safe indoors for the night, spending the evening by the open fire. Moonlight nights I loved, and on nights when the moon was bright I often stayed at Margaret's house, taking advantage of my freedom to wander home alone as late as midnight. Sometimes Margaret did this, too, staying late with me and going home without thought of fear; but I was the venturesome one, the one who loved to be abroad in the moonlight——

Do horrors such as came to me march toward one from the hour of birth, so that every trait, every characteristic is inclined to meet them?

Up to my sixteenth birthday, my life had been like a placid stream. It had been without excitement, and almost without incident. Perhaps its very calm had made me ready for adventure.

On my sixteenth birthday, Margaret dined at my house and I supped with her. It was our idea of a celebration. It was October, and the night of the full moon. I did not start home until nearly midnight. I would not reach home until a little after that, but that would not matter, because my father would be asleep in bed, and, in any case, not worried about me or interested in the hour of my arrival. The bright colors of autumn leaves, strangely softened and dimmed in the moonlight, rose all around me. Single leaves drifted through the still air and fell at my feet. The moon had reached mid-heaven, and the sky was like purple velvet.

I was happy. It was too beautiful a night to go home. It was a night to enjoy to the fullest—to wander through, going over strange roads, going farther than I had ever gone. I threw out my arms in the moonlight, posing like a picture of a dancing girl which my father had—I had never seen a dancer!—and flitted down the road. As I reached the cross-road, the sound of our clock chiming midnight drifted to my ears, and I stopped.

A beautiful high-powered car stood just at the entrance to our road, its headlights off, its parking lights hardly noticeable in the brilliant moonlight.

I knew it was a fine car, because my father had one, and on rare occasions the fit took him to drive it. When he drove it I went with him, and I noticed cars, for I loved them. I loved their strength and speed, and their fine lines. I loved to rush through the air in my father's car, and was never happier than when I could coax him to drive the twenty miles to the state road, and go fast on the perfect paving. But aside from my father's car, I had never seen a good one on these little back country roads.

I stopped, although I knew I ought to go on. And as I stopped just short of the cross-road, the big car glided softly forward a few feet until it stopped, blocking the road to my father's house. My father's motor was a silent one; but this car actually moved without the slightest sound.

Until now I had not seen the driver. Now I looked at him.

His face was shadowy in the moonlight. Perhaps it did not catch the direct light. There was a suggestion of strong, very sharply cut features, of a smile and a deep-set gaze——

My pen shakes until I can hardly write the words. But I heard the

doctor say today that I had nearly reached the end of my strength, and any night with its horrors may be the end. I must control myself and think of the things I am writing down as they seemed to me at the time.

I was just turned sixteen, and this was romance. And so I stopped and talked to him, although we exchanged few words. That night he did not ask me to ride with him, and so I was less afraid. For with the romance was fear—but I answered his questions.

"What is your name?" he asked; and I answered, "Leonora."

"It is music in my ears," he said softly; and again, I felt that this was romance. I felt it again, when he added: "I have been looking for you for a long time."

Of course, I did not dream—I did not think that he meant that. I had read novels, and love stories. I knew how to take a compliment.

"Do you often pass this way as late as this?"

Something made me hesitate. But something about him, something about our meeting alone in the moonlight, fascinated me. If I said "no," perhaps I would never see him again.

"Very often, when the moon is full," I said, and moved to go around the car. In a moment the gloved hand that rested on the wheel had touched the broad brim of his hat; another movement, and the car shot silently ahead and was gone.

I RAN home with a beating heart. My last words had almost made a rendezvous of the night of the next full moon. If I desired, there might be another encounter.

Yet it was two months later when we met again. The very next full moon had been clear, cloudless, frostily cold—a lovely November night. But that night I was afraid. I was so afraid that I even avoided the full light of the moon when I crossed our yard in the early evening to bring in a book I had left lying outside. At the thought of traversing the road that led to Margaret's house, every instinct within me rebelled. At midnight, I was lying in my bed, with the covers drawn close around me, and my wide-open eyes turned resolutely away from the patch of moonlight that lay, deathly white, beneath my open window. I was like a person in a nervous fit—I, who had never known the meaning of nerves.

But the second month, it was different.

After all, it was a fine thing to have mystery and romance, for the taking, mine. Or were they mine for the taking? Perhaps the man in the long, low car had never come again, would never come again. But his voice had promised something different. Would he be there tonight? Had he been there a month ago? Curiosity began to drive me before it. After all, he had made no move to harm me. And there had been something about him, something that drew and drew me. Surely my childish fears were the height of folly—the product of my loneliness.

I went to Margaret's, and stayed late—almost, as on that other night, until the clock struck 12. At last, with a self-consciousness that was noticeable only to me, I wrapped my heavy coat around me and went out into the night.

The night had changed. It was bitterly cold, and there was a heavy, freezing mist in the air which lay thickly in the hollows. The shadows of the bare trees struck through the dismal vapors like dangling limbs of skeletons——

What am I writing, thinking of? The scream that pierced the night, I could not suppress. I must control myself, or they will come and silence me. And I must finish this tonight. I must finish it before the hour of dawn. That is the hour I fear, worse

than the hour of midnight. It is the hour when Those outside must seek their dreadful homes, the hour when striking fleshless fingers against my window-pane is not enough, but They would take me with Them where They go—where I, but not another living soul, have been before! And whence I never shall escape again.

I walked down, slowly, toward the cross-road. I would not have lingered. I would have been glad to find the cross-road empty. It was not.

There stood the car, black—I had not noticed its color before—low-hung, spectral fingers of white light from its cowl lights piercing the mist. The cross-road was in the hollow, and the mist lay very heavily there—so heavily that I could hardly breathe.

He was there in the car, his face more indistinct in the shadow of his broad-brimmed hat than it had been before, I thought, his gloved hand resting as before upon the wheel. And again, with a thrill of fear, there went a thrill of fascination through me. He was different!—different from everyone else, I felt. Strangeness, romance—and his manner was that of a lover. In my inexperience, I knew it.

"Will you ride tonight, Leonora?"

It had come—the next advance—the invitation!

But I was not going with him. I had got the thrill I had come for. He had asked me, and that was enough. It was enough, now, if I never saw him again. This was a better stopping point. (Remember that I was only sixteen.)

A stranger had come out of the night, had been mysteriously attracted to me, and I to him. He had asked me to ride with him.

I do not know what I said. Somehow, I must have communicated to him what I felt—my pleasure in being asked, my refusal.

His gloved hand touched his hat in the farewell gesture I remembered.

"Another night, Leonora. Leonora!"

The car glided forward and was gone. But the echo of his voice was in my ears. His voice—deep, strange, *different*—but the voice of a lover. My inexperience was sure. And already I doubted if, after all, this would be enough for me if I never saw him again. Another time, he would be as punctilious, as little urgent. But he might say—— What would he say?

THE January moon we hardly saw, so bitter were the storms of that winter, so unbreaking the heavy clouds that shut us from the sky.

The February full moon was crystal-clear in a sky of icy light. The snow-covered ground sparkled, and the branches of the trees were ice-coated, and burned with white fire. But I clung to the fireside, and again crept early within my blankets, drawing them over my head. I was in the grip of the fear that had visited me before. I was like a person in the grip of a phobia, such as they say that I have now, shunning the moonlight and the open air.

It was March.

Next month would bring the spring, and then would follow summer. The world would be a soft and gentle world again, in which fear would have no place. Yet I began to long for a repetition of the meetings at the cross-road, a repetition that should have the same setting—the rigors of winter, rather than the entirely different surroundings of the season of new buds and new life. My last attack of unreasoning terror had passed away again, and again it seemed as though it left behind it a reaction that urged me more strongly than ever toward adventure.

Had *he* been at the cross-road in the bitter storms of January, and on the sparkling white night which I spent close indoors? Would he be there on

the night of the next full moon, the March moon?

There was still no breath of spring in the air on that night. The winter's snow lay in the hollows, no longer whitely sparkling, but spoiled by the cold rains that had come since it had fallen. The night sky was wild with wind-torn clouds, and the moonlight was now clear and brilliant, now weirdly dim, and again swept away by great, black, sweeping shadows. The air was full of the smell of damp earth and rotted leaves.

I did not go to Margaret's. I sat by the fire, dreaming strange dreams, while the clock ticked the hours slowly by, and the fire sank low. At 11, my father yawned and went up to his room. At a quarter before 12, I took my heavy cloak, and wrapped it around me. A little later, I went out.

I knew that I would find him waiting. There was no doubt of that tonight. It was not curiosity that drove me, but some deeper urge, some urge I know no name for. I was like a swimmer in a dangerous current, caught at last by the undertow.

The car stood in the cross-road, low and dark. Although it was a finely made machine, I was sure, it seemed to me for the first time to be in some way *very* peculiar. But at that moment a cloud swept across the face of the moon, and I lost interest in the matter, with a last vague thought that it must be of foreign make.

Then, suddenly, I was aware that for the first time the stranger had opened the door of the car before me. Indeed, this was the first time I had approached on the side of the vacant seat beside the driver.

"We ride tonight, Leonora. Why not? Why not? And what else did you come out for?"

That was true. For the first time I now met him, not on my way home, not on my way anywhere. I had met him, only to meet him. And he expected me to ride. He had never forced, or tried to urge me, but tonight he expected me to ride. Wouldn't it seem silly to have come out only to exchange two or three words and go back, and wouldn't it be better to go with him? A less inexperienced girl might take the trouble to leave her house on a stormy March night for the sake of a real adventure—only a very green country girl would have come out at all for less. I would go.

I had entered the car. I sat beside him, and when the moon shone out brightly I tried to study his face as he started the car down the narrow road. I met with no success. I had become conscious of a burning anxiety to see more clearly what was the manner of this man who had been the subject of so much speculation, the reason of so many dreams. But here beside him I could see him no more clearly than I had seen him from the road. The side of his face which was turned toward me, and which was partly exposed between the deep-brimmed hat and the turned-up collar of his cloak, was still deeply shaded by the car itself; so that I had the same elusive impression as before, of strong, sharp features, a deep-set gaze, a smiling expression——

WE DROVE fast, over strange roads. So closely was my attention centered upon my companion, that I did not concern myself with the way we went. Later, I was to become uneasy over the distance we had traversed; but when I did, he reassured me, and I believed that we were then on our way home, and nearly there. I thought he meant by home, my father's house; and had I not thought that, my wildest nightmare could not have whispered to me what it was that *he* called "home"!

He was very silent. I spoke little, and he seldom answered me. That did not alarm me as it might have done, because of my ever-present con-

viction of my childishness, my crudeness. I blamed myself because my remarks were so stupid that they were not worth a reply, and the taciturnity that so embarrassed me yet added to the fascination that made me sit motionless hour after hour, longing more than anything else in the world to get a good look at the face beside me, to arouse more interest in my companion.

Once only, he spoke of his own accord. He asked me why I was called Leonora.

I asked him if he did not think it was a pretty name, remembering how he had said at our first meeting that it was "music in his ears." But I was disappointed, for he did not compliment my name again.

"Some would say it was an ill-starred name. But, luckily, people are not superstitious as they used to be."

"If that is lucky, you can not call it ill-starred."

I wanted to provoke him into talking more to me. I wanted his attention. But he did not answer me.

I can not go on. I can not finish my story as I intended to do, telling things as they happened, in their right order. There are things I must explain, things that people have said about me that I must deny. And the night is growing late, and the rapping I hear all night long upon my window-pane, between the bars that shut me in but that will soon protect me no longer, is growing louder—as the dawn approaches. The pain in my heart, of which the doctor has said I would die soon, is growing unendurable. And when I come to the end of my story—*to the end, which I will set down*—I do not know what will happen then. But that which I am to write of is so dreadful that I have never dared to think of it. Not of that itself, but of the horrible ending to the story I am telling.

I must finish before the dawn, for it is at the dawn that They must go, and it is then that They would take me—where *he* waits for me, always at dawn.

But to explain first—people say I am mad. You who will read this will doubtless believe them. But tell me this:

Where was I, from the time I disappeared from my father's house until I was found, "mad," as they say, and clutching in my frenzied grasp—the finger of a skeleton? In what dread struggle did I tear that finger loose, and from what dreadful hand? And although I, a living woman, could not remain in the abode of death, if I have not been touched by the very finger of death, then tell me this:

Why is my flesh like the flesh of the dead, so that the doctors say it is like leprous flesh, although it is not leprous? Would God it were!

Now, let me go on.

OUR silent drive continued through the flying hours. Flying hours, for I was unconscious of the lapse of time, excepting for the once when I vaguely became uneasy at our long journey, and was reassured. Had he who sat behind the wheel refused to answer my questioning then, perhaps I would then have become frantic with terror. But his deep, soothing voice worked a spell on me once more; and in his reply I thought I could detect a real solicitude which comforted me. I was assured that we would shortly reach my father's house; I would slip in before my father could possibly have waked, and avoid questioning.

As the night grew older, it became more dismal. The moon which had swung high overhead sent long shadows scurrying from every tree and shrub, every hill and hummock, as we dashed by. The wind had fallen, but yet blew hard enough to make a moan-

ing, wailing sound which seemed to follow us through the night. The clouds that had swept in great masses across the sky had changed their shapes, and trailed in long, somber, broken streamers like torn black banners. The smell of dank, soggy earth and rotting leaves, of mold and decay, was heavier since the wind had sunk a little. Suddenly, I had a great need for reassurance and comfort. My heart seemed breaking with loneliness, and with a strange, unreasoning despair.

I turned to the silent figure at my side. And it seemed that *he* smelled of the stagnant odor of decay that filled the night—that the smell, and the oppression, were heavier because I had leaned nearer to him!

I looked—with a more intense gaze than I had yet turned on him—not at the face that bent above me now, the face that still eluded and baffled me—but down at the arm next me, at the sleeve of his cloak of heavy, black cloth. For something had caught my eye—something moved—— Oh, what was this horror, and why was it so horrible?——A slowly moving *worm* upon his sleeve?

I shuddered so that I clashed my teeth together. I must control myself.

And then, as though my deep alarm were the cue for the hidden event to advance from the future upon me, the car was gliding to a stop. I tore my horrified gaze from the black-clad arm, and looked out of the car. We were gliding *into a cemetery!*

"Not here! Oh, don't stop here!"

I gasped the words, as one gasps in a nightmare.

"Yes. Here."

The deep voice was deeper. It was deep and hollow. There was no comfort in it.

The mask was off my fear, at least. I was face to face with that, though I had not yet seen that other face——

I leaped from the car, and fell fainting beside it. Black, low-hung, and long, and narrow—I had been to but one funeral in my life, but I knew it, now. It was the shape of a coffin!

After that, I had no hope. I was with a madman, or——

He dragged me—in gloved hands through which the hard, long fingers bruised my flesh—past graves, past tombstones and marble statues, and I was numb. I saw among the graves, or seemed to see—oh, let me say I saw strange things, for I have seen them since; and I was numb.

He dragged me toward an old, old, sunken grave headed by a time-stained stone that settled to one side, so long it had marked that spot. And suddenly the nightmare dreaminess that had dulled my senses gave way to some keener realization of the truth. I struggled, I fought back with all my little strength, till I tore the glove from his right hand, and the finger of his right hand snapped in my grasp—snapped, and—gave way!

I struggled in the first faint rays of dawn, struggled as I felt the old, old, sunken earth give way beneath my feet. And the sun rose over the edge of the earth, and flamed red into my desperate eyes. I turned for a last time to the inscrutable face, and in those blood-red rays of the dawn I saw at last revealed—the grinning, fleshless jaws, the empty eye-sockets of . . . . .

Statement by the Superintendent of St. Margaret's Insane Asylum

THIS document was found in the room of Leonora ———, who was pronounced dead of heart-failure by the resident physician. Attendants who rushed to the room on hearing wild cries, and who found her dead, believe the fatal attack to have been caused by the excitement of writing down her extraordinary narration.

The doctor who had attended her considered her the victim of a strange form of auto-hypnosis. She undoubtedly disappeared from her home on the night of the eighteenth of March,

and was found two days later in an old cemetery, three hundred miles away. When found, she was incoherent and hysterical, and *was holding in her hand the finger of a skeleton.* How and where she might have come by this, it was and is impossible to surmise.

It seems, however, that she must have been lured from her home by some stranger, and have escaped or been abandoned near the cemetery; that she must have read of the legend of Leonora, and that it must have made a morbid impression on her mind which later, following the shock which caused her to lose her reason, dictated the form her insanity was to take.

It is true that her skin, from the time of her discovery in the graveyard, had a peculiar appearance suggestive of the skin of a leprous person, or even more of that of a corpse; and (which she does not mention) it also exuded a peculiar odor. These phenomena were among those attributed by the doctor to the effects of auto-hypnosis; his theory being that, just as a hypnotized person may be made to develop a burn on the arm by the mere suggestion without the application of heat, Leonora had suggested to herself that she had been contaminated by the touch of death, and that her physical nature had been affected by the strength of the suggestion.

SONG

By SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

(Reprint)

A sunny shaft did I behold,
  From sky to earth it slanted;
And poised therein a bird so bold—
  Sweet bird, thou wert enchanted!

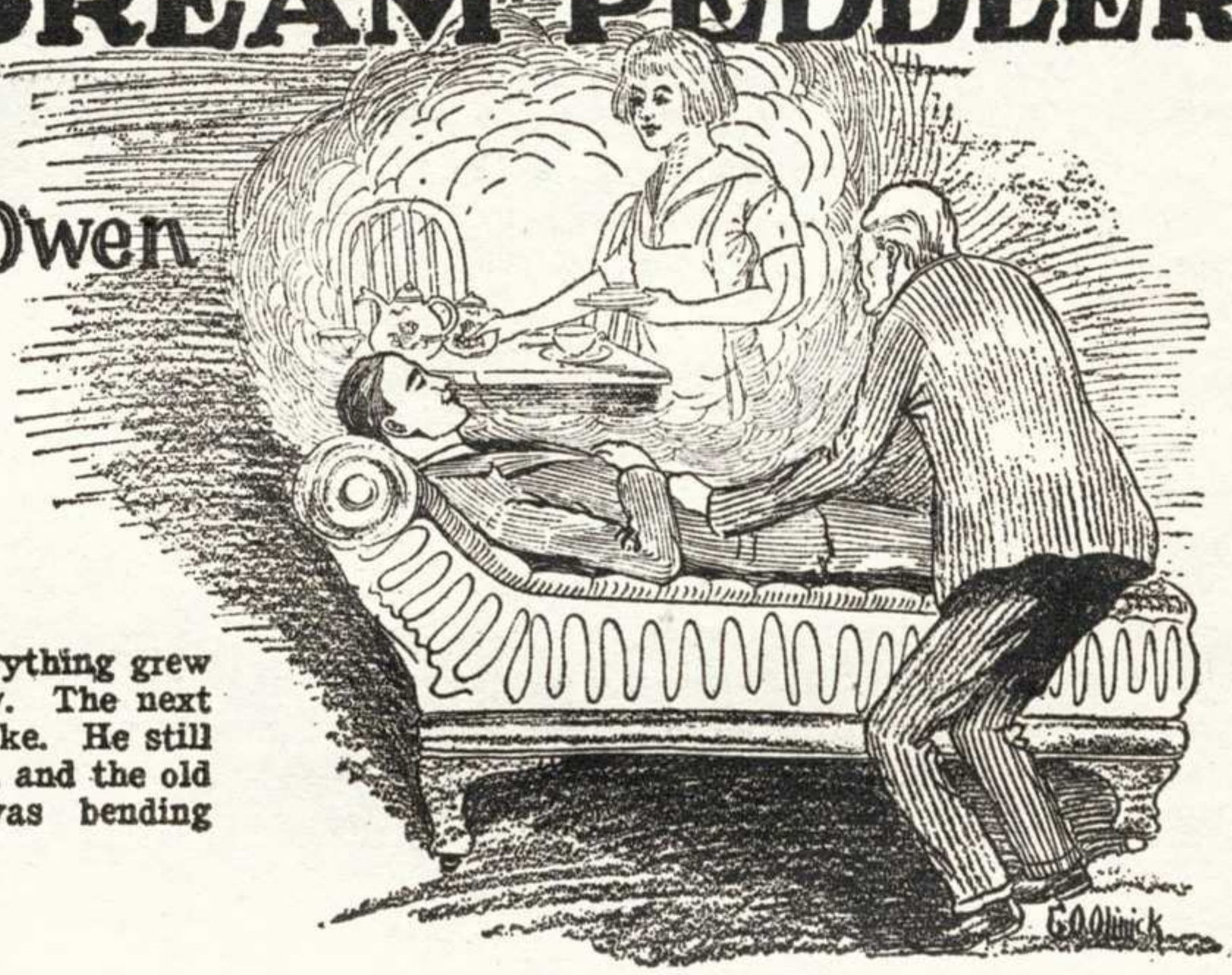
He sunk, he rosé, he twinkled, he trolled
  Within that shaft of sunny mist;
His eyes of fire, his beak of gold,
  All else of amethyst!

And thus he sang: "Adieu! adieu!
Love's dreams prove seldom true.
The blossoms they make no delay:
The sparkling dew-drops will not stay:
  Sweet month of May, we must away;
  Far, far away! today! today!"

The DREAM PEDDLER

by

Frank Owen



"As she spoke, everything grew hazy and far away. The next moment, Hugh awoke. He still lay upon the couch, and the old Dream Peddler was bending over him."

IT WAS long past midnight. At Giacomo's Restaurant two loiterers still lingered despite the fact that it was an imposition on the solitary waiter who impatiently remained to lock up. Giacomo prides himself on never turning out a guest no matter how unearthly the hour; but the hospitality of the restaurateur was not reflected in the bleary-eyed, drowsy appearance of the waiter. He considered the presence of the silent two a rank imposition, aggravated by the fact that he expected but scant tips, for usually men so ultra-taciturn were too preoccupied with their own thoughts to remember such mundane things.

The younger man was well dressed and rather good-looking, not the sort of "good-looking" which is pictured in collar "ads" and other atrocious posters, but there was an air of strength and energy about him. His face reflected a rather keen mentality, although it must be admitted, his expression at the moment was one of extreme disgust and boredom.

He motioned to the waiter.

"Another cup of coffee."

"Black coffee?" yawned the waiter a trifle irritably.

"The usual color," was the reply. "I have heard of pink teas but was unaware that coffee had become esthetic."

The waiter had already slouched off to the kitchen, so the sarcasm was wasted. But the young man failed to notice this breach of manners, for his eyes for the first time met those of the man who occupied the other table, and stayed. There was nothing distinctive about the elderly stranger. He was just a tiny bit of a man about sixty years of age, such as one meets a dozen times a day in New York City. He did not appear to be poor even though he was extremely thin, almost emaciated-looking, evidently a chronic dieter, prone to Fletcherism. Had it not been for the chance meeting of their eyes, the young man would never have been cognizant of the other's existence. Now, however, since their eyes had met, everything else on earth was forgotten. For perhaps a moment they sat and stared at

one another. Then abruptly the stranger rose, and crossing the room, he seated himself at the table opposite the young man.

"Since you have invited me," said he, "I have come. After all, there is much to be commended in companionship. My name is Randall Crane."

"And mine," was the reply, "is Hugh Bannerton."

Hugh did not deny the invitation, despite the fact that he had not given one. Nor did he hesitate for a moment to tell his name. He had felt the implied question, although Randall Crane had asked nothing. But what was stranger still, although as a rule he was one of the most unapproachable of men, he did not resent the intrusion.

"You appear," remarked Randall Crane, "to be distinctly out of sorts, or perhaps it would be more appropriate to say, out of focus."

"I am disgusted with life," replied Hugh petulantly. "I'm sick of realities. I'm pining for adventure. By profession I am a detective. It is my lot in life to be continuously mixed up in other people's affairs, their mysteries and adventures. I work hours unraveling knots for them. But I never have any adventure of my own, I mean a personal adventure of which I am the central figure, an adventure which would appeal to my yearning for romance. Most of the cases I handle are those of robbery and forgery. Each is almost a repetition of the preceding one. They lack individuality. At times my work bores me to death, I yearn for something new, to get away from the sordid realities of life."

"Did I not say," broke in Randall Crane, "that your vision was out of focus? I can not understand why you should bother with realities when dreams are so close at hand. A man should select a dream with as much care as he selects a garment. It is of far more value. Yet it is surprizing how little thought we give to it. Psycho-analysts are beginning to attach a great scientific significance to dreams, thanks to the experiments of Freud, Ernest Jones, and a few other pioneers who do not fear the ridicule of the multitudes who can not at once grasp any new fact. Are you aware that seven-eighths of a man's mind is subconscious and until recently no one knew of its existence? The subconscious mind is really a great vault in which every past record of your life is filed; no picture that ever has or ever will pass before your eyes is lost entirely. You may forget it in your conscious mind, but still it is within you, buried in your great subconscious filing system. As a rule your mind enters this vault only when you are asleep, or in other words, dreaming, despite the fact that usually when you awake you immediately forget your dreams. In the face of such unescapable facts, a person must indeed be brave who contends that dreams are utterly worthless. Surely if seven-eighths of one's consciousness is given over to dreams, they must be far more worthwhile than the one-eighth reality."

All this time Hugh's eyes had never once left those of Randall Crane. The waiter, unnoticed, had brought the coffee, but Hugh could not for the life of him have told whether it was black or pink. In fact, he was totally unaware of its existence.

Randall Crane paused for a moment and leaned toward him. His eyes burned with a fire that seemed to penetrate to Hugh's very soul. Of course it was a ridiculous impression and yet, at the time, to Hugh it seemed sane enough.

"Supposing," said Crane tensely, "there were dreams for sale, and you could do your own choosing, what would you buy? Would you crave diamonds and pearls, rubies and

sapphires, gold, silver and carved jade—things as valueless in themselves as the stones on which we tread heedlessly every day?"

"No," was the fervent reply, "I would buy adventure, a romance such as poets sing about but which is in truth as intangible as vapor."

"You are wrong," cried Randall Crane. "Absolutely wrong! Romance is within your grasp if you but hold out your hand."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that I am a peddler of dreams. Among my wares are dreams such as even you might treasure. If you would find romance, come with me."

To the delight of the lone waiter, now fully awake at last, Hugh rose to his feet. Randall Crane paid the bill but Hugh was not even aware that he did so. His boredom had slipped from him like a cloak, his ennui was forgotten. He did not for a single moment believe Crane, and yet there was something about his absorbed expression which left the slightest thread of hope. Often barest possibilities are far more attractive in appearance than the most vivid actualities.

THE rooms of Randall Crane were just around the corner in one of a row of old-fashioned red-brick buildings with white stoops. They totally lacked personality. In fact they were just replicas of all other boarding house rooms. One look at the drab furniture was sufficient to convince Hugh that Randall Crane rented the rooms as they were and did not own a single stick in them.

Randall Crane noticed Hugh's expression.

"When one lives in dreams," he explained, "one cares very little for material things. The only thing I desire in my room is quietude to sleep." As he spoke he lighted a small pipe which lay on a table in the center of the room, and motioning Hugh toward an old couch in the corner, he continued, "Smoke this, and as you drift off into a land of delightful dreams you will forget your uninviting environment."

Hugh took the pipe, and throwing himself on the couch, he uttered a sigh of contentment. Here was an adventure sufficiently interesting to appeal. Perhaps he was unwise to accede so readily to Randall Crane's suggestion, but he did not care. Usually he was the most careful of men. Although still young, he had been an active detective for almost ten years. So ardently had he pursued his studies, he discovered the defect in everything long before he acknowledged its merit. But now all caution was thrown to the winds. For once he had decided to let himself go adventuring. As he drew on the pipe he tried to guess what it contained. It was sweet-scented as though made of flowers. And then abruptly he looked into Crane's eyes, which seemed oddly bright in the semi-darkness of the room, and instantly all reflections and problems vanished.

"You have just crossed the silent stream where the slumber shadows go," said Crane softly. "Care, worry and the material things of life are forgotten, for you are in the 'Hills of Dream' and it is spring. The flowers are blooming everywhere in the gorgeous sunlight. From the forest come pungent scents of birch and pine and fir. The forest trails, cool and shadowy, are very attractive to you. Heeding their call you enter the woods."

Randall Crane's voice seemed to grow farther and farther away as Hugh slipped softly into sleep. And now he had a dream, and the dream was like a continuation of the voice of Randall Crane, for he was in a forest from which came "pungent scents of birch and pine and fir" and it was spring. He walked through

the dim-lit paths singing a nonsense song which he had learned as a child:

"The cow is in the bathtub,
The cat is in the lake,
Baby's in the garbage pail—
What difference does it make?"

He was as carefree as a lad. The youth and joy of spring possessed him. He wanted somebody to talk to, somebody to laugh with him, and then abruptly he came to the fringe of the woods to behold a tiny white road winding off into the hills like a strip of silver.

"There must be romance hidden somewhere on that road," he cried.

As he spoke he noticed a little lop-eared white bull-terrier sitting in the center of the road, with one ear sticking up and one hanging down in the most droll little way imaginable. At Hugh's approach the dog gave a series of yelps which, without stretching the imagination too much, certainly resembled a series of chuckles.

"Good afternoon," said Hugh, bowing in mock gravity. "You seem to be having a doggone good time. I prithee, will you tell me your name?"

"Grr, Grr," barked the dog.

"Rather an odd name," chuckled Hugh. "Foreign, isn't it? Russian, I should imagine, with a dash of Chinese .... Well Mr. Grr Grr, something tells me that if I followed you, you would lead me to a charming adventure. A dignitary with such a distinctive name as yours must have had a very adventurous career. Lead on, Mr. Grr Grr, and I will follow. Throw in a dash of romance to give the adventure piquancy."

Even as Hugh spoke, the little dog turned and trotted down the road. He seemed as pleased with himself as Punch, or, if you prefer, Judy. Soon he rounded a bend in the road, and Hugh, whistling a merry tune, followed after him. And now he noticed that they had arrived at a tiny cottage from the chimney of which issued a thin, lazy haze of smoke. Mechanically Hugh repeated to himself the verse of a poem which he had read somewhere and which had remained hidden away in his memory to recur to him now:

"I knew by the way the smoke gracefully curled
Above the green elms that a cottage was near,
And I knew that if peace could be found in this world,
A heart that was humble might look for it here."

He stopped abruptly in his quoting as he noticed the figure of a girl standing by the entrance gate to the garden, and what was most odd about it was that she was speaking to him as though she had known him all her life.

"You have been long in coming," she said softly. "I have waited for you many weeks. But come, it is lunchtime and I will serve tea for two, with toast, marmalade and waffles."

As she spoke, the girl turned and entered the cottage. Much interested, Hugh followed after her.

She led him into a decidedly attractive room in the house. It was furnished in English walnut, and the paneled walls were of the same wood. The carpet also was in harmony and, save for a single tea-rose in a slender glass vase in the center of the table, there was no other bit of color in the room.

When the girl noticed Hugh looking curiously at the table, she smiled.

"It is in the style of William and Mary," she told him roguishly, "but don't ask me what William and don't ask me what Mary. Some of my friends do not like the idea of furnishing a room in a single tone. They say, although this is a dining room, it looks like a 'brown study.' Tell me, do you think there is sufficient color in the room?"

"Since you are here," he said impulsively, "any additional color would be wasted."

She blushed slightly but did not seem ill-pleased.

"Come, let us drink our tea."

As she spoke, she seated herself at the table, and taking a teapot as fragile as a wild-flower, she poured the jade-colored tea into two iridescent cups.

"Are you aware," she asked, "that tea never is as palatable when sipped from a cup that is not in harmony with its own alluring shade? For instance, could you enjoy tea out of a pink or yellow cup?"

"Immensely," he declared, "if you served it to me."

"I am serious," she pouted.

"How can one be serious," he asked, "when one is so supremely happy?"

"One should always be at least dignified when drinking tea," she said. "Of all beverages it is by far the most cultured and refined. Can you name another single drink which holds so lofty a position? The Japanese realize that drinking tea is a fine art and they try to keep it so. In the best tea-houses of 'The Land of Cherry Blossoms' no word is ever spoken, no discordant note is ever heard. There philosophers for ages have worked out lofty problems. Hence they have made Teaism a science. At first tea was used as a medicine to cure bodily ills, now it has become an elixir to cure moral ills."

Hugh looked at her in awe. Here was a girl as beautiful as the sun glimmering through the early mists of morning, yet she was talking as sagely as though she had lived in the marts of Eastern Asia for a hundred years.

He held out his cup. "A little more," he said, "not because I adore tea but for the sheer joy of watching you pour it, knowing that you are doing it for me." And then he added impulsively, "Do tell me more about tea. From now on I shall devote my life to it. I'll make Teaism my religion and listen to you always."

For a moment she seemed lost in thought. Then she said, "There is no more definite way of expressing a delightful compliment than to ask a friend to take tea with you. Over the teacups, souls seem very close together, friendship at that moment is more intimate than at any other point. It is the moment for the exchange of confidences. It is the time when peace steals into one's soul. Even now are you not conscious of a strange attraction that is drawing us together?"

"Yes," said Hugh softly.

She leaned toward him and her voice, almost inaudible, was like a caress. "It is the Spirit of the Tea," she murmured.

And so they sat and talked as though they had known each other always.

"Do you know," said she, "for ever so long I have made tea for two each day and yet I have always had to drink it alone."

"You were then expecting me?" said Hugh, greatly interested.

"Oh, yes," she answered quickly. "Even though you were long in coming, I knew that you would come. But this is our first meeting, so you must not stay too long. Good-bye for a while, but I shall wait patiently until you come back to me."

As she spoke, everything seemed to grow hazy and very far away. The next moment, Hugh awoke. He still lay upon the couch in the little atrociously furnished room, and the old Dream Peddler was bending over him.

"Come," he cried, "it is morning, and I have fried a steak for breakfast."

"But I have just had marmalade and tea," murmured Hugh.

It was very hard for him to come back to the material things of life

from the dream-world in which he had been roaming.

"That," chuckled Randall Crane, "must have been a dream or two ago. If the stuff that dreams are made of is finer than mist, then without a doubt, dream-food doesn't contain many calories. So I suggest that you eat again. Dreams are ample food for the soul, but the stomach is a far more vulgar fellow."

WHEN they had finished breakfast, Hugh said, "Now with your permission I should like to buy another dream."

"Another dream?" asked Randall Crane with surprized inflection.

"I mean the same dream," Hugh hastened to explain. And then, realizing that he had not paid for it, he took out his wallet.

But Randall Crane waved him aside. "Put your money away," he said. "You can't pay for dreams with material things. Some day I will tell you the price of a dream,"

"When you do," declared Hugh, "I shall be delighted to pay whatever you ask."

"Evidently you liked your dream," drawled Crane.

"Liked it!" cried Hugh. "Why, just the remembrance of it is worth living for. Did I not prove my utter satisfaction by wishing to have it over again at once?"

Randall Crane shook his head. "I do not deal in day-dreams," he said slowly. "One can't have a beautiful dream until one's day's work is done. Perhaps I am assuming when I say you can not spare the golden hours of sunlight for day-dreaming. Perhaps you belong to the rich, idle, useless class, although I seriously doubt it, the men who just knock about town doing nothing, thinking nothing, producing nothing."

"Whether I belong to that class depends on one's point of view," declared Hugh. "Usually the things I produce are stolen bonds, jewels or money. I am a detective. I am seldom idle, sometimes useless, but never rich. In the last few years I have solved some intricate problems, but never has one proven such an enigma as this. I can hardly credit the happenings of the last dozen hours."

"Do they seem like a dream?" chuckled Randall Crane.

"I'd say a miracle," replied Hugh fervently.

The hours of that day to Hugh seemed leaden. The minutes dragged past as though they were feeble with age. He went to his office, but all he could think of was the dream girl. She was a delicious mystery. The day seemed endless. He made no effort to work. He recalled Mason's story of *The Clock*, wherein is related how a man lived fourteen minutes in a single second. Each second now seemed just that long to him. He was in love with a girl whom he had met in a dream. Now only sleep mattered. His waking hours were useless.

2

PROMPTLY at 6 o'clock Hugh was in the rooms of the Dream Peddler. "Bring on your dreams," he cried. He made no effort to hide his jubilant spirits.

"But we must eat first," said Randall Crane prosaically.

"I've had my supper," replied Hugh irritably. "Can't you eat while I sleep?"

"Since I am but a peddler," drawled Randall Crane, "it would not be polite of me to insist." As he spoke he lighted a pipe.

In silence Hugh stretched himself out upon the couch and looked steadily into his eyes.

"You are on a hilltop," said Randall Crane softly. "But you are not alone. She is with you. Together you can go on with the dream."

As the Dream Peddler's voice faded off into nothing, Hugh realized

that he was standing on a hilltop, but more glorious still, *she* was there also. She sat on a rock and smiled up into his face.

"Are you looking for someone?" she asked demurely.

"I was," he chuckled as he threw himself on the ground beside her, "but I am not now."

"You mean you grew tired of looking?"

"You are partly right," he said. "I grew tired, went to sleep and then I found her."

"Well, you have come at a most opportune moment," she cried gayly, "for it is nearly noon and I have brought a lunch with me fit for the gods."

"And prepared by a goddess," he finished.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"It depends on one's point of view," she murmured roguishly. "The hamper was packed by Corinne, our colored cook who is so black she claims she never has to wash because her face never soils. She would, I fear, look rather out of place on high Olympus, besides being a terrible weight for Atlas to carry, for she weighs three hundred pounds."

Hugh smiled. "Atlas didn't hold up Olympus," he corrected, "he held up the world."

"Worse than Jesse James," she broke in.

"Don't change the subject in order that you need not admit your error," he said. "You must acknowledge that if Atlas held up the world it would make very little difference to him in what particular locality Corinne wished to be."

She pouted deliciously.

Thus the meal progressed. Gradually conversation drifted into more serious channels, and they discussed literature, especially poetry.

"My favorite poem," she said, "is by Bourdillon:

"Wide must the poet wander
To garnish his golden cells,
For in yesterday and in yonder
The secret of poesy dwells.

"It is where the rainbow resteth,
And the Gates of the Sunset be,
And the star in the still pool nesteth,
And the moon-road lies on the sea."

He rose to his feet. "And mine also is about a road," he said tensely. "It is by Marie Van Vorst:

"A town road and a down road,
And the King's road broad and free—
There's but one road in all the world,
The way that leads to thee."

As he uttered the last word, he seized her in his arms.

"You are mine!" he cried softly, "all mine!"

But even as he drew her unresisting to him, everything began to grow blurred and hazy. The next moment he opened his eyes. Randall Crane was bending over him.

"Breakfast," he said laconically.

"Hang it!" muttered Hugh irritably. "You've awakened me at the most beautiful moment of my dream. Serves me right for dealing with a peddler." In spite of everything, he tried to keep in good spirits, but his effort at humor was rather half-hearted.

"I am sorry I had to disturb you," said Crane whimsically, "but I'm going away for a few days, out to the country to show a few of my samples to a prospective customer."

At Randall Crane's words, Hugh's heart turned to ice. That meant he wouldn't be able to see the Dream-Girl for several days. He was very miserable. How was he to live? And then an even greater worry gripped him. Suppose Randall Crane were to die. What would happen then? He would lose his Dream-Girl forever. He wondered how old Crane really was.

"I say," he said finally, "can't I go out to the country with you?"

"To help carry my samples?" asked Randall Crane.

"No, to see that you do not run any unnecessary risks," explained Hugh. "Don't you know I'm terribly worried for fear something may happen to you?"

"Rubbish," laughed Crane. "But I'll take you with me. It'll do your nerves good."

AN HOUR later they were on a train speeding out into the country and at noon they arrived at their destination—Avondale.

As they alighted from the train they were greeted by a little old colored gentleman who was so aged that he might easily have once been a schoolmate of Diogenes. Despite the fact that the day was somewhat warm, he had a great green scarf around his neck as though it were midwinter. This, with his vivid brown suit and orange waistcoat, gave him a rather grand and glorious appearance. But his horse, which apparently was held up by the shafts of the rickety carriage, presented a strong contrast to him. If the little colored gentleman had been a schoolmate of Diogenes, then without a doubt the horse had once been attached to the chariot of the mighty Cæsar—a very apropos remark, for the little colored hackman went by the illustrious name of John Cæsar. Evidently the horse had always been owned by the same family.

"Hello, Mistuh Crane," said John Cæsar. "Yassuh, it sure is a fine day. Yassuh. Climb in. Yassuh. The Oaks? Yassuh. Feels like summer. Yassuh." Thus the little old colored fellow kept up a train of conversation which could easily have run from New York to Philadelphia.

As Hugh and Randall Crane climbed into the carriage, John Cæsar tried to coax his horse to start. "Giddap there, you lazy, good-fur-nothin' bag o' bones. Yassuh, you sure am a bag of bones. Yassuh, lazy bones. Yassuh, you sure am some horse. Yassuh."

Eventually the horse shook off its lethargy and sauntered down the country road. The gait at which he went would have been very irritating to Hugh if he had not been so extremely interested in the pompous way in which John Cæsar sat upon the driver's seat.

"Surely," he chuckled, "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed more splendidly."

At last the horse stopped and Randall Crane said, "Well, here we are, and once more that trusty charger has completed a trip without dying en route."

Hugh climbed out of the rickety carriage. As he did so he noticed the figure of a girl standing by the entrance gate to the garden, and what was most odd was that she was speaking to him as though she had known him all her life.

"You have been long in coming," she said softly. "I have been waiting for you. But come, it is lunchtime and I will serve tea for three, with toast, marmalade and waffles."

As Hugh heard her speak, he rushed forward and seized her in his arms. He drew her unresisting to him. "You are mine, all mine," he cried tensely. And thus his dream came true.

3

LATE that afternoon Hugh said to Randall Crane, "I have two questions to ask you. How did you ever contrive to be such a perfect peddler of dreams?"

Randall Crane smiled slightly. "I have been expecting that question," he said slowly. "Without a doubt you think me somewhat of a conjuror, and yet I assure you that there is nothing in the slightest degree supernatural in what I have done. Psychoanalysts at last have begun to realize the importance of dreams. Many

doctors of medicine are devoting half their time to the diagnosis of illness through the interpretation of dreams. I have taken the experiment a step farther. Realizing the importance of dreams and the dream function, I have endeavored to control them. Now I knew to begin with that dreams are ofttimes the product of suggestion. I took this as a starting point and annexed it to a fact which is also quite well-known by psychologists. It is quite easy to implant into a person's mind, either the conscious or subconscious, a suggestion which the subject is desirous of absorbing. The third fact which I made use of was that when the will of the suggester is stronger than that of the subject, the problem of implanting the desired dream is almost trifling. When I met you, you were bored to death, in the grip of melancholia. Therefore you were an excellent subject for experiment. The only rift in the lute was this: if you had never met my daughter by chance as you walked through Washington Square, I knew I should fail in my attempt. Understand, I merely mean that I had to assume that you two had passed each other. If you had not seen her face once at least, I knew that I could not have infused her presence into your dreams. Some day what I have done will be as simple as hypnotism is at present. Hypnotism is the science of controlling a person's will. You can appreciate that the control of dreams is not a much greater step forward.

"The pipe which you smoked contained nothing but scented tobacco. It had no power to provoke even the faintest glimmer of a dream. I used it because by so doing I could more readily and quickly get control over your consciousness. Having once gotten control of your conscious mind, the task of gaining control of your subconscious mind was simplified greatly. You believed that the pipe contained the stuff that dreams are made of, and when you had once absorbed the suggestion, auto-suggestion helped me materially to implant the ensuing dreams. Physicians are well aware of the phenomenon which I have mentioned. Were a doctor to suggest to a patient that he were dying, even though the statement were groundless, the chances are ten to one the patient would die. A case in point was reported in the newspapers recently. A man in England decided to commit suicide. He locked himself in a small room, sealed up all the cracks in the doors with newspapers and then turned on the gas-jets. Unknown to him the gas in the house had been turned off that day to permit the company to fix the mains in the street. But he imagined that the gas was pouring into the room and so he died from heart-failure, one of the most peculiar cases of suicide ever recorded. . . .

"At first it had been my intention to permit you to believe that the girl existed in your dream only. I had no idea of ever making known her actual existence. This subsequent development was the natural result of your attitude toward the dream. Psychoanalysts now know that a man dreams constantly when he is sleeping, but that due to the careful guarding of the Gateway to the Unconscious by what Freud has termed the 'censor' we seldom remember our dreams. There are many proofs that this is so, as for instance when one is awakened suddenly in the middle of the night, it often happens that one is conscious of a nameless fear as if an unknown presence or horror is in the room. At the same time one doesn't remember having dreamed a thing. The dream is forgotten, but the fear gets by the 'censor.' I am not going to bore you with unnecessary detail, but you can verify my assertions very easily by referring to Fielding, Barbara Low, Tridon, or any of the writ-

ers who have written books on this subject. However, even though one does not always remember a dream, it is possible by continued concentration to recall the incidents which the 'censor' guards so carefully. Of course in many persons the 'censor' is not so alert, and these people dream all the time. There are two extremes of this class of people—the genius and the maniac. The difference between the two is that the first controls his dreams, while the second is controlled by his dream . . . . But I am wandering away from my subject. Always when speaking of psycho-analysis I say too much, and I fear in a great many instances I make of myself a dreadful bore. But I know you will pardon my digressing, especially since I am returning at once to my real subject.

"When I found that you remembered the dream in every detail and that your whole outlook on life had changed, I thought what a pity it would be not to let you meet the real girl of your dreams. So I did, and you know the result."

Randall Crane paused for a moment, then he said, "And now I am ready for your other question."

"I want to know how much I owe you," said Hugh whimsically. "Even yet you have not told me the price of my dreams."

It was a while before Randall Crane spoke, then he said fervently, "Just make my little girl happy. That will be pay enough."

A Serial Novel About a Voyage to Jupiter

The Star Shell

By GEORGE C. WALLIS and B. WALLIS

The Story So Far

HARRY WILLIAMS, Mark Dexter and Prince Danda Singh are catapulted to Jupiter in Dexter's space-ship, the *Star Shell*, through the treachery of Professor Norden. After terrific adventures among the Barbarians, and a flight through the Forest of the Great Red Weed, they are asked for advice in helping the civilized Jovians repel the invasion of the Barbarians, who are armed with the Green Fire. Briseis, the queen-elect, is snatched from the council chamber and rushed off to the Barbarians in an airship which they have learned to manage through the treachery of Ostrong and Professor Norden. The three men from Earth leave in an airship in desperate pursuit to try to rescue the queen.

CHAPTER 20

IN THE HANDS OF THE BARBARIANS

THE transparent walls of the vessel revealed nothing below us but a blur of gray blackness. Above, shining here and there through brief breaks in the heavy clouds, twinkled the eternal stars.

We rested as much as possible under these strange conditions, so as to be prepared for our task with the coming of daylight. When the airship slackened speed and sank safely to ground, it was yet an hour to dawn. All we could see was that we had landed in a fairly open, fairly level space fringed with the spiky Red Weed.

"Now for the disguises," said Mark. "We big chaps will have to stoop and make ourselves as small as possible. A smear of brown stain on our faces and arms, plenty of wrinkles on our foreheads, and we ought to pass for dyed-in-the-wool savages. Whoop! Whiroo!"

Flourishing his spear, my once sedate and studious pal tried to execute a war-dance. Evidently the heavy at-

mosphere of Jupiter did not disagree with him.

"This is the plan I suggest," he resumed, sobering down suddenly. "When we reach the edge of the Red Forest we must separate, going in two pairs into the enemy's country. We shall keep apart, but each couple will make for Malador. I will take Astris; you, Harry, can go with Delius. Dandy we had better leave just at the forest edge, with one of the mechanics for company, to help us on our way back to the ship. The other three of the crew must stick by the vessel. It is clear that we must bring the queen here to the ship, by some means or other. Is it agreed?"

It was, and only Prince Danda grumbled.

"Somebody has to do the idle waiting, I know," he said. "But me, I it not like at all."

"And if we don't return in ten days," said I, "you will return to Nadir, thankful you were left behind. I wonder why they gave us so long."

"The Barbarians are cunning," said Astris. "They know our people are slow to decide, and they fear that if we were to act hurriedly we might not give way to them—as they think we shall do after long consideration. They judge rightly, for though I am for the new ideas, I am afraid the counsels of Ostrong will prevail."

"All the more reason, then, to save the queen," said Mark. "Her influence will overcome Old Stick-in-the-Mud. And here comes the sun."

We started at once. The short Jovian days compel one to hustle. It seems noon directly after breakfast, and bedtime soon after that. At the edge of the forest we left Dandy and his companion, and separated into two parties. The country was fairly level, moderately wooded, and with but few hamlets in sight. These settlements were merely clusters of rude tents encircled by rough stockades. Our plan was to avoid these, not showing ourselves, even disguised as we were, till we were nearly at Malador.

Good fortune favored Astris and me until we reached the town. Two miles from the forest we found a herd of zemas grazing, and each of us appropriated a mount. This helped us greatly, and it was scarcely past midday when we topped a slight rise and saw in the hollow before us the straggling, irregularly walled city wherein the queen was held captive.

"Not much of a city, after yours," I said to Astris, as we rode down. "Mud walls, mud huts, skin tents, thatched hovels. Savages, animals and dirty children playing around the gates. And your folks would let such people as these dominate the planet!"

"I am one of those who think more like you, Solitarian," replied my companion. "When the Barbarians were not so many, nor so well led, they were not such a danger, and perhaps we could then afford to have scruples—now we can not."

We were soon on the beaten track —it could hardly be called a road— leading to the main gate of the city, and had to mingle with the traffic of mounted men, creaking wagons, and laden zemas. Our disguises were good, and nobody took much notice of us. Again and again I reflected what a good thing it was that all the peoples of Jupiter had one language, and that we strangers had learned it so quickly and thoroughly. It had simplified many things for us.

Passing through the gateway, we kept our ears open, and soon gathered vital news. There was a steady pressure of the uncouth savages, jostling each other, scowling and snarling, toward the center of the city. It was a show day; captives of the hated civilized race were on view in cages, for all to see and gloat over.

"And today," croaked an old barbarian, a toothless hag, whose moldy skin robe hung in tatters from her

lean frame, "we have a special treat, neighbors. We have the queen a prisoner. Ah, if only she were not behind bars, so that I could make my gums meet in her pampered flesh! Why should they keep our people stewed up in this one land of ours? Gr-r-r!"

"Big talk, old moldy pelt!" grinned a mounted soldier passing. "You lack your tusks. Don't trouble yourself; Megalof leads us from victory to victory, and when he goes back to Cardiac the world will soon all be ours."

Shouts of approval followed the man down the street. Both Astris and I were silent till we caught the old woman's eyes fixed upon us intently. Then we joined in the chorus.

"Ah, you do well to shout, you two!" she croaked. "Malador is no place today for weaklings and laggards."

"Better get on," I whispered to Astris, and we pushed our zemas forward through the press as quickly as we could. The old woman, shaking a gnarled fist, tottered after us.

Thinking we had shaken her off at last, we dismounted, turned our animals loose, and mingled with the increasing crowd that congested the main square of the town. Edging our way forward, we finally reached the front of the prison cages.

There were nine great wooden huts with barred fronts, and in each of them save one, three or four dejected specimens of the civilized race were huddled. The jeering sightseers shook their dirty hands at them, threw stones and dirt at the helpless captives.

In the tenth cage, all alone, was Briseis, whom we had come to rescue.

Even in captivity there was an air of royalty, of greatness, about this splendid woman, the queen of Jupiter, and even the gazing hordes of Barbarians showed more respect for her than for the other prisoners. Also, a couple of armed guards prevented too near an approach to the prize exhibit of the day.

"Well, we know where she is," said I. "Somehow we shall have to let her know help is at hand. You throw in your message whilst I attract the attention of the guards. Then we had better look out for lodgings, and devise some plan."

Astris had written a note and rolled it up in a rough ball ready for some such emergency as this.

"Death is coming to you; death—death—death—the death of the Green Fire!" shouted some of the crowd. "One by one the others, then your turn last, proud one!"

A surge of the concourse forced us nearer to the cages, a push of rough newcomers. Stones were hurled through the air. Astris managed to catch the queen's eye, and threw in his message, putting a warning finger to his lips. Another rush came, sweeping the guards aside, and I saw one brawny Barbarian, almost as tall as myself, aiming a blow at the queen with a metal-shod pole. It was a long, cruel weapon, and there was no escape from it in the narrow cage.

Forgetting myself in the horror of the moment, I drew the sword I carried and struck the pole, snapping it in two.

"None of that, you coward!" I shouted, in English; and realized my folly directly I had spoken. Yet I don't see how I could have helped interfering.

The baffled bully turned on me in fury, the crowd pressed round us, their curiosity roused by the strange language, and Astris, very pale of face, ranged alongside me.

Perhaps, after giving the bully a good trouncing, we should have escaped from the mess, but we had forgotten that wretched old woman.

"Ay, ay, I knew they were strangers! I knew they were spies! I have

followed them and watched them. Seize them, bind them!"

"The game's up if we can't fight our way out of this crush," I cried in anger, recognizing the toothless hag who had put her evil eye on us at the gate. "Stick to me."

We made a bold bid for freedom, but it was no use. Astris plucked up more courage than I had given him credit for, and used his sword smartly; I fired my revolver again and again into the scrum and laid out half a dozen of the ferocious brutes. It was a desperate rough-and-tumble whilst it lasted, but they were too many for us. The crowd was too dense, and in ten minutes we were lying on our backs, bruised and bleeding, with a squad of soldiers keeping the people off.

"This is the end of us, my friend," groaned Astris, turning to me. "It was a mad effort—yet I am glad we made it."

"I only hope that old wretch came to grief in the mix-up," I panted. "We might have got away, but for her."

CHAPTER 21

LOOKING INTO THE FACE OF DEATH

FURTHER talk was impossible just then, for our captors seized us roughly and threw us into a rude cart drawn by a couple of zemas. Through the hostile crowd, which surged angrily around us and our guard, we were taken away at a good pace. The badly made, springless vehicle rattled and jolted unmercifully over the uneven streets. We were tossed about in the cart like a couple of helpless logs, and by the time the thing stopped, I felt as though I must be black and blue all over.

We had been brought to the house of Megalof, the chief general of the Barbarians, the nearest approach they had yet made to having a king. The general, a big, dark man, lounged in a heavy chair outside the main door, a dozen warriors standing at attention on each side of him. Without any ceremony we were lifted out, bound as we were, and set on our feet before him, whilst the officer in charge of us told the story of our capture. A Barbarian who stood near the general had a conversation with him, too low for us to hear, and then Megalof spoke.

To my surprize he spoke in a cultured tone, using the style of language more favored by the civilized people.

"You, Mr. Williams," he said, addressing me, "are the strangest prisoner ever welcomed here. Noxin has just told me about you, for he was a captive amongst our enemies and heard much of your doings before he helped to bring the queen. He tells me that the civilized race believe you to be men from one of the stars—that the metal vessel in which you traveled through the sky lies near the city Nadir. It is a strange story, and my people will not believe it, but I do. For years I was a prisoner amongst the civilized people, and they taught me much. I also learned much that they knew not that I knew. With all their faults, their weaknesses, they are a wonderful people, and it is what I learned from them that has given me power here."

"Cut short the speech and get down to rock-bottom, general," I said wearily. "I am tired out, and you may as well tell us at once what you are going to do."

He smiled, a broad, slow smile.

"I have no particular enmity toward you, visitor from the sky," he said. "It would have been more fortunate if you had fallen amongst us, made our acquaintance first, for without doubt we are the coming race, the conquerors and future owners of this world. But now you are here,

you can help us. This little fire-weapon of yours, now, that kills at a distance—here, as it is empty I give it back to you—if you would show us how to make and use such things, and the bigger ones you have talked about, you would become rich and famous."

"Nothing doing, general, in that line," I said, forgetting that he would not understand earthly idioms. He took my meaning well enough, however. "I don't propose to help you against my friends, anyhow," I went on. "And as to this little weapon, this revolver, it would take me years to teach your thick-skulled louts how to begin making them."

"Not so long as you think, sky-stranger. Near our fire-stuff mines there are great deposits of a black substance that our skilled workers have at times combined with some other rare materials and produced terrible upheavals. We already have the knowledge of working in all kinds of metals. You can help us greatly. You can make us weapons of destruction that will make our armies invincible. Will you do so?"

"And if I don't?"

"If you act as an enemy, you will receive an enemy's treatment," said Megalof. "You will die, as all our prisoners die, by the Green Fire. You can test it now, if you are stupid enough. Take the Jovian and put him into one of the cages in the square. Noxin, call in the servants of the Flame."

I shouted encouragement to Astris as they took him away, and then set my teeth hard together. I was not so sure of myself as to feel confident that I could stand too much pain. I could only do my best. I have shrunk from the hurt of burning more than from any other sort of damage, ever since I can remember, so when the six hefty servants of the Flame marched up with six swinging baskets of smoking Green Fire, my blood ran cold.

"Let me explain to you the method of your death," remarked the general, who evidently loved to hear the sound of his own voice. "You will be held so that you can not stir a limb, and then one by one the servants of the Flame will slowly burn a little of you away. A finger, a toe, a foot, a hand, an arm, and so on, gradually. Not too quickly, lest you die too soon. Men have been known to live for days, burning all the time. Now if you are ready, we can begin."

By this time I was gripped in hands strong as steel and held rigidly despite all my power. One of the basket-carriers advanced, and with a long handle fished out of his smoking receptacle a dripping lump of Green Fire. He held it toward my right foot. Already the heat of it scorched me. I clenched my jaws together so that one of my teeth cracked and broke.

I should have to give way, I told myself; I should have to pretend, to do my best to make a long job of instructing the Barbarians in the use of firearms, and perhaps find a way of escape later. And then the general laughed, dismissing the servants of the Flame with a gesture.

"I was only testing you, skyman," he said. "You are indeed brave, and we esteem bravery. Yet I think you would have given way had the experiment proceeded. And, now you know what to expect, you can think about the matter till tomorrow. Be ready with your answer then; the next time it will be life and death in real earnest. Take him away."

They led me to a small thatched hut at the back of the general's house and there left me to myself. Two armed men sat on the ground with their backs to the door. The only window was a tiny, barred square over the doorway.

"This, Henry Williams, looks like your finish," I said. "What a come-

down! You have traveled more than 300,000,000 miles—to end your career amongst a lot of Jovian savages!"

It was certainly a black outlook, and the only spot of light I could see was that Megalof had contemptuously given me back my empty revolver. He didn't know I had a box of cartridges in an inner pocket of my Barbarian robe. If the worst came to the worst, I could make a last fight—and save a bullet for myself, perhaps.

I wondered how Mark and Delius were getting on, whether they had reached the town safely, and what they were now doing. Yet our effort seemed such a mad venture that I scarcely dared hope they had succeeded better than Astris and myself.

Night came quickly, and a tall Barbarian arrived with a basket of food and a vessel of water. The guards got up lazily to let him enter, but did not follow him in. I nearly jumped out of my skin when he spoke.

"Steady. Don't give the show away," he said in English, speaking low. "I can't explain now—no time. In half an hour we shall dig a hole through the back of this wicker wall, and you must be ready. Then we are going to save the queen."

It was good old Mark! Before I had recovered from my surprize he was gone.

It was a trying wait, but there was hope at the end of it, and the food Mark had brought me was good. There was some well-cooked texotis meat—thank goodness the savages were not vegetarians!—and a very tasty cake of Jovian bread.

The half-hour passed, and then I heard a scratching and rustling behind the rear wall. The two guards outside the door were asleep and snoring hard. Never were such ugly sounds so welcome to mortal ears.

CHAPTER 22

FOR THE QUEEN'S SAKE

IT DID not take Mark and Delius long to poke a way through the wickerwork and help me to crawl out. The night was very dark, and I could only dimly discern two shadowy forms.

"Come on, nobody will suspect us," whispered Mark. "But be sure and speak in Jovian. This way."

We hurried along several narrow streets, between rows of thatched and mud hovels, and skin tents. There were a few Barbarians roving about, and numbers of zemas straying at large, but no notice was taken of us. At last we came to the opening of a wider space and saw in the distance the green flare of the watch-fires burning in front of the prison cages.

"We are safe enough in the shadow here," said Mark, "and I had better tell you how things stand. It was very fortunate we separated before entering the town. We came in at another gate and reached the square before you and Astris. Delius contrived to get a message into the queen's hands, and we were slipping away unsuspectingly when we saw and recognized you two, and the old woman hobbling along at your heels. Wedged in the crowd, we could not have helped you if we had tried, and I am glad we couldn't, as it turned out.

"Our disguises, or our acting, must have been better than yours, for we kept in the thick of things, followed you to the general's reception, and saw you put in jail. Then we went back to the cages and scouted around the rear premises. The prisoners are not at all well guarded, anybody could break into the cages from behind with a few good tools, especially if some sort of a noisy diversion could be started elsewhere. Well, I worked out a plan, and we returned to fetch you along. All I had to do

was to waylay the chap who was bringing your grub—a bit of ju-jitsu proved useful—and so get in to give you warning. That's all, and here we are, ready for the next move."

"It sounds easy enough," said I, "but you are a wonder, old chap. Anyhow, what is the next move? Hanged if I can see how we are going to get the queen and the others out of the city and across the twenty miles of open country to the Red Forest."

"We shall not need to try," replied Mark. "Though, mounted on fast zemas, I would make the effort, failing a better way. But we have discovered a shorter cut, a quicker route home. In an open space near the general's hut lies the airship that brought him and the queen here. Delius has had a look inside it. There is enough power in its reservoirs for the return journey. Don't you see, Harry, it's a trump card? They will look for us anywhere but there. You two were known to have come in from the country, and once you are missed they will be on the watch at all the gates."

"One up for you, Mark," said I. "This is where a scientific head scores over mere muscle. It's a cinch!"

"I'm going to give you the most risky part of the business," said my chum, seizing my hand and gripping it suddenly. "It's a job where nerve and muscle may be more useful than mere brains. I daresay you have some matches; here are a few more. Work your way round to the opposite side of the square, get behind some of the huts and set fire to them. When they are started, go a bit farther and fire some more, then get across to us as best you can. In the meantime, under cover of the panic and confusion, we shall be busy digging the prisoners out of their cages from the back, as we rescued you. We have planted a few tools in readiness. If you miss us, or anything goes wrong, make for the airship near Megalof's quarters."

This was work in my line, and it was with grim, malicious joy that I left my companions and skulked away into the deep shadows cast across the square by the flickering green fires. I soon found what I wanted and got busy.

Near every hut or tent was a heap of miscellaneous refuse, piled against the wall—a sort of hay and straw for the zemas and other animals, bones and skins, and all kinds of rubbish. It had been, save for occasional terrific storms, a very dry year on Jupiter. There was a strong wind blowing, but it was a steady gale, and I had no trouble in starting several cheerful bonfires blazing before anybody was alarmed. And when the surprized Barbarians woke up to find their domiciles in flames, pandemonium broke loose.

I went farther back into the shadows and started more little fires—quite a nice row of them—and then, joining in the panic-stricken crowd, began to work my way round in the direction of the cages.

There was enough light now to see my way, and in that scared, raving mob, no fear of discovery.

I reached the safe side of the square at last, and had just time to see that the queen's and most of the other cages were empty, when a wild rush of the terrified savages swept me and the armed guard up to the bars. One of the soldiers shouted something, poking within a cage with a spear. A revolver shot from inside put an end to his curiosity forever. I potted another, but in the uproar and fear and confusion nobody heeded what was happening around them. And when I glanced back over the heads of the crowd, I did not wonder.

I had done my work too well; I had started more than I expected. The town was on fire. The flames had spread from hut to hut, from tent

to tent, from street to street. Everything was dry and caught quickly, burnt fiercely. The steady gale drove the flames on with resistless fury; from the advanced edge of the conflagration a sheet of fire stretched out like a huge red tongue, reaching almost across to us, driving the howling mob before it in frenzied flight. If the wind held, I said, nothing could save the whole town from destruction.

And the wind did hold; it grew to a strong gale. The fire spread like a roaring demon, and I began to wonder whether I should reach the others before the flames were across the square. It was a fearful sort of nightmare, racing about in the fire-streaked darkness, under the clouds of rolling smoke, amongst the panicky savages. The only merit of the hurly-burly was that I had nothing to fear from the Barbarians themselves.

When I worked round to the back of the cages I found that all had been smashed open and were empty, but there was no sign of my friends. A spark-laden gust of hot air drove me and a group of bewildered savages away from the spot helter-skelter, and I made all the speed I could to the general's headquarters.

I reached the open space in front of Megalof's hut in advance of the fire, but only just in advance. Here the panic was not so frantic, for the general had taken hold of the situation and was doing his best to cope with it. A long line of active carriers were busily bringing water from the near stream, and others were demolishing houses in the path of the fire.

In the light of the yellow flames reflected from the smoke cloud, I caught a glimpse of the Jovian airship in an enclosed stockade. A little cluster of dark figures was struggling near the gateway. There were cries, shouts, the flash of light on weapons, the whiplike crack of revolver shots. I had arrived in time to help in forcing the gate. As I ran toward the spot, the general himself became aware of the disturbance and gave a sharp order. A squad of armed men followed close on my heels.

It was a neck-or-nothing race, but with the bit of start, my longer legs won. I reached the gate just as it gave way and our people scattered the resisting guards. The queen, supported by Delius, was taken forward into the enclosure. Astris and the other prisoners were standing in front, their faces turned toward the oncoming soldiers.

A grimy, ragged savage clapped me on the shoulder and shouted into my ear, in Mark's voice: "We have done well so far, if you haven't overdone it, Harry. Now we have to fight for all we are worth to save the queen. She and Delius can work the ship all right, but it will take them at least twenty minutes to get her going, so we have to hold the fort till they give us the signal. We must keep the enemy out of here for twenty minutes!"

I shall never forget that fight. There were, all told, only twenty-five of us. Mark and I had revolvers. Astris and another had swords, a few had spears and sticks they had snatched up in their hurried flight through the town, but the rest had only their fists and their bodies to help fill the gap in the broken gate. And we were all of us tired, the prisoners were weak from scant food and confinement, and all, except us two strangers from a rough-and-tumble world, were scared at bloodshed and shrank from violence. Against us came, in the first rush, a hundred well-armed Barbarians.

I must give those civilized Jovians their due. Now that they had their backs to the wall, and it was their lives to save the queen, they fought and died like heroes. Mark and I did

our bit, and the revolvers worked deadly execution in the enemy's ranks, whilst Astris hewed away alongside us like a berserker, but it was soon evident we could not hold out the needful time. The most we could hope for was to keep the savages back as long as possible and then scoot for the ship ourselves.

The Barbarians, their numbers increasing faster than we shot them down, pressed us hard, driving us back into the breach of the broken gate. They were fighting for the ship, as well as for the queen, for Megalof would be stranded here, 7,000 miles from the battle-front, if they lost the vessel.

Astris fell at my side, Mark finished his cartridges, and I received a knock that nearly bowled me out. The fire around the stockade roared fiercely, the sparks and smoke swirling about our faces, choking us, making our eyes run.

"It's no use, Mark; we must clear out," I said at last; and we turned—to face disaster and utter defeat.

Whilst we had been fighting, the flames had worked round to our rear. The stockade and the dry grass and brushwood within were crackling and blazing. We were cut off from the ship, we were caught between a wall of flame and a horde of triumphant foes. Hope died within me.

CHAPTER 23

THE VICTIMS OF THE WEED

"GOOD-BYE, old pal!" cried Mark, seizing my hand and wringing it quickly. "I think—I hope—we have saved the queen and the airship. Now for a last scrap, and then the end of everything!"

We raced about, and then fickle fortune wrought another of her erratic miracles. Blown by the changing gale, the fire took a fresh direction, and a great yellow tongue of flame shot out in front of us, cutting us off from the main body of the foe. Before that fierce, hot breath of flame the Barbarians recoiled in shrieking panic, forgetting us completely in their sudden terror.

We ran at top speed alongside the burning stockade—the half-dozen of us who remained alive of those who had held the gate—running between two walls of fire, scorched and frizzled on each side, scarcely able to see each other for the clouds of pungent smoke.

But we won out in front of the flames at last, and mingled, unnoticed, in the mad, helter-skelter rush of the fleeing populace. We gained one of the town gates, came through, nearly breathless, in the crush, just as day broke, and made across the open country for the distant fringe of the Red Forest. We caught zemas and mounted, riding straight ahead for dear life.

Besides Mark and myself, there were now only four of the heroic Jovians left, but, glancing back, as we mounted, we saw the airship rise from the smoke-cloud over doomed Malador, turn, and vanish westward. A cheer of triumph went up from our little band.

"It was worth while, after all, Harry," said my friend. "Now we can look to ourselves. I'm nearly dead with fatigue, and as limp as a rag. I hope to goodness old Dandy is where we left him; he will have to help carry us to the ship!"

"What I am wondering," said I, "is how long it will be before they get on our track. Megalof is no fool, and he is sure to hear from somebody about us, and the sudden way we set out here. We already have a better start than I hoped for. Three hours more should see us safe. Only three hours!"

Fortune still seemed to be favoring us, for we had reached the edge of the Red Spot without any pursuit revealing itself. The day was more

than half gone now, and a strange silence lay over the plain. Every stockaded hamlet we passed was still, and deserted of life, human or animal. There were no zemas in sight, and our own mounts, after slowing to a walking pace, finally set their ears back like obstinate mules and refused to take another step forward. Urging and coaxing were no good, and when we dismounted the scared animals broke loose and galloped back wildly upon their tracks.

We stared helplessly at each other, slowly becoming conscious of a queer sensation of languor. I yawned, Mark followed suit, so did the four Jovians. Between his yawns one of them spoke.

"The breath of the Red Weed. A patch of the forest has burst into flower, and the wind is from the trees. We must go back, or we shall die!"

I swung round, conquering my sleepiness, and saw a row of tiny black objects rising and falling away on the skyline.

"We shall certainly die if we do turn back," I said, pointing across the silent plain. "Here come Megalof's men after us. Better stay where we are. The poison breath of the Red Weed will do for them as well as for us. I'm stopping here."

And I sat down, feeling as though nothing could ever rouse me again. Mark and the others flung themselves on the ground near me, and we gave ourselves up to the inevitable. All we wanted was rest, sleep, forgetfulness.

I was nearly gone, was in a state of drowsy bliss, when a fresh, cold breeze flowed over my face, chilling me, waking me, and Mark suddenly jumped to his feet, shouting.

"The wind has veered round! Come on, all of you! The Barbarians are close upon us; it is a case of best legs first if we are to gain shelter in time."

So, revived, once more inspired with hope, we raced for the protection of the deadly Red Forest, a crowd of savages hot upon our heels. I remember thinking, even as I ran, that it was very much like jumping from the frying pan into the fire; that we must have been watched over by a specially guarding providence to have escaped from the dangers of the weed during our previous wanderings. And close on that thought, as we ran into the shade of the outlying clumps of trees, came another. How had our friends fared? Had they breathed the vapor of death? Should we find Prince Danda too late?

And close on the thought came realization. By virtue of my athletic training, I was well in front of the others. Leaping over the roots of a big forest tree, I stumbled on something, and fell, sprawling headlong, barking my shins, scratching my hands, and hitting Jupiter with my head. I had fallen over the unconscious forms of Danda Singh and the Jovian mechanic.

Were they only sleeping, or was it the sleep that men call death?

"A bad lookout, Harry," said my friend, after we had tried to waken them, without success. "I am afraid they are past hope. And if so, what of the others, whom we left with the airship? If they are dead, too, it will be awkward."

"The ship will be there, anyhow," said I, cheerfully. "We had better get along."

"But," said one of the Jovians, "if the crew of the ship are dead, how can we ever leave the Red Forest? Not one of us has been trained to work the magnetic motors, and to meddle with them unskilfully would be dangerous."

"And we have been too busy with other things," added Mark, gloomily.

Just then Dandy opened his eyes and feebly raised his right hand. His lips moved. I knelt to catch his words.

"Thought it was with us all ended," he said, his voice growing stronger with every word. "The vapor from the trees—it made us sleepy, us it choked, our eyes we could not open keep. Glad I am to see you again."

We pulled him to his feet, gave him a drink of water, and rapidly explained the situation.

"And the Barbarians must be near now," Mark ended.

"If they are, they are wonderfully quiet about it," said I, after a moment's strained silence. "There isn't a sound in the forest. We need not worry about them; they have funked the Red Forest again. What we have to do now is to tote Dandy and this other chap along to the airship. If he can recover, so may the others, and we shall be all right."

Dandy was soon able to stagger along, though rather weak from the weed sickness, but the mechanic was lifeless as a log, and had to be carried. I had my fears of him from the first, he felt so cold, and when we reached the ship at last and laid him down, and could detect neither sign of breath nor beat of heart, we knew that he was dead.

The other three of the crew, lying on the ground close to the stranded ship, were also dead. Of that there was no manner of doubt, for some beasts of prey had already found them. Our sudden appearance, and the crack of my revolver, drove off a couple of huge, catlike creatures into the shadows of the deepening twilight. We placed the four bodies together and covered them with a mound of earth dug out, heaped up and beaten solid with our Barbarian swords.

Evidently the breath of the Red Weed was more surely fatal to the Jovians than to us men of Earth. Dandy had lived because he was physically tougher.

"And now for the airship," said I. "Even if we can not move her, we shall be safer inside, what with this poisonous weed and the animals roaming amongst it."

"Unless the Barbarians come along after all," said Mark. "I don't feel quite sure that they have given us up. They may prefer to attack in the dark, or they may be waiting for the dawn. I am going to have a look at the motors, and then a try at the wireless."

We were all tired, and glad to crawl inside and rest in comparative safety and peace, but it was little sleep we had. The breeze from the plain increased to a howling gale, blowing in thunderous gusts as only a Jovian gale can blow. Along with the wind came a storm of fierce rain. The noise of it lashing the tree-tops was like the sound of a surging sea. The airship quivered and strained and rolled, and only the fact that it lay in a sheltered depression prevented it from being swept away.

When the storm abated, after two hours of fury, the forest dwellers recovered their spirits. We heard rustlings and crashings through the undergrowth all around us—the chattering and drumming of giant apes, the roaring and snarling of the cat beasts, the trumpeting of passing gigasaurs. And all the time Mark was studying the mechanism of the ship.

"It is beyond me, Harry," he said, at last. "I have a hazy idea of the principle—the ship is a sort of solenoid traveling within an invisible coil of energy, but I don't see how to start her. A wrong lever pressed might smash the thing to fragments. And something is wrong with the wireless, too. I can neither send nor receive a call. I am afraid the ship is of no use to us except as a shelter. We shall have to trudge it back to Nadir."

"Another journey through the Red Forest?" asked one of the Jovians.

"It would be madness, utter and absolute. Except yourselves and certain animals that are immune to the poison, no beings have ever penetrated this desolation and lived. You can not expect to be so fortunate again. It would be almost as wise to go back and give ourselves up to the Barbarians!"

CHAPTER 24

FROM OUT THE SKY

THE other Jovians nodded a gloomy, silent assent. Faced with the prospect of tramping a few thousand miles of forest, they had lost all their courage. We Earthmen did not exactly relish the idea of that tramp, but we did not let them see how disappointed we were.

"Whatever else happens, we don't surrender, sonny," said I, with pardonable swagger. "We are not built that way. We have had good luck so far, and we are prepared to chance it again. When daylight comes, we start."

"That's right," said Mark. "The sooner we are off the better I shall be pleased, for I fear that we have not done with Megalof yet. Now that the other airship has escaped, he will want possession of this one in order to get back to the isthmus and the fighting line. Any other means of travel would take him weeks and weeks. And he is sure to have divined that we have a ship somewhere."

Our position was decidedly annoying, to put it mildly. Here were we, three men from the distant Earth, with four men of a marvelously clever and civilized Jovian race, sheltering in a metal airship that could travel at 2,000 miles an hour. Yet, unable to use the wonderful vessel, we were stranded 7,000 miles from our friends, and myriads of savage enemies were thirsting for our lives not twenty-five miles away.

Only the great fear of the Red Forest—a fear that seems inborn in every human being or tame animal on Jupiter—had saved us from pursuit so far. And when day came, a yellow radiance filtering through heavy clouds, we knew that Megalof had somehow forced his men to overcome that fear.

We looked out from the doorway of the ship to find the whole depression encircled by armed Barbarians. Driven by their leader's threats and forceful personality, they had crept up in the night and silently surrounded us.

An arrow struck the vessel just above my head, splintering on the smooth, hard metal. A yell went up from a thousand throats as the Barbarians rushed to the attack.

Our four Jovians brought out their Heat Ray projector whilst we replied with our few remaining cartridges. Though we picked off quite a dozen, we could not stay the rush, but when one of our friends pushed the tube of the projector through the doorway and turned on the heat, the effect was wonderful.

The fierce Blue Ray, burning everything it touched—flesh and bone and tree and shrub—mowed our enemies down by the score. Screaming, shrieking, they recoiled in panic before its scorching advance, leaving their charred dead amongst the smoldering undergrowth.

We heard a huge voice roaring orders, and over the blackened ground a fresh wave of warriors poured. Again the Heat Ray flashed, and again they recoiled.

We cheered, but our Jovian comrades were pale, shivering with repugnance.

"It is too horrible," said one man. "I can not go on."

Another took the instrument from his trembling fingers and plied the marvelous radiance upon the third attack. This time the Barbarians were more careful, advancing in a

wide curve, each man at least a yard from his neighbor, and all protected by thick shields of hide. The shields smoked, crackled, shriveled and flamed if the ray were kept on them long enough, but at each delay for this purpose other parts of the line drew nearer.

Still, we should have driven them off again, for human flesh could not be made to face that scorching heat long, but for an unseen disaster. A flight of arrows, skilfully shot, drove most of us from the doorway, and one tough shaft struck the heat-projector in a weak place, cracking open the metal casing of the box containing the essential chemicals.

There was a blinding flash of light, a swift spasm of warmth that made the whole interior of the airship hot, and the machine and its operator lay on the ground inside, a smoking, unrecognizable heap of man and metal.

"And there goes our last cartridge!" I cried, bitterly, following up the shot by hurling the useless weapon at the delighted, yelling enemy. "The game's up."

But Mark did not think so. He stepped in front of me, risking the flying arrows, and held up both hands. I believe the hands-up gesture will be understood on any planet where there is any sort of humanity; at any rate the Barbarians recognized it, and Megalof himself, mounted on a prancing zema, came to the front, out in the open.

He smiled sardonically. He was in good humor, thinking we were about to capitulate.

"You are strong and cunning, strangers," he said, "but the great gods of Jupiter are on my side. You are all in my hands, but because I admire courage and skill, I will hear what you have to say."

"We merely desire to know your wishes, general," replied Mark, very coolly. "What do you want with us? The queen has escaped, and we were not intending to worry you any more."

Megalof's face darkened with sudden annoyance.

"Why waste time so foolishly?" he cried. "You can make no terms with me, for you are in my power. I want the airship, and I shall get it. Yet, as I said, I admire bravery such as yours, and if you will give up the ship without further trouble, I will spare your lives."

"I thought that was it!" said Mark to us. Then he turned to the Barbarian. "We don't intend to accept your kind offer, general. We are too old to be caught that way. And if you got the ship you could not use it any more than we can. The crew are dead, killed by the Red Weed."

A ripple of dismay and fear ran through the savage ranks, but Megalof wasn't scared.

"I can work the vessel," was his confident answer. "That was one of the things I learnt when I was a prisoner in Nadir. After our next victory we shall capture many airships, and I shall instruct our people how to work them. Once more I ask you to come out quietly."

"For our part, rather than let the vessel pass into their hands, we would destroy it," said the most ready speaker of the civilized Jovians. "But you, Solitarians, who have really no concern in our quarrels, why not save yourselves?"

"Because, friends," said Mark, "we are not mean-spirited cowards. We are sticking by you. Besides, I don't trust Old Dark-Face for a moment.

"No, general," he went on, "we are just stopping where we are, thank you all the same. We shall just shut ourselves in and wait. You have no weapons that can pierce the metal walls. And if it comes to the worst I will try to start the ship,

when we shall either get away or smash it and ourselves to pieces."

The Barbarian was furious with baffled rage.

"Then I will show no mercy!" he roared. "The Green Fire shall speak for me. From that there is no escape."

He made a sign and backed his mount to the shelter of a copse. Through the opened ranks of the armed men came a host of others, and these others carried smoking braziers of fire. We closed the door of the airship and watched through the transparent metal walls.

Nearer and nearer came the encircling line of fire, closing in upon us relentlessly. Soon the leaping flames and green-yellow fumes of the burning mineral made a flickering wall around us. Nearer still the blazing circle drew, and we were powerless to check its progress. And well we knew that once the braziers were emptied upon the ground below us, the very metal of the ship itself would sizzle and melt.

"I shall have to do something, soon," said Mark, frowning at the magnetic mechanism. "Once more, you two, I'm sorry I ever made the *Star Shell* and brought you into this fix. If ever we get back to the good old Earth I'll never ask you to leave it again. But we shall never get back!"

"Worry you not," said Prince Danda. "It your fault not was. If only for five minutes I could get hold of Norden!"

"Which you may yet do!" I cried, suddenly. "Look there! The queen has reached safety, and remembered us!"

An airship was swooping down toward us, a long, clear, siren note heralding her approach. As the shining vessel, magnificently handled, swept around us in a narrowing spiral, a pair of Blue Rays, fore and aft, scorched and blazed a double circuit of death amongst the Barbarians.

The savages broke and ran, the bearers of the flame threw away their braziers, and Megalof, his robes smoldering, was thrown headlong from his frantic zema in its mad flight. Whether he was killed or not, I shall never know.

The airship came to ground alongside, and when we explained our position a couple of skilled mechanics were put aboard our craft. We Earthmen went in the second ship, and both vessels rose rapidly from that smoking ring of fire, putting their prows toward Nadir at the rate of thirty-three miles a minute. Along the distant skyline still trailed the smoke cloud from burning Malador.

In the second ship were our old friends, Delius and Oberon. They greeted us warmly.

"We also have much to tell you," said Delius, after Mark had given them some account of our experiences in Maladór, and whilst the news was being wirelessed to the queen. "Much that will please you. Even now the great battle is beginning."

Ostrong's vengeance, and Norden's final treachery, will be narrated in the thrilling chapters that bring this story to a close in next month's issue.

The Chilling Chamber of Fantomheath Fields;
or, The Winning of Alicia, the Beautiful

YE GOODE OLDE GHOSTE STORIE

By WILLIAM A. P. WHITE

"BUT there ain't no sech thing!" said Jed Hoskins' old man forcefully.

"No such thing as what?" queried the stranger with the black bag, who had justed seated himself near the group.

"Ha'nts," Jed hastened to explain. "Grandad Miller there, he says the old Lawrence home's ha'nted, and my dad, he says it can't be, 'cause there ain't no ha'nts."

"Aren't there, though?" said the stranger, half to himself.

"Ye believe there be, don't ye?" asked Grandad Miller hopefully.

"Yes, I do. I had a horrible experience once over in England . . ."

"England?" (This from Jed, who thought it a place only geography teachers could be familiar with.)

"England it was. Would you like to hear about it?"

"Yes!" came a chorus of assent, even from old man Hoskins.

"All right." And so he began.

"It must have been about two years ago that Lord Fantomheath invited me to spend the week-end at Fantomheath Fields, his ancestral domicile. I accepted with pleasure—and promptly forgot all about it. I was to have left London on the . . . on the . . . well, I don't exactly remember the train, but it was somewhere about noon on Friday. I didn't remember my engagement until about 6 Friday evening. Then I hurried down *lo más pronto posible.*"

"Low mass?" asked Grandad Miller, the only Catholic in Higginsville.

"*Lo más pronto posible.* It's a Spanish phrase meaning 'as quickly as possible.'"

"Oh!"

"Percy—that is, Lord Fantomheath"—a gasp of surprize went round—a man who could call a lord by his first name!—"was awfully angry at my being late. 'Harry,' he said, 'if we weren't such good friends, I'd cut you altogether.'

" 'Well, Perce,' said I, 'as long as you don't cut me all apart, it's all right.'

" 'But that's just what might happen,' he explained. 'If you stay, you will have to sleep in the Chilling Chamber, otherwise known as the Bloody Bedroom. It was there that my revered ancestor, Lord Felix of Fantomheath, committed suicide by slitting his throat with a razor. Since then, every guest that has slept in the Beastly Boudoir has been found next morning with his throat cut!' "

A shiver ran around the little circle, even though the fire was blazing gayly away. "Didja sleep there?" asked Bob Hill.

"Of course. Would I be afraid of the ghost of a long-dead Englishman? Never! So Percy had Barracks, the butler, show me upstairs to the Horrible Haunt of the Suicidal Spirit.

"Feeling marvelous, I began to dress for dinner. Now, if it hadn't

been for Percy's sister, Alicia, it might never have happened. But I was hopeful of persuading her some day to marry me. She was pretty, rich, and of one of England's best families. Can you blame me?

"I'd already shaved once that day, but the thought of Alicia inspired me to shave twice in one day for the first time in five years. I had lathered my face, and was all set to begin. Then I saw in the mirror a horrible *form* at the other end of the room. It was absolutely and indescribably horrible. It was one of those things that are unmentionable, that *should not be*. It had a slight semblance of human form, but it was horribly distorted. It was unholy, sacrilegious. . . . It is not healthful for a man to see such things. . . .

"Slowly it advanced on me. I was helpless, spellbound, standing there motionless with the razor in my hand. An arm appeared from nowhere on the *shape*, seemingly projected like the pseudopod of a protozoan."

"Like the which of a what?" asked Jed.

"Never mind. Anyway, an arm appeared. The *thing* was now standing directly behind me. Slowly *it* reached out and seized my hand. I could not move. Still more slowly *it* drew my own razor, in my own hand, across my throat!"

"But you're not dead!" Bob Hill objected. "How come?"

"Wait a moment and you'll see. I came to in Alicia's arms. She was supporting me while Barracks poured brandy down my throat to revive me. 'My hero!' cried Alicia. 'You've freed the family of its curse. It has been foretold that if anyone survived the Gruesome Ghost's attack, he—I mean the Ghost, of course—would never be able to appear again.'

" 'Alicia,' I said, 'I claim but one reward. Will you marry me?' And Barracks discreetly turned his head. And so we lived happily ever after."

"But I don't see," Hill reiterated, "how come *it* didn't kill you."

"Very, very simple."

"But how?"

"I was using a safety razor!

"Now, gentlemen," he went on, opening the black bag, "I have here a very fine assortment of Burham-Triplex safety razors at very reasonable prices."

WEIRD STORY REPRINT

No. 19. The Dream Woman

By WILKIE COLLINS

SOME years ago there lived in the suburbs of a large seaport town on the west coast of England a man in humble circumstances, by name Isaac Scatchard. His means of subsistence were derived from any employment that he could get as an ostler, and occasionally when times went well with him, from temporary engagements in service as stable-helper in private houses. Though a faithful, steady, and honest man, he got on badly in his calling. His ill-luck was proverbial among his neighbors. He was always missing good opportunities by no fault of his own, and always living longest in service with amiable people who were not punctual

payers of wages. "Unlucky Isaac" was his nickname in his own neighborhood, and no one could say that he did not richly deserve it.

With far more than one man's fair share of adversity to endure, Isaac had but one consolation to support him, and that was of the dreariest and most negative kind. He had no wife and children to increase his anxieties and add to the bitterness of his various failures in life. It might have been from mere insensibility, or it might have been from generous unwillingness to involve another in his own unlucky destiny; but the fact undoubtedly was, that he had arrived at the middle term of life without marrying, and, what is much more remarkable, without once exposing himself, from eighteen to eight-and-thirty, to the genial imputation of ever having had a sweetheart.

When he was out of service he lived alone with his widowed mother. Mrs. Scatchard was a woman above the average in her lowly station as to capacity and manners.

One bleak autumn, when Isaac was getting on fast toward forty, and when he was, as usual, out of a place through no fault of his own, he set forth from his mother's cottage on a long walk inland to a gentleman's seat, where he had heard that a stable-helper was required.

It wanted then but two days of his birthday; and Mrs. Scatchard, with her usual fondness, made him promise, before he started, that he would be back in time to keep that anniversary with her, in as festive a way as their poor means would allow. It was easy for him to comply with this request, even supposing he slept a night each way on the road.

He was to start from home on Monday morning, and, whether he got the new place or not, he was to be back for his birthday dinner on Wednesday at 2 o'clock.

Arriving at his destination too late on the Monday night to make application for the stable-helper's place, he slept at the village inn, and in good time on the Tuesday morning presented himself at the gentleman's house to fill the vacant situation. Here again his ill-luck pursued him as inexorably as ever. The excellent written testimonials to his character which he was able to procure availed him nothing; his long walk had been taken in vain: only the day before the stable-helper's place had been given to another man.

Before starting on his homeward walk, he made some inquiries at the inn, and ascertained that he might save a few miles on his return by following a new road. Furnished with full instructions, several times repeated, as to the various turnings he was to take, he set forth on his homeward journey, and walked on all day with only one stoppage for bread and cheese. Just as it was getting toward dark, the rain came on and the wind began to rise, and he found himself, to make matters worse, in a part of the country with which he was entirely unacquainted, though he knew himself to be some fifteen miles from home. The first house he found to inquire at was a lonely roadside inn, standing on the outskirts of a thick wood. Solitary as the place looked, it was welcome to a lost man, who was also hungry, thirsty, footsore, and wet. The landlord was civil, and respectable-looking, and the price he asked for a bed was reasonable enough. Isaac therefore decided on stopping comfortably at the inn for that night.

He was constitutionally a temperate man. His supper consisted of two rashers of bacon, a slice of home-made bread and a pint of ale. He did not go to bed immediately after this moderate meal, but sat up with the landlord, talking about his bad prospects and his long run of ill-luck, and diverging from these topics to the sub-

ject of horse-flesh and racing. Nothing was said either by himself, his host, or the few laborers who strayed into the taproom, which could, in the slightest degree, excite the very small and very dull imaginative faculty which Isaac Scatchard possessed.

At a little after 11 the house was closed. Isaac went round with the landlord and held the candle while the doors and lower windows were being secured. He noticed with surprize the strength of the bolts and bars, and iron-sheathed shutters.

"You see we are rather lonely here," said the landlord. "We never have had any attempts made to break in yet, but it's always as well to be on the safe side. When nobody is sleeping here, I am the only man in the house. My wife and daughter are timid, and the servant-girl takes after her missuses. Another glass of ale before you turn in? No! Well, how such a sober man as you come to be out of a place is more than I can make out, for one. Here's where you're to sleep. You're our only lodger tonight, and I think you'll say my missus has done her best to make you comfortable. You're quite sure you won't have another glass of ale? Very well. Good night."

It was half-past 11 by the clock in the passage as they went upstairs to the bedroom, the window of which looked on to the wood at the back of the house.

ISAAC locked the door, set his candle on the chest of drawers, and wearily got ready for bed. The bleak autumn wind was still blowing, and the solemn, monotonous, surging moan of it in the wood was dreary and awful to hear through the night-silence.

Sleep stole on him before he was aware of it. His eyes closed, and he fell off insensibly to rest without having so much as thought of extinguishing the candle.

The first sensation of which he was conscious after sinking into slumber was a strange shivering that ran through him suddenly from head to foot, and a dreadful sinking pain at the heart, such as he had never felt before. The shivering only disturbed his slumbers; the pain woke him instantly. In one moment he passed from a state of sleep to a state of wakefulness—his eyes wide open—his mental perceptions cleared on a sudden as if by a miracle.

The candle had burned down nearly to the last morsel of tallow, but the top of the unsnuffed wick had just fallen off, and the light in the little room was, for the moment, fair and full.

Between the foot of the bed and the closed door there stood a woman with a knife in her hand, looking at him.

He was stricken speechless with terror, but he did not lose the preternatural clearness of his faculties, and he never took his eyes off the woman. She said not a word as they stared each other in the face, but she began to move slowly toward the left-hand side of the bed.

His eyes followed her. She was a fair, fine woman, with yellowish flaxen hair and light gray eyes, with a droop in the left eyelid. He noticed those things, and fixed them on his mind before she was round at the side of the bed. Speechless, with no expression in her face, with no noise following her footfall, she came closer and closer—stopped and slowly raised the knife. He laid his right arm over his throat to save it; but, as he saw the knife coming down, threw his hand across the bed to the right side, and jerked his body over that way just as the knife descended on the mattress within an inch of his shoulder.

His eyes fixed on her arm and hand as she slowly drew her knife out of the bed; a white, well-shaped arm, with a pretty down lying lightly over

the fair skin—a delicate lady's hand, with the crowning beauty of a pink flush under and round the finger-nails.

She drew the knife out, and passed slowly to the foot of the bed; stopped there for a moment looking at him; then came on—still speechless, still with no expression on the blank, beautiful face, still with no sound following the stealthy footfalls—came on to the right side of the bed where he now lay.

As she approached, she raised the knife again, and he drew himself away to the left side. She struck, as before, right into the mattress, with a deliberate, perpendicularly downward action of the arm. This time his eyes wandered from her to the knife. It was like the large clasp-knives which he had often seen laboring men use to cut their bread and bacon with. Her delicate little fingers did not conceal more than two-thirds of the handle; he noticed that it was made of buckhorn: clean and shining the blade was, and looking like new.

For the second time she drew the knife out, concealed it in the wide sleeve of her gown, then stopped by the bedside, watching him. For an instant he saw her standing in that position, then the wick of the spent candle fell over into the socket, the flame diminished to a little blue point, and the room grew dark.

A moment, or less, if possible, passed so, and then the wick flamed up, smokingly, for the last time. His eyes were still looking eagerly over the right-hand side of the bed when the final flash of light came, but they discerned nothing. The fair woman with the knife was gone.

The conviction that he was alone again weakened the hold of the terror that had struck him dumb up to this time. The preternatural sharpness which the very intensity of his panic had mysteriously imparted to his faculties left them suddenly. His brain grew confused—his heart beat wildly—his ears opened for the first time since the appearance of the woman to a sense of the woful, ceaseless moaning of the wind among the trees. With the dreadful conviction of the reality of what he had seen still strong within him, he leaped out of bed, and screaming, "Murder! Wake up there! wake up!" dashed headlong through the darkness to the door.

It was fast-locked, exactly as he had left it on going to bed.

His cries on starting up had alarmed the house. He heard the terrified, confused exclamations of women; he saw the master of the house approaching along the passage with his burning rush-candle in one hand and his gun in the other.

"What is it?" asked the landlord, breathlessly.

Isaac could only answer in a whisper. "A woman, with a knife in her hand," he gasped out. "In my room—a fair, yellow-haired woman; she jabbed at me with the knife twice over."

The landlord's pale cheeks grew paler. He looked at Isaac eagerly by the flickering light of his candle and his face began to get red again; his voice altered, too, as well as his complexion.

"She seems to have missed you twice," he said.

"I dodged the knife as it came down," Isaac went on, in the same scared whisper. "It struck the bed each time."

The landlord took his candle into the bedroom immediately. In less than a minute he came out again into the passage in a violent passion.

"The devil fly away with you and your woman with the knife! There isn't a mark in the bedclothes anywhere. What do you mean by coming into a man's place, and frightening his family out of their wits about a dream?"

"I'll leave your house," said Isaac, faintly. "Better out on the road, in rain and dark, on my road home, than back again in that room, after what I've seen in it. Lend me a light to get my clothes by, and tell me what I'm to pay."

"Pay!" cried the landlord, leading the way with his light sulkily into the bedroom. "You'll find your score on the slate when you go down-stairs. I wouldn't have taken you in for all the money you've got about you if I'd known your dreaming, screeching ways beforehand. Look at the bed. Where's the cut of a knife in it? Look at the window—is the lock bursted? Look at the door (which I heard you fasten yourself)—is it broke in? A murdering woman with a knife in my house? You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Isaac answered not a word. He huddled on his clothes, and they went down-stairs together.

"Nigh on twenty minutes past 2!" said the landlord, as they passed a clock. "A nice time in the morning to frighten honest people out of their wits!"

Isaac paid his bill, and the landlord let him out at the front door, asking, with a grin of contempt, as he undid the strong fastenings, whether "the murdering woman got in that way?"

THEY parted without a word on either side. The rain had ceased, but the night was dark, and the wind bleaker than ever. Little did the darkness or the cold or the uncertainty about the way home matter to Isaac. If he had been turned out into the wilderness in a thunderstorm, it would have been a relief after what he had suffered in the bedroom of the inn.

What was the fair woman with the knife? The creature of a dream, or that other creature from the unknown world called among men by the name of ghosts? He could make nothing of the mystery—had made nothing of it, even when it was midday on Wednesday, and when he stood, at last, after many times missing his road, once more on the doorstep of home.

His mother came out eagerly to receive him. His face told her in a moment that something was wrong.

"I've lost the place; but that's my luck. I dreamed an ill dream last night, mother—or maybe I saw a ghost. Take it either way, it scared me out of my senses, and I am not my own man again yet."

"Isaac, your face frightens me. Come in to the fire—come in, and tell Mother all about it."

He was as anxious to tell as she was to hear: for it had been his hope, all the way home, that his mother, with her quicker capacity and superior knowledge, might be able to throw some light on the mystery which he could not clear up for himself. His memory of the dream was still mechanically vivid, though his thoughts were entirely confused by it.

His mother's face grew paler and paler as he went on. She never interrupted him by so much as a single word; but when he had done, she moved her chair close to his, put her arms around his neck, and said:

"Isaac, you dreamed your ill dream on this Wednesday morning. What time was it when you saw the fair woman with a knife in her hand?"

Isaac reflected on what the landlord had said when they had passed by the clock on his leaving the inn; allowed as nearly as he could for the time that must have elapsed between the unlocking of his bedroom door and the paying of his bill just before going away, and answered:

"Somewhere about 2 o'clock in the morning."

His mother suddenly quitted her hold of his neck, and struck her hands together with a gesture of despair.

"This Wednesday is your birthday, Isaac, and 2 o'clock in the morning was the time when you were born."

Isaac's capacities were not quick enough to catch the infection of his mother's superstitious dread. He was amazed, and a little startled also, when she suddenly rose from her chair, opened her old writing desk, took pen, ink, and paper, and then said to him:

"Your memory is but a poor one, Isaac, and now I'm an old woman mine's not much better. I want all about this dream of yours to be as well known to both of us, years hence, as it is now. Tell me over again all you told me a minute ago, when you spoke of what the woman with the knife looked like."

Isaac obeyed, and marveled much as he saw his mother carefully set down on paper the very words that he was saying.

"Light gray eyes," she wrote, as they came to the descriptive part, "with a droop in the left eyelid; flaxen hair, with a gold-yellow streak in it; white arms, with a down upon them; little lady's hand, with a reddish look about the fingernails; clasp-knife with a buckhorn handle, that seemed as good as new." To these particulars Mrs. Scatchard added the year, month, day of the week, and time in the morning when the woman of the dream appeared to her son. She then locked up the paper carefully in the writing desk.

Neither on that day nor on any day after could her son induce her to return to the matter of the dream. She obstinately kept her thoughts about it to herself, and even refused to refer again to the paper in her writing desk. Ere long Isaac grew weary of attempting to make her break her resolute silence; and time, which sooner or later wears out all things, gradually wore out the impression produced on him by the dream. He began by thinking of it carelessly, and he ended by not thinking of it at all.

The result was the more easily brought about by the advent of some important changes for the better in his prospects, which commenced not long after his terrible night's experience at the inn. He reaped at last the reward of his long and patient suffering under adversity by getting an excellent place, keeping it for seven years, and leaving it, on the death of his master, not only with an excellent character, but also with a comfortable annuity bequeathed to him as a reward for saving his mistress's life in a carriage accident.

THUS it happened that Isaac Scatchard returned to his old mother, seven years after the time of the dream at the inn, with an annual sum of money at his disposal sufficient to keep them both in ease and independence for the rest of their lives.

The mother, whose health had been bad of late years, profited so much by the care bestowed on her and by freedom from money anxieties, that when Isaac's birthday came round she was able to sit up comfortably at table and dine with him.

On that day, as the evening drew on, Mrs. Scatchard discovered that a bottle of tonic medicine which she was accustomed to take, and in which she had fancied that a dŏse or more was still left, happened to be empty. Isaac immediately volunteered to go to the chemist's and get it filled again. It was as rainy and black an autumn night as on the memorable past occasion when he lost his way and slept at the roadside inn.

On going into the chemist's shop he was passed hurriedly by a poorly dressed woman coming out of it. The glimpse he had of her face struck him, and he looked back after her as she descended the door steps.

"You're noticing that woman?" said the chemist's apprentice behind

the counter. "It's my opinion there's something wrong with her. She's been asking for laudanum to put to a bad tooth. Master's out for half an hour, and I told her I wasn't allowed to sell poison to strangers in his absence. She laughed in a queer way, and said she would come back in half an hour. If she expects master to serve her, I think she'll be disappointed. It's a case of suicide, sir, if ever there was one yet."

These words added immeasurably to the sudden interest in the woman which Isaac had felt at the first sight of her face. After he had got the medicine bottle filled, he looked about anxiously for her as soon as he was out in the street. She was walking slowly up and down on the opposite side of the road. With his heart, very much to his own surprize, beating fast, Isaac crossed over and spoke to her.

He asked if she was in any distress. She pointed to her torn shawl, her scanty dress, her crushed, dirty bonnet; then moved under a lamp so as to let the light fall on her stern, pale, but still most beautiful face.

"I look like a comfortable, happy woman, don't I?" she said, with a bitter laugh.

She spoke with a purity of intonation which Isaac had never heard before from other lips than ladies' lips. Her slightest action seemed to have the easy, negligent grace of a thoroughbred woman. Her skin, for all its poverty-stricken paleness, was as delicate as if her life had been passed in the enjoyment of every social comfort that wealth can purchase. Even her small, finely shaped hands, gloveless as they were, had not lost their whiteness.

Little by little, in answer to his question, the sad story of the woman came out. There is no need to relate it here; it is told over and over again in police reports and paragraphs about attempted suicides.

"My name is Rebecca Murdoch," said the woman, as she ended. "I have ninepence left, and I thought of spending it at the chemist's over the way in securing a passage to the other world. Whatever it is, it can't be worse to me than this, so why should I stop here?"

Besides the natural compassion and sadness moved in his heart by what he heard, Isaac felt within him some mysterious influence at work all the time the woman was speaking which utterly confused his ideas and almost deprived him of his powers of speech. All that he could say in answer to her last reckless words was that he would prevent her from attempting her own life, if he followed her about all night to do it. His rough, trembling earnestness seemed to impress her.

"I won't occasion you that trouble," she answered, when he repeated his threat. "You have given me a fancy for living by speaking kindly to me. No need for the mockery of protestations and promises. You may believe me without them. Come to Fuller's Meadow tomorrow at 12, and you will find me alive, to answer for myself. No!—no money. My ninepence will do to get me as good a night's lodging as I want."

She nodded and left him. He made no attempt to follow—he felt no suspicion that she was deceiving him.

"It's strange, but I can't help believing her," he said to himself, and walked away, bewildered, toward home.

On entering the house his mind was still so completely absorbed by its new subject of interest that he took no notice of what his mother was doing when he came in with the bottle of medicine. She had opened her old writing desk in his absence, and was now attentively reading a paper that lay inside it. On every birthday of Isaac's since she had written down the particulars of his dream from his

own lips, she had been accustomed to read that same paper, and ponder over it in private.

The next day he went to Fuller's Meadow.

He had done only right in believing her so implicity. She was there, punctual to a minute, to answer for herself. The last-left faint defenses in Isaac's heart against the fascination which a word or look from her began inscrutably to exercise over him sank down and vanished before her forever on that memorable morning.

When a man previously insensible to the influence of woman forms an attachment in middle life, the instances are rare indeed, let the warning circumstances be what they may, in which he is found capable of freeing himself from the tyranny of the new ruling passion. The charm of being spoken to familiarly, fondly, and gratefully by a woman whose language and manners still retained enough of their early refinement to hint at the high social station that she had lost, would have been a dangerous luxury to a man of Isaac's rank at the age of twenty. But it was far more than that—it was certain ruin to him—now that his heart was opening unworthily to a new influence at that middle time of life when strong feelings of all kinds, once implanted, strike root most stubbornly in a man's moral nature. A few more stolen interviews after that first morning in Fuller's Meadow completed his infatuation. In less than a month from the time when he first met her, Isaac Scatchard had consented to give Rebecca Murdoch a new interest in existence and a chance of recovering the character she had lost by promising to make her his wife.

She had taken possession, not of his passions only, but of his faculties as well. All the mind he had he put into her keeping. She directed him on every point—even instructing him how to break the news of his approaching marriage in the safest manner to his mother.

"If you tell her how you met me and who I am at first," said the cunning woman, "she will move heaven and earth to prevent our marriage. Say I am the sister of one of your fellow-servants—ask her to see me before you go into any more particulars—and leave it to me to do the rest. I mean to make her love me next best to you, Isaac, before she knows anything of who I really am."

The motive of the deceit was sufficient to sanctify it to Isaac. The stratagem proposed relieved him of his one great anxiety, and quieted his uneasy conscience on the subject of his mother. Still, there was something wanting to perfect his happiness, something that he could not realize, something mysteriously untraceable, and yet something that perpetually made itself felt; not when he was absent from Rebecca Murdoch, but, strange to say, when he was actually in her presence! She was kindness itself with him. She never made him feel his inferior capacities and inferior manners. She showed the sweetest anxiety to please him in the smallest trifles; but, in spite of all these attractions, he never could feel quite at his ease with her. At their first meeting there had mingled with his admiration, when he looked in her face, a faint, involuntary feeling of doubt whether that face was entirely strange to him. No after-familiarity had the slightest effect on this inexplicable wearisome uncertainty.

Concealing the truth as he had been directed, he announced his marriage engagement precipitately and confusedly to his mother on the day when he contracted it. Poor Mrs. Scatchard showed her perfect confidence in her son by flinging her arms round his neck, and giving him joy of having found at last, in the sister of one of his fellow-servants, a woman

to comfort and care for him after his mother was gone. She was all eagerness to see the woman of her son's choice, and the next day was fixed for the introduction.

It was a bright sunny morning, and the little cottage parlor was full of light as Mrs. Scatchard, happy and expectant, dressed for the occasion in her Sunday gown, sat waiting for her son and her future daughter-in-law.

Punctual to the appointed time, Isaac hurriedly and nervously led his promised wife into the room. His mother rose to receive her—advanced a few steps smiling—looked Rebecca full in the eyes, and suddenly stopped. Her face, which had been flushed the moment before, turned white in an instant; her eyes lost their expression of softness and kindness, and assumed a blank look of terror; her outstretched hands fell to her sides; and she staggered back a few steps with a low cry to her son.

"Isaac," she whispered, clutching him fast by the arm when he asked alarmedly if she was taken ill, "Isaac, does that woman's face remind you of nothing?"

Before he could answer—before he could look round to where Rebecca stood, astonished and angered by her reception, at the lower end of the room—his mother pointed impatiently to her writing desk, and gave him the key.

"Open it," she said in a quick, breathless whisper.

"What does this mean? Why am I treated as if I had no business here? Does your mother want to insult me?" asked Rebecca, angrily.

"Open it, and give me the paper in the left-hand drawer. Quick, quick, for heaven's sake!" said Mrs. Scatchard, shrinking farther back in terror.

Isaac gave her the paper. She looked it over eagerly for a moment, then followed Rebecca, who was now turning away haughtily to leave the room, and caught her by the shoulder —abruptly raised the long, loose sleeve of her gown, and glanced at her hand and arm. Something like fear began to steal over the angry expression of Rebecca's face as she shook herself free from the old woman's grasp. "Mad!" she said to herself; "and Isaac never told me." With these few words she left the room.

Isaac was hastening after her when his mother stopped his further progress. It wrung his heart to see the misery and terror in her face as she looked at him.

"Light gray eyes," she said, in low, mournful, awe-struck tones, pointing toward the open door; "a droop in the left eyelid; flaxen hair, with a gold-yellow streak in it; white arms, with a down upon them; little lady's hand, with a reddish look under the fingernails—it is the Dream-Woman, Isaac, the Dream-Woman!"

That faint cleaving doubt which he had never been able to shake off in Rebecca Murdoch's presence was fatally set at rest forever. He had seen her face, then, before—seven years before, on his birthday, in the bedroom of the lonely inn.

"Be warned! oh, my son, be warned! Isaac, Isaac, let her go, and do you stop with me!"

Something darkened the parlor window as those words were said. A sudden chill ran through him, and he glanced sidelong at the shadow. Rebecca Murdoch had come back. She was peering in curiously at them over the low window-blind.

"I have promised to marry, Mother," he said, "and marry I must."

The tears came into his eyes as he spoke and dimmed his sight, but he could just discern the fatal face outside moving away again from the window.

His mother's head sank lower.

"Are you faint?" he whispered.

"Broken-hearted, Isaac."

He stooped down and kissed her. The shadow, as he did so, returned to the window, and the fatal face peered in curiously once more.

THREE weeks after that day Isaac and Rebecca were man and wife. All that was hopelessly dogged and stubborn in the man's moral nature seemed to have closed round his fatal passion, and to have fixed it unassailably in his heart.

After that first interview in the cottage parlor no consideration would induce Mrs. Scatchard to see her son's wife again, or even to talk to her when Isaac tried hard to plead her cause after their marriage.

This course of conduct was not in any degree occasioned by a discovery of the degradation in which Rebecca had lived. There was no question of that between mother and son. There was no question of anything but the fearfully exact resemblance between the living, breathing woman and the specter-woman of Isaac's dream.

Rebecca, on her side, neither felt nor expressed the slightest sorrow at the estrangement between herself and her mother-in-law. Isaac, for the sake of peace, had never contradicted her first idea that age and long illness had affected Mrs. Scatchard's mind. He even allowed his wife to upbraid him for not having confessed this to her at the time of their marriage engagement rather than risk anything by hinting at the truth. The sacrifice of his integrity before his one all-mastering delusion seemed but a small thing, and cost his conscience but little after the sacrifices he had already made.

The time of waking from this delusion—the cruel and the rueful time—was not far off. After some quiet months of married life, as the summer was ending, and the year was getting on toward the month of his birthday, Isaac found his wife altering toward him. She grew sullen and contemptuous; she formed acquaintances of the most dangerous kind in defiance of his objections, his entreaties, and his commands; and, worst of all, she learned, ere long, after every fresh difference with her husband, to seek the deadly self-oblivion of drink. Little by little, after the first miserable discovery that his wife was keeping company with drunkards, the shocking certainty forced itself on Isaac that she had grown to be a drunkard herself.

He had been in a sadly desponding state for some time before the occurrence of these domestic calamities. His mother's health, as he could but too plainly discern every time he went to see her at the cottage, was failing fast, and he upbraided himself in secret as the cause of the bodily and mental suffering she endured. When to his remorse on his mother's account was added the shame and misery occasioned by the discovery of his wife's degradation, he sank under the double trial—his face began to alter fast, and he looked what he was, a spirit-broken man.

His mother, still struggling bravely against the illness that was hurrying her to the grave, was the first to notice the sad alteration in him, and the first to hear of his last worst trouble with his wife. She could only weep bitterly on the day when he made his humiliating confession, but on the next occasion when he went to see her she had taken a resolution in reference to his domestic afflictions which astonished and even alarmed him. He found her dressed to go out, and on asking the reason received this answer:

"I am not long for this world, Isaac," she said, "and I shall not feel easy on my deathbed unless I have done my best to the last to make my son happy. I mean to put my own fears and my own feelings out

of the question, and to go with you to your wife, and try what I can do to reclaim her. Give me your arm, Isaac, and let me do the last thing I can in this world to help my son before it is too late."

He could not disobey her, and they walked together slowly toward his miserable home.

It was only 1 o'clock in the afternoon when they reached the cottage where he lived. It was their dinner-hour, and Rebecca was in the kitchen. He was thus able to take his mother quietly into the parlor, and then prepare his wife for the interview. She had fortunately drunk but little at that early hour, and she was less sullen and capricious than usual.

He returned to his mother with his mind tolerably at ease. His wife soon followed him into the parlor, and the meeting between her and Mrs. Scatchard passed off better than he had ventured to anticipate, though he observed with secret apprehension that his mother, resolutely as she controlled herself in other respects, could not look at his wife in the face when she spoke to her. It was a relief to him, when Rebecca began to lay the cloth.

She laid the cloth, brought in the bread-tray, and cut a slice from the loaf for her husband, then returned to the kitchen. At that moment, Isaac, still anxiously watching his mother, was startled by seeing the same ghastly change pass over her face which had altered it so awfully on the morning when Rebecca and she first met. Before he could say a word, she whispered, with a look of horror:

"Take me back—home, home again, Isaac. Come with me, and never go back again."

He was afraid to ask for an explanation; he could only sign to her to be silent, and help her quickly to the door. As they passed the bread-tray on the table she stopped and pointed to it.

"Did you see what your wife cut your bread with?" she asked, in a low whisper.

"No, Mother—I was not noticing—what was it?"

"Look."

He did look. A new clasp-knife, with a buckhorn handle, lay with the loaf in the bread-tray. He stretched out his hand shudderingly to possess himself of it; but, at the same time, there was a noise in the kitchen, and his mother caught at his arm.

"The knife of the dream! Isaac, I'm faint with fear. Take me away before she comes back."

He was hardly able to support her. The visible, tangible reality of the knife struck him with a panic, and utterly destroyed any faint doubts that he might have entertained up to this time in relation to the mysterious dream-warning of nearly eight years before. By a last desperate effort, he summoned self-possession enough to help his mother out of the house—so quietly that the "Dream-Woman" (he thought of her by that name now) did not hear them departing from the kitchen.

"Don't go back, Isaac—don't go back!" implored Mrs. Scatchard, as he turned to go away, after seeing her safely seated again in her own room.

"I must get the knife," he answered, under his breath. His mother tried to stop him again, but he hurried out without another word.

On his return he found that his wife had discovered their secret departure from the house. She had been drinking, and was in a fury of passion. The dinner in the kitchen was flung under the grate; the cloth was off the parlor table. Where was the knife?

Unwisely, he asked for it. She was only too glad of the opportunity of irritating him which the request afforded her. He wanted the knife, did

he? Could he give her a reason why? No! Then he should not have it—not if he went down on his knees to ask for it. Further recrimination elicited the fact that she had bought it a bargain, and that she considered it her own especial property. Isaac saw the uselessness of attempting to get the knife by fair means, and determined to search for it, later in the day, in secret. The search was unsuccessful. Night came on, and he left the house to walk about the streets. He was afraid now to sleep in the same room with her.

THREE weeks passed. Still sullenly enraged with him, she would not give up the knife; and still that fear of sleeping in the same room with her possessed him. He walked about at night, or dozed in the parlor, or sat watching by his mother's bedside. Before the expiration of the first week in the new month his mother died. It wanted then but ten days of her son's birthday. She had longed to live till that anniversary. Isaac was present at her death, and her last words in this world were addressed to him:

"Don't go back, my son, don't go back!"

He was obliged to go back, if it were only to watch his wife. Exasperated to the last degree by his distrust of her, she had revengefully sought to add a sting to his grief, during the last days of his mother's illness, by declaring that she would assert her right to attend the funeral. In spite of all that he could do or say, she held with wicked pertinacity to her word, and on the day appointed for the burial forced herself—inflamed and shameless with drink—into her husband's presence, and declared that she would walk in the funeral procession to his mother's grave.

This last worst outrage, accompanied by all that was most insulting in word and look, maddened him for the moment. He struck her.

The instant the blow was dealt he repented it. She crouched down, silent, in a corner of the room, and eyed him steadily; it was a look that cooled his hot blood and made him tremble. But there was no time now to think of a means of making atonement. Nothing remained but to risk the worst till the funeral was over. There was but one way of making sure of her. He locked her in her bedroom.

When he came back some hours after, he found her sitting, very much altered in look and bearing, by the bedside, with a bundle on her lap. She rose and faced him quietly, and spoke with a strange stillness in her voice, a strange repose in her eyes, a strange composure in her manner.

"No man has ever struck me twice," she said, "and my husband shall have no second opportunity. Set the door open and let me go. From this day forth we see each other no more."

Before he could answer she passed him and left the room. He saw her walk away up the street.

Would she return?

All that night he watched and waited, but no footsteps came near the house. The next night, overpowered by fatigue, he lay down in his clothes, with the door locked, the key on the table, and candle burning. His slumber was not disturbed. The third night, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth passed, and nothing happened. He lay down on the seventh, still in his clothes, still with the door locked, the key on the table, and the candle burning, but easier in his mind.

Easier in his mind, and in perfect health of body when he fell off to sleep. But his rest was disturbed. He woke twice without any sensation of uneasiness. But the third time it was that never-to-be-forgotten shivering of the night at the lonely inn, that dreadful sinking pain at the heart,

which once more aroused him in an instant.

His eyes opened toward the left-hand side of the bed, and there stood——

The Dream-Woman again? No! his wife; the living reality, with the dream-specter's face, in the dream-specter's attitude; the fair arm up, the knife clasped in the delicate white hand.

He sprang upon her almost at the instant of seeing her, and yet not quickly enough to prevent her from hiding the knife. Without a word from him—without a cry from her—he pinioned her in a chair. With one hand he felt up her sleeve, and there, where the Dream-Woman had hidden the knife, his wife had hidden it—the knife with the buckhorn handle, that looked like new.

In the despair of that fearful moment his brain was steady, his heart was calm. He looked at her fixedly with the knife in his hand, and said these last words:

"You have told me we should see each other no more, and you have come back. It is now my turn to go, and to go forever. I say that we shall see each other no more, and *my* word shall not be broken."

He left her, and set forth into the night. There was a bleak wind abroad, and the smell of recent rain was in the air. The distant church-clock chimed the quarter as he walked rapidly beyond the last houses in the suburb. He asked the first policeman he met what hour that was of which the quarter past had just struck.

The man referred sleepily to his watch, and answered, "Two o'clock." Two in the morning. What day of the month was this day that had just begun? He reckoned it up from the date of his mother's funeral. The fatal parallel was complete: it was his birthday!

Had he escaped the mortal peril which his dream foretold? or had he only received a second warning?

As that ominous doubt forced itself on his mind, he stopped, reflected, and turned back again toward the city. He was still resolute to hold to his word, and never to let her see him more; but there was a thought now in his mind of having her watched and followed. The knife was in his possession; the world was before him; but a new distrust of her—a vague, unspeakable, superstitious dread—had come over him.

"I must know where she goes, now she thinks I have left her," he said to himself, as he stole back wearily to the precincts of his home.

It was still dark. He had left the candle burning in the bed-chamber; but when he looked up to the window of the room now, there was no light in it. He crept cautiously to the house door. On going away, he remembered to have closed it; on trying it now, he found it open.

He waited outside, never losing sight of the house, till daylight. Then he ventured indoors—listened, and heard nothing—looked into kitchen, scullery, parlor and found nothing; went up, at last, into the bedroom—it was empty. A picklock lay on the floor, betraying how she had gained entrance in the night, and that was the only trace of her.

Whither had she gone? No mortal tongue could tell him. The darkness had covered her flight; and when the day broke no man could say where the light found her.

Before leaving the house and the town forever, he gave instructions to a friend and neighbor to sell his furniture for anything that it would fetch, and apply the proceeds to employing the police to trace her. The directions were honestly followed, and the money was all spent, but the inquiries led to nothing. The picklock on the bedroom floor remained the one last useless trace of the Dream-Woman.



KEEP WEIRD TALES weird! This advice is constantly received, and in nearly every mail we are reminded that WEIRD TALES is the only magazine of its kind, and that you, the readers, wish it to remain so. You do not want humdrum stories, but want tales such as you can get nowhere else—gooseflesh stories that send cold shivers up your back; stories of creeping horror and dark mystery; ghost-tales, and tales of spirit return; tales of witchcraft and devil-worship, werewolves and vampires, ghouls and familiars. But the most popular stories, the tales which have called forth the greatest flood of congratulatory letters from you, the readers, are the weird-scientific tales—the Jules Verne type of stories, about trips to other planets, weird surgical experiments, stories that forecast the tremendous possibilities of imaginative science, such as *The Metal Monsters* in last month's issue; tales of inventors gone mad with power and threatening the world with destruction by uncanny mechanical devices, as in *The Moon Terror,* which was one of the first stories that established the fame of WEIRD TALES as the herald of this type of imaginative literature. And when these stories combine true weirdness and sound scientific reasoning, and are done with the consummate skill and imaginative insight of Edmond Hamilton or Ray Cummings (both of whom are writing for WEIRD TALES), then we have the perfect weird-scientific stories.

Weird surgery motivates Eli Colter's dramatic story, *The Last Horror,* in this issue; and *Drome* and *The Star Shell* are excellent examples of the weird-scientific tale: one penetrates the very bowels of the Earth and the other takes you to another planet. WEIRD TALES has obtained a rich store of such tales for future issues. We want to keep the magazine up to the standard you desire, and we have therefore obtained the best weird-scientific stories in existence—new stories, every one of them: imaginative thrill-tales that develop the amazing possibilities of science and invention in fascinating style, and yet seem plausible even when they deal with apparently impossible themes. You have particularly admired such tales in this magazine, and we will give you many such in our forthcoming issues—the best stories of this type that are written today.

In the meantime we are grateful for every bit of suggestion and advice that you have given us, and we thank one and all of you for the many letters that come to The Eyrie. If you especially like any particular stories, let us know, and we will try to give you more of equal merit. And if there are any stories that you don't like, any tales that you think should not appear in

this magazine, let us know about those too, for your advice and criticism are invaluable in keeping WEIRD TALES up to the high standard that you desire.

Writes Bill E. Braband, in a letter to The Eyrie: "Do not fear to make your stories too bizarre, or too blood-curdling. That is what I believe we all want. You have a wonderful group of authors, and I for one will say, 'Let their imaginations run wild; that is what we want.' My one criticism is these 'madman' stories that leave the ending to the reader's imagination. They leave a sense of incompleteness which I am positive annoys everyone. Your scientific stories please me most. *The Star Shell* promises several happy hours, and I would certainly like to know the authors personally."

Frederic Youngfelt, of Los Angeles, writes: "I and six of my friends who are readers of your magazine all vote for *The Assault Upon Miracle Castle* as the best story in the November issue, but *The Star Shell* runs a close second and *The City of Spiders* third. I find that quite often your 'filler' stories are the best in the book."

"For the sake of a long-suffering public," writes Peter O'Dactylle, of Detroit, "please don't print any more of Poe's tales, as they leave us with a taste in our mouth like a yellow dog. If *Ligeia* is his best, then God have pity on his worst!"

There have been several raps against *Ligeia,* the reprint story for the November issue, despite the fact that Poe himself considered it his best story. For a year and a half now we have given you one of the famous weird stories in each issue, in our "Weird Story Reprint" series, and we have many noted weird tales of the past in prospect for future issues. How about it, readers: do you wish us to continue printing one reprint story in each issue, or do you wish nothing but new stories, written especially for you?

"One of the greatest of enjoyments to me in this not always so cheerful world," writes Austin De Veux, of East Orange, New Jersey, "is to sit in a large comfy armchair, with several juicy apples near at hand and a comfortable warmth at my back while a raging wind makes vain assaults upon my modern castle and a biting cold fruitlessly applies his sharp gimlet to my loyal walls—to do all this while I peruse with avidity the latest WEIRD TALES."

C. D. Davis, M. D., of Baltimore, writes to The Eyrie: "In November your very best story, in *our* opinion (this is from the boys as well as from myself), is *The Fiend of the Marsh.* It is an entertaining tale, interesting all the time, and very original in its plots and sub-plots. I have seen the author of this story, Major Lewis, many times. He passes our house nearly every day with a collie dog and a little kitten which accompanies him on his daily walks like a dog. Sometimes the little black kitten will ride on the collie's ruff, wabbling comically, for all the world like an unaccustomed rider on the back of a camel. The boys tell me he has a D. S. C., and was brevetted by the French for gallantry in action."

"Give us more spider stories," asks Melvin Hamlin, of Bowling Green, Ohio. "I have just finished *The City of Spiders,* by H. Warner Munn, and it is *great!* Would it be possible to publish *Frankenstein,* by Mrs. Shelley, in W. T.? I am sure many people would enjoy it."

Writes Margaret Harper, of Claymont, Delaware: "Having read the November WEIRD TALES, I consider *The City of Spiders,* by H. Warner Munn, as the best story in this issue. Words fail me in praise of this story. I think it far surpasses any of the author's previous work, except *The Werewolf of Ponkert,* which I consider the best werewolf story you have ever

published. E. Hoffmann Price's tale of devil-worship, *The Peacock's Shadow,* was thrilling, and held me fascinated. Another story that deserves special mention was *The Fiend of the Marsh.* That story certainly gave me the creeps; I confess to glancing warily behind me several times while reading it. *The Ode to Pegasus* gets a vote from me, too; it was short but a gem of genius. The first part of *The Star Shell* was splendid, and I hope the succeeding chapters are as interesting."

Hugh W. Ramsaur, of Brooklyn, writes: "Allow me to express my long-felt appreciation for the work you are doing in WEIRD TALES. I think we may safely assume that it is making permanent contributions to American literature, as well as providing a quantity of imaginative entertainment never before so much needed in this materialistic and pseudo-realistic age. Such writers as Frank Owen, H. P. Lovecraft, Arthur J. Burks and Bassett Morgan are genuine finds of the century. Candidly, I believe that the harassed shade of our patriarch of the weird, Edgar Allan Poe, is resting more easily than it has for years."

Writes L. Ozelle Mathis, of Houston, Texas: "I have been reading your magazine for the past year and take this opportunity to tell you how much I appreciate the sincere worth and good literature I have found between the covers of WEIRD TALES. Perhaps we are all interested in the unusual, the weird, the strange and bizarre of life; and in reading your magazine I have found a sense of reality that others do not contain. For this good element and many others, I commend the magazine and wish for you great success."

The first installment of *The Star Shell,* by George C. Wallis and B. Wallis, wins your votes for favorite story in the November WEIRD TALES; and three stories are in a neck-and-neck race for second place: *The City of Spiders,* by H. Warner Munn; *The Peacock's Shadow,* by E. Hoffmann Price; and *The Fiend of the Marsh,* by Major Robert Emmett Lewis and Martha May Cockrill.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE JANUARY WEIRD TALES ARE:

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Drome

(Continued from page 28)

single mark in the snow. It could have disappeared without doing that. For I knew what had killed poor Rhoda Dillingham.

Supposing, however, that this was indeed the secret, what then? A great deal was explained, but as much remained inexplicable. For where on earth, after reaching the bottom of the crevasse, could the angel and the demon have gone? There was, so far as I could see, no possible way of escape. There was a remarkable overhang of rock there at the end, coming down within a yard or so of the floor. But that was all it was—an overhang. It was not the entrance to any subterranean passage.

Perhaps, if this was indeed the way, we had come too late; perhaps there had been an opening there—an opening that, what with the movement of the ice, was now wholly concealed.

I looked at Milton Rhodes, and on the instant I knew that he too had been noticing all these things. Had the same thoughts come to him also?

"Everything is still now," I observed. "That sound might have been only a fancy."

He nodded slowly. "Or it might been made by the glacier. No telling, though, Bill. It might have been real enough and something else. We mustn't forget that."

"I am not likely to do so. However, what do you make of this?"

"It may be the way to—the way to Drome. And it may be nothing of the kind. They easily could have vanished into this crevasse."

"And then where could they have gone?"

"Probably the way is blocked by the ice now. Who can say? That overhang down there——"

"Is not an entrance," I told him.

"There may, however, be something there. It will take us only a moment to find that out."

He turned forthwith and moved along the edge to that spot where the fissure narrowed and it was filled with snow. I followed. A few moments, and we stood at the bottom.

"Great heaven!" said I as we moved along between those walls of ice.

"What is it, Bill?" queried Milton, pausing and looking back at me.

"Suppose this ice-mass here above were to slip! We'd be flattened between these walls like pancakes!"

Rhodes smiled a little and said he *guessed* we'd be like pancakes all right if that happened. The next moment we were moving forward again, our steel soles grating harshly, though not loudly, upon the glacier-polished bottom.

"You see," said I as we drew near to the end, "the way to Drome does not lie here. Under that overhang there is nothing but rock. There is not even a crack, to say nothing of an entrance."

"It certainly looks like it, Bill. However, it will do no harm to make an examination. That there *is* an entrance we know. And, if it isn't here —well then it must be some place else. And, unless we are too late, we'll search these Rocks of Tamahnowis until we find it."

A few steps, and Rhodes halted, his left hand resting against the rock. He stooped to peer under. I exclaimed and involuntarily seized him by the sleeve.

"There it is again!"

He straightened up, and we stood in an attitude of riveted attention. The place, however, was as silent as the grave.

"I know that I heard something!" I told him.

"Yes; I heard it that time, too,"



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said Milton Rhodes. "Where did it come from?"

I shook my head.

"Maybe one of the sounds that the glacier makes," he proffered.

"It is possible. But——"

"Well?"

"It seemed to come right out of the rocks; but that isn't possible."

"We'll see about that, Bill."

He pressed a button, and the strong rays of his electric light played upon the dark rock and the blue ice. The light in his left hand, he dropped to his knees and looked under. I heard an exclamation and saw him move forward. At that instant a sound brought me up and whirled me around.

My heart was in my throat. I could have sworn that the sound had issued from some point just behind me. But there was nothing to be seen there—only the walls of blue ice and the blue sky above.

"Must have been some sound made by the glacier slipping or something," I told myself.

I turned—to find that Milton Rhodes had vanished!

For a little space I stood staring and wondering, then called in a low voice: "Milton! Oh, Milton!"

No answer.

"Milton!"

Silence still.

"Milton!" I called once more. "Where are you?"

The answer was a scream, a scream that threatened to arrest the coursing blood in my veins—the fearful sound seeming to issue from the very heart of the rock mass there before me.

Thrills and shivers aplenty enliven next month's installment, which describes the hideous encounter with the Angel and her Demon in the caverns of horror under Mount Rainier.

Horror

(Continued from page 46)

into the clean air, and the sunshine of broad day.

"Now I'll light the fuse, and we'll hustle." Straub walked off a few feet to where the black length of a thick fuse protruded from under a rock. "It runs through another old tunnel, a narrow one. I had to crawl on my belly to pull it through. Ballymair couldn't get in at all. Well, here goes."

He knelt and applied his candle flame to the fuse. It caught, sputtered and hissed like a snake.

As one man we turned and began a rapid trot down and across the mountainside. Fifty feet away Straub gave a yell and leaped back toward the tunnel through which we had emerged.

"My check! That check for two million! He's got it in his pocket with a letter waiving identification! You three go ahead. I know the way perfectly. I can beat that fuse before it reaches the dynamite. We can't get to it to cut it. I'll be right out!"

"Come back here!" Remington yelled after him. "It's too late! Come back here!"

But Straub ignored him, mad with the thought of the check in Ballymair's pocket. He sped across the intervening space and darted into the mouth of the hole in the mountainside.

"Come on," Remington commanded. "He'll have to take care of himself. He was nearly as bad as Ballymair, anyway. Shall I give you a lift, Bleeker?"

Bleeker shook his head and broke into a shambling run. Now and then we glanced back to see if Straub was coming, but he didn't again appear. Then suddenly the mountain seemed to shake and heave beneath our feet, and the whole side of it broke off and slithered down. The earth pitched

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and boiled, and the huge green block of trees and ivy surrounding the "box" pitched in and disappeared, like a head of a cabbage swirling to the bottom in a kettle of boiling water. The concussion threw us all flat, earth and rocks falling around in a dusty shower, and when we we again struggled to our feet there was left only a great raw wound in the mountain, and the trees about us stood straight to the sky as though nothing had happened beyond the orderly course of every day.

And you wonder why Remington and Bleeker and I are "queer!" You wonder why we always stick together, and why we've grown so silent. Well, I could show you a big scar on a mountainside that looks more like the remains of a landslide than anything else. And Remington could show you where to dig to find a pile of human bones. And Bleeker could show you some patches of black skin on his thighs. And we could tell you the whole thing over and over again—but you wouldn't believe. So we don't say anything.

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