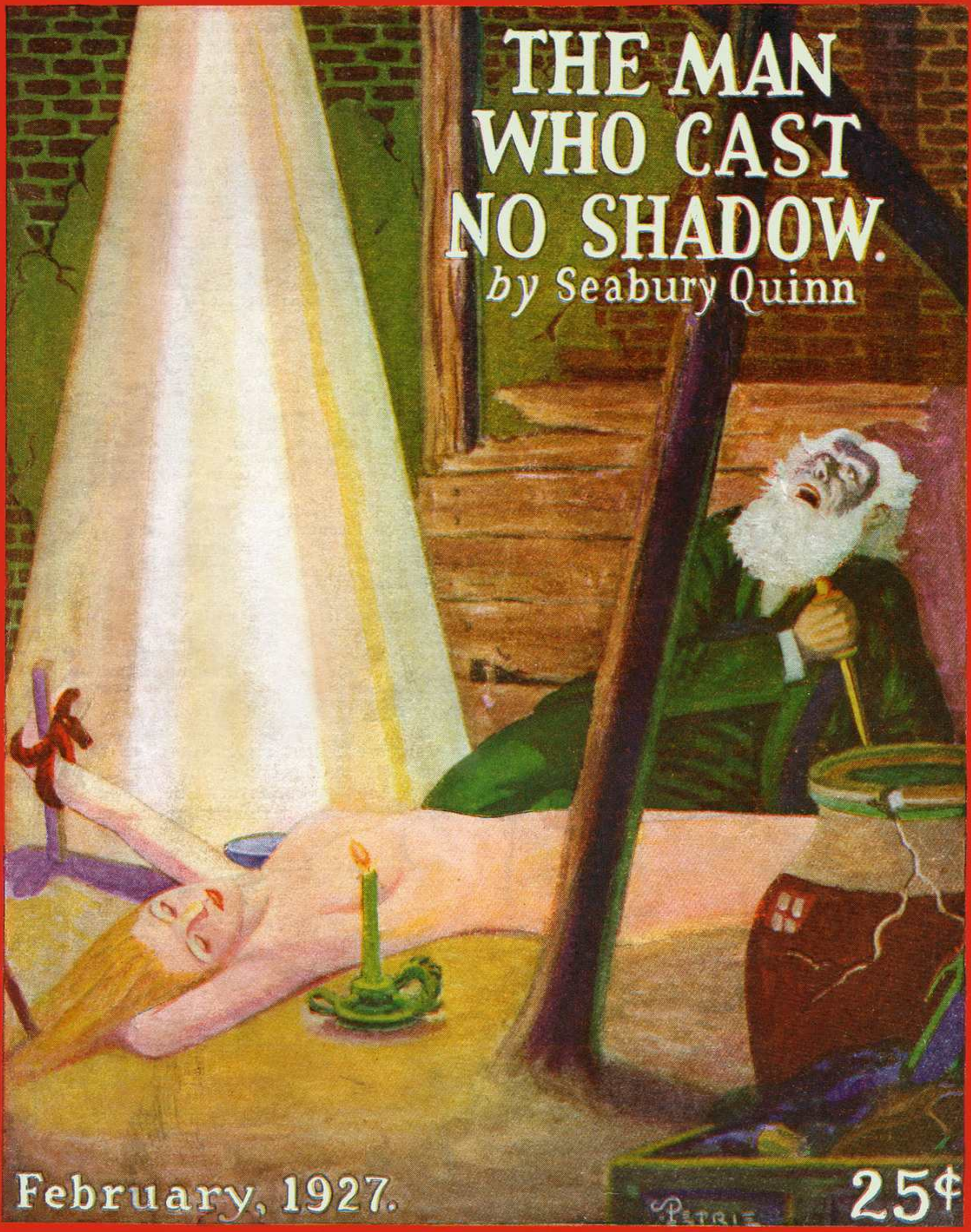
Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine



Edmond Hamilton, John Martin Leahy, G. Appleby Terrill, Bassett Morgan, Victor Rousseau, B. Wallis, and others

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

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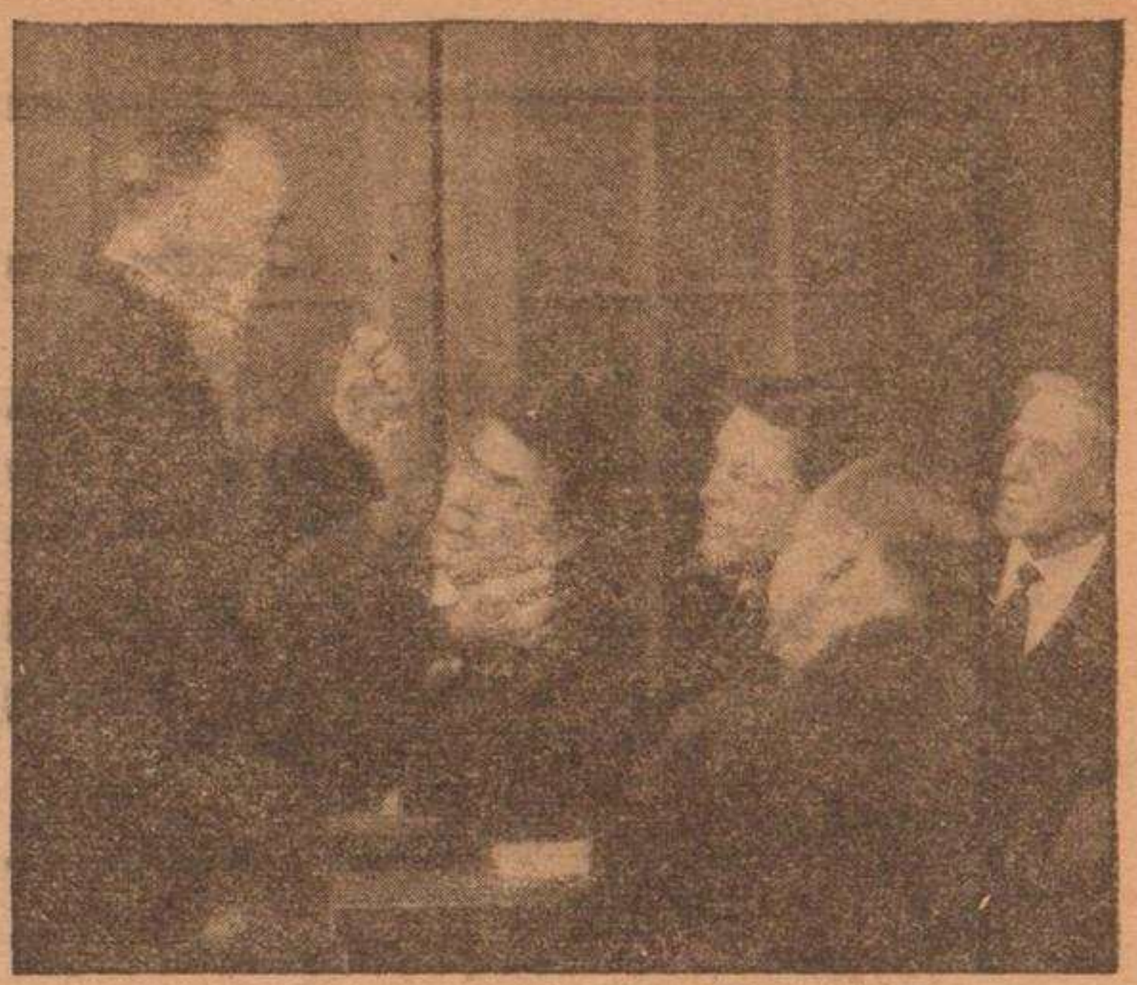
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Suddenly I Broke Away
and Held Them Spellbound

As I review that tense dramatic moment when I electrified that meeting, it all seems strange and weird to me. How had I changed so miraculously in three months from a shy, diffident "yes" man to a dynamic, vigorous he-man? How had I ever dared give my opinion? Three months before nobody ever knew I held opinions!

ALL my life I had been cursed with a shy, timid, self-conscious nature. With only a grammar school education I could never express ideas in a coherent, self-confident way. But one day my eye fell upon a newspaper article which told about a wonderful free book entitled "How to Work Wonders with Words"—a book that was causing widespread comment from coast to coast—a book that was being read not only by millionaires, but by thousands of others. It discussed men like me and explained how we could overcome our handicaps.

At first I was skeptical. I thought these defects were a part of my natural makeup—that I would never be able to overcome them. But some subtle instinct kept prodding me to send for that free book. I lost no time in sending for it, as I was positively amazed at being able to get cost free a book that made absolutely plain the secrets that most successful men have used to win popularity, distinction, money and success.

As the weeks wore on and I absorbed the principles of this remarkable method, I became conscious of new physical and mental energy, a new feeling of aggressiveness, and a resurrected personal power that I never dreamed I possessed. Then came that day in the general meeting when the president called on the assembled department heads and assistants for suggestions on the proposed new policy.

Three months previously, the forces of indecision, timidity, and inability to talk in public would have held me to my seat. But suddenly that new power took possession of me and drove me to my feet. That wonderful 15-minute daily training at home had taught me to forget myself and think only of my subject. Almost automatically the ideas which had heretofore lain dormant in a mental jumble, now issued with a vigor, clearness and enthusiasm that astounded me no less than my boss and associates. And I noticed with silent exultation the rapt, intent look on my audience as my story unfolded itself smoothly and eloquently.

Today the men whom I used to greet deferentially I now meet with an air of cool equality. I am asked to conferences, luncheons, banquets, etc., as a popular after-dinner speaker. And my talents are not confined to business matters, but have made me an interesting conversationalist at social affairs. I am meeting worth-while people, I own a good job, a good home, a good car. I am the happiest man that ever lived.

And I frankly and candidly admit that I owe all of these blessings to that wonderful little free book "How to Work Wonders with Words."

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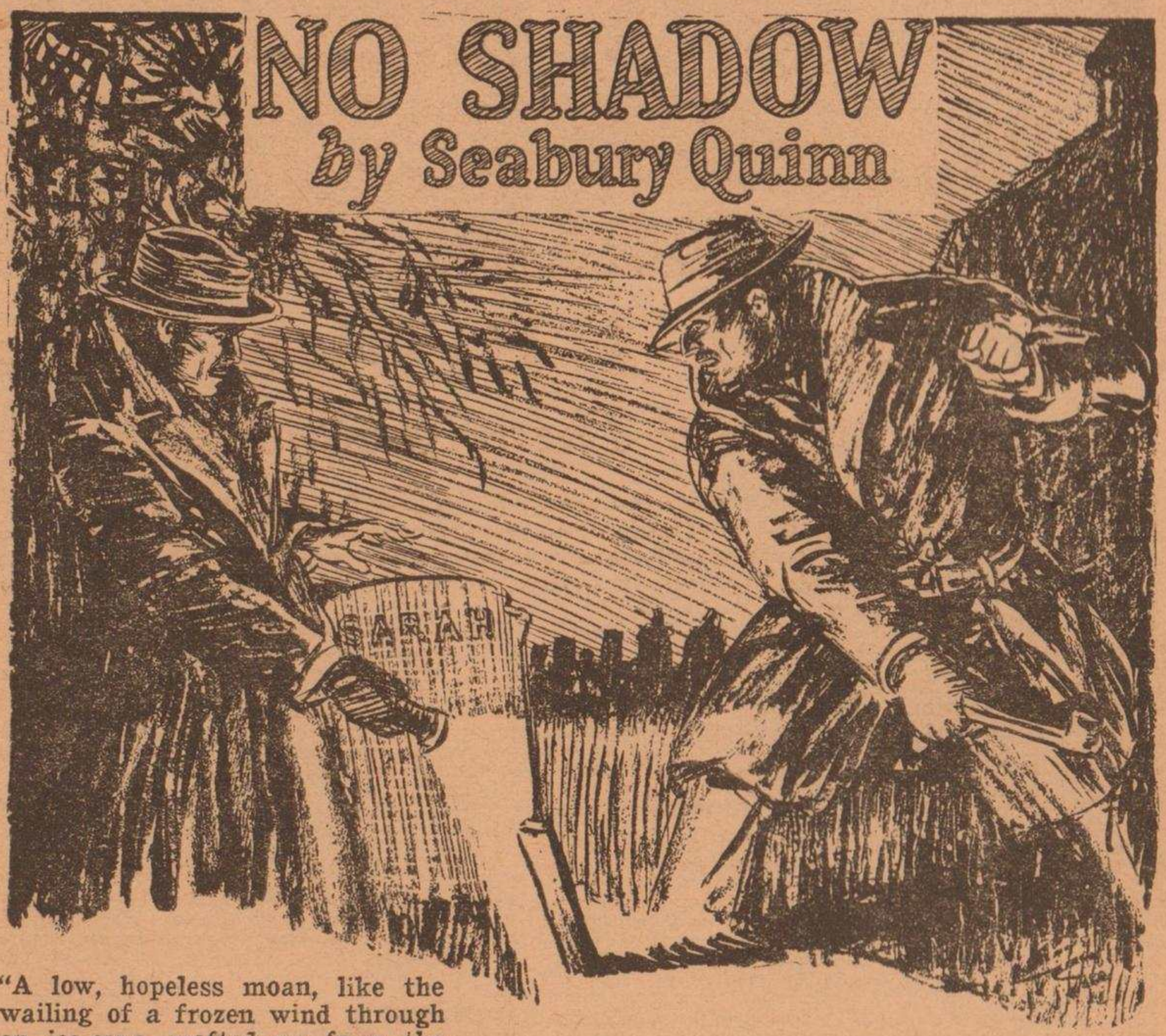
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THE MAN WHO CAST NO SHADOW

by Seabury Quinn



"A low, hopeless moan, like the wailing of a frozen wind through an ice-cave, wafted up from the depths of the grave."

1

"BUT no, my friend," Jules de Grandin shook his sleek, blond head decidedly and grinned across the breakfast table at me, "we will go to this so kind Madame Norman's tea, of a certainty. Yes."

"But hang it all," I replied, giving Mrs. Norman's note an irritable shove with my coffee spoon, "I don't want to go to a confounded tea-party! I'm too old and too sensible to dress up in a tall hat and a long coat and listen to the vaporings of a flock of silly flappers. I——"

"*Mordieu,* hear the savage!" de Grandin chuckled delightedly. "Always does he find excuses for not giving pleasure to others, and always does he frame those excuses to make him more important in his own eyes. Enough of this, Friend Trowbridge; let us go to the kind Madame Norman's party. Always there is something of interest to be seen if one but knows where to look for it."

"H'm, maybe," I replied grudgingly, "but you've better sight than I

think you have if you can find anything worth seeing at an afternoon reception."

THE reception was in full blast when we arrived at the Norman mansion in Tuscarora Avenue that afternoon. The air was heavy with the commingled odors of half a hundred different perfumes and the scent of hot-poured jasmine tea, while the clatter of cup on saucer, laughter, and buzzing conversation filled the wide hall and dining room. In the long double parlors the rugs had been rolled back and young men in frock coats glided over the polished parquetry in company with girls in provocatively short skirts to the belching melody of a saxophone and the drumming rhythm of a piano.

"*Pardieu,*" de Grandin murmured as he viewed the dancers a moment, "your American youth take their pleasures with seriousness, Friend Trowbridge. Behold their faces. Never a smile, never a laugh. They might be recruits on their first parade for all the joy they show—ah!" He broke off abruptly, gazing with startled, almost horrified, eyes after a couple whirling in the mazes of a foxtrot at the farther end of the room. "*Nom d'un fromage,*" he murmured softly to himself, "this matter will bear investigating, I think!"

"Eh, what's that?" I asked, piloting him toward our hostess.

"Nothing; nothing, I do assure you," he answered as we greeted Mrs. Norman and passed toward the dining room. But I noticed his round, blue eyes strayed more than once toward the parlors as we drank our tea and exchanged amiable nothings with a pair of elderly ladies.

"Pardon," de Grandin bowed stiffly from the hips to his conversational partner and turned toward the rear drawing room, "there is a gentlemen here I desire to meet, if you do not mind—that tall, distinguished one, with the young girl in pink."

"Oh, I guess you mean Count Czerny," a young man laden with an ice in one hand and a glass of non-Volstead punch in the other paused on his way from the dining room. "He's a rare bird, all right. I knew him back in '13 when the Balkan Allies were polishing off the Turks. Queer-lookin' duck, ain't he? First-class fightin' man, though. Why, I saw him lead a bayonet charge right into the Turkish lines one day, and when he'd shot his pistol empty he went at the enemy with his teeth! Yes, sir, he grabbed a Turk with both hands and bit his throat out, hanged if he didn't."

"Czerny," de Grandin repeated musingly. "He is a Pole, perhaps?"

His informant laughed a bit shamefacedly. "Can't say," he confessed. "The Serbs weren't asking embarrassing questions about volunteers' nationalities those days, and it wasn't considered healthful for any of us to do so, either. I got the impression he was a Hungarian refugee from Austrian vengeance; but that's only hearsay. Come along, I'll introduce you, if you wish."

I saw de Grandin clasp hands with the foreigner and stand talking with him for a time, and, in spite of myself, I could not forbear a smile at the contrast they made.

The Frenchman was a bare five feet four inches in height, slender as a girl, and, like a girl, possessed of almost laughably small hands and feet. His light hair and fair skin, coupled with his trimly waxed diminutive blond mustache and round, unwinking blue eyes, gave him a curiously misleading appearance of mildness. His companion was at least six feet tall, swarthy-skinned and black-haired, with bristling black mustaches and fierce, slate-gray eyes set beneath beetling black brows. His large nose was like the predatory beak of some

bird of prey, and the tilt of his long, pointed jaw bore out the uncompromising ferocity of the rest of his visage. Across his left cheek, extending upward over the temple and into his hair, was a knife- or saber-scar, a streak of white showing the trail of the steel in his scalp, and shining like silver inlaid in onyx against the blue-black of his smoothly pomaded locks.

What they said was, of course, beyond reach of my ears, but I saw de Grandin's quick, impish smile flicker across his keen face more than once, to be answered by a slow, languorous smile on the other's dark countenance.

At length the count bowed formally to my friend and whirled away with a wisp of a girl, while de Grandin returned to me. At the door he paused a moment, inclining his shoulders in a salute as a couple of debutantes brushed past him. Something—I know not what—drew my attention to the tall foreigner a moment, and a sudden chill rippled up my spine at what I saw. Above the georgette-clad shoulder of his dancing partner the count's slate-gray eyes were fixed on de Grandin's trim back, and in them I read all the cold, malevolent fury with which a caged tiger regards its keeper as he passes the bars.

"What on earth did you say to that fellow?" I asked as the little Frenchman rejoined me. "He looked as if he would like to murder you."

"Ha?" he gave a questioning, single-syllabled laugh. "Did he so? Obey the noble Washington's injunction, and avoid foreign entanglements, Friend Trowbridge; it is better so, I think."

"But look here," I began, nettled by his manner, "what——"

"*Non, non,*" he interrupted, "you must be advised by me, my friend. I think it would be better if we dismissed the incident from our minds. But stay—perhaps you had better meet that gentleman, after all. I will have the good Madame Norman introduce you."

More puzzled than ever, I followed him to our hostess and waited while he requested her to present me to the count.

In a lull in the dancing she complied with his request, and the foreigner acknowledged the introduction with a brief handclasp and an almost churlish nod, then turned his back on me, continuing an animated conversation with the large-eyed young woman in an abbreviated party frock.

"And did you shake his hand?" de Grandin asked as we descended the Normans' steps to my waiting car.

"Yes, of course," I replied.

"Ah? Tell me, my friend, did you notice anything—ah—peculiar, in his grip?"

"H'm." I wrinkled my brow a moment in concentrated thought. "Yes, I believe I did."

"So? What was it?"

"Hanged if I can say, exactly," I admitted, "but—well, it seemed—this sounds absurd, I know—but it seemed as though his hand had two backs—no palm at all—if that means anything to you."

"It means much, my friend; it means a very great deal," he answered with such a solemn nod that I burst into a fit of laughter. "Believe me, it means much more than you suspect."

IT MUST have been some two weeks later that I chanced to remark to de Grandin, "I saw your friend, Count Czerny, in New York yesterday."

"Indeed?" he answered with what seemed like more than necessary interest. "And how did he impress you at the time?"

"Oh, I just happened to pass him in Fifth Avenue," I replied. "I'd been up to see an acquaintance in Fifty-ninth Street and was turning

into the avenue when I saw him driving away from the Plaza. He was with some ladies."

"No doubt," de Grandin responded dryly. "Did you notice him particularly?"

"Can't say that I did, especially," I answered, "but it seems to me he looked older than the day we met him at Mrs. Norman's."

"Yes?" the Frenchman leaned forward eagerly. "Older, do you say? *Parbleu,* this is of interest; I suspected as much!"

"Why——" I began, but he turned away with an impatient shrug. "Pah!" he exclaimed petulantly. "Friend Trowbridge, I fear Jules de Grandin is a fool, he entertains all sorts of strange notions."

I had known the little Frenchman long enough to realize that he was as full of moods as a prima donna, but his erratic, unrelated remarks were getting on my nerves. "See here, de Grandin," I began testily, "what's all this nonsense——"

The sudden shrill clatter of my office telephone bell cut me short. "Dr. Trowbridge," an agitated voice asked over the wire, "can you come right over, please? This is Mrs. Norman speaking."

"Yes, of course," I answered, reaching for my medicine case; "what is it—who's ill?"

"It's—it's Guy Eckhart, he's been taken with a fainting fit, and we don't seem to be able to rouse him."

"Very well," I promised, "Dr. de Grandin and I will be right over.

"Come on, de Grandin," I called as I shoved my hat down over my ears and shrugged into my overcoat, "one of Mrs. Norman's house guests has been taken ill; I told her we were coming."

"*Mais oui,*" he agreed, hurrying into his outdoors clothes. "Is it a man or a woman, this sick one?"

"It's a man," I replied, "Guy Eckhart."

"A *man,*" he echoed incredulously. "A *man,* do you say? No, no, my friend, that is not likely."

"Likely or not," I rejoined sharply, "Mrs. Norman says he's been seized with a fainting fit, and I give the lady credit for knowing what she's talking about."

"*Eh bien,*" he drummed nervously on the cushions of the automobile seat, "perhaps Jules de Grandin really is a fool. After all, it is not impossible."

"It certainly isn't," I agreed fervently to myself as I set the car in motion.

YOUNG Eckhart had recovered consciousness when we arrived, but looked like a man just emerging from a lingering fever. Attempts to get a statement from him met with no response, for he replied slowly, almost incoherently, and seemed to have no idea concerning the cause of his illness.

Mrs. Norman was little more specific. "My son Ferdinand found him lying on the floor of his bath with the shower going and the window wide open, just before dinner," she explained. "He was totally unconscious, and remained so till just a few minutes ago."

"Ha, is it so?" de Grandin murmured half heedlessly, as he made a rapid inspection of the patient.

"Friend Trowbridge," he called me to the window, "what do you make of these objective symptoms: a soft, frequent pulse, a fluttering heart, suffused eyes, a hot, dry skin and a flushed, hectic face?"

"Sounds like an arterial hemorrhage," I answered promptly, "but there's been no trace of blood on the boy's floor, nor any evidence of a stain on his clothing. Sure you've checked the signs over?"

"Absolutely," he replied with a vigorous double nod. Then to the

young man: "Now, *mon enfant,* we shall inspect you, if you please."

Quickly he examined the boy's face, scalp, throat, wrists and calves, finding no evidence of even a pin-prick, let alone a wound capable of causing syncope.

"*Mon Dieu,* this is strange," he muttered; "of a surety, it has the queerness of the devil! Perhaps the bleeding is internal, but—ah, *regard-ez vous,* Friend Trowbridge!"

He had turned down the collar of the youngster's pajama jacket, more in idle routine than in hope of discovering anything tangible, but the livid spot to which he pointed seemed the key to our mystery's outer door. Against the smooth, white flesh of the young man's left breast there showed a red, angry patch, such as might have resulted from a vacuum cup being held some time against the skin, and in the center of the discoloration was a double row of tiny punctures scarcely larger than needle-pricks, arranged in horizontal divergent arcs, like a pair of parentheses laid sidewise.

"You see?" he asked simply, as though the queer, blood-infused spot explained everything.

"But he couldn't have bled much through that," I protested. "Why, the man seems almost drained dry, and these wounds wouldn't have yielded more than a cubic centimeter of blood, at most."

He nodded gravely. "Blood is not entirely colloidal, my friend," he responded. "It will penetrate the tissues to some extent, especially if sufficient force is applied."

"But it would have required a powerful suction——" I replied, when his rejoinder cut me short:

"Ha, you have said it, my friend. Suction—that is the word!"

"But what could have sucked a man's blood like this?" I was in a near-stupor of mystification.

"What, indeed?" he replied gravely. "That is for us to find out. Meantime, we are here as physicians. A quarter-grain morphine injection is indicated here, I think. You will adminster the dose; I have no license in America."

WHEN I returned from my round of afternoon calls next day I found de Grandin seated on my front steps in close conference with Indian John.

Indian John was a town character of doubtful lineage who performed odd jobs of snow shoveling, furnace tending and grass cutting, according to season, and interspersed his manual labors with brief incursions into the mercantile field when he peddled fresh vegetables from door to door. He also peddled neighborhood gossip and retailed local lore to all who would listen, his claim to being a hundred years old giving him the standing of an indisputable authority in all matters antedating living memory.

"*Pardieu,* but you have told me much, *mon vieux,*" de Grandin declared as I came up the porch steps. He handed the old rascal a handful of silver and rose to accompany me into the house.

"Friend Trowbridge," he accused as we finished dinner that night, "you had not told me that this town grew up on the site of an early Swedish settlement."

"Never knew you wanted to know," I defended with a grin.

"You know the ancient Swedish church, perhaps," he persisted.

"Yes, that's old Christ Church," I answered. "It's down in the east end of town; don't suppose it has a hundred communicants today. Our population has made some big changes, both in complexion and creed, since the days when the Dutch and Swedes fought for possession of New Jersey."

"You will drive me to that church, right away, at once, immediately?" he demanded eagerly.

"I guess so," I agreed. "What's the matter now; Indian John been telling you a lot of fairy-tales?"

"Perhaps," he replied, regarding me with one of his steady, unwinking stares. "Not all fairy-tales are pleasant, you know. Do you recall those of *Chaperon Rouge*—how do you say it, Red Riding Hood?—and Bluebeard?"

"Huh!" I scoffed; "they're both as true as any of John's stories, I'll bet."

"Undoubtlessly," he agreed with a quick nod. "The story of Bluebeard, for instance, is unfortunately a very true tale indeed. But come, let us hasten; I would see that church tonight, if I may."

CHRIST CHURCH, the old Swedish place of worship, was a combined demonstration of how firmly adz-hewn pine and walnut can resist the ravages of time and how nearly three hundred years of weather can demolish any structure erected by man. Its rough-painted walls and short, firm-based spire shone ghostly and pallid in the early spring moonlight, and the cluster of broken and weather-worn tombstones which staggered up from its unkempt burying ground were like soiled white chicks seeking shelter from a soiled white hen.

Dismounting from my car at the wicket gate of the churchyard, we made our way over the level graves, I in a maze of wonderment, de Grandin with an eagerness almost childish. Occasionally he flashed the beam from his electric torch on some monument of an early settler, bent to decipher the worn inscription, then turned away with a sigh of disappointment.

I paused to light a cigar, but dropped my half-burned match in astonishment as my companion gave vent to a cry of excited pleasure. "*Triomphe!*" he exclaimed delightedly. "Come and behold, Friend Trowbridge. Thus far your lying friend, the Indian man, has told the truth. *Regardez!*"

He was standing beside an old, weather-gnawed tombstone, once marble, perhaps, but appearing more like brown sandstone under the ray of his flashlight. Across its upper end was deeply cut the one word:

SARAH

while below the name appeared a verse of half-obliterated doggerel:

Let nonne difturb her deathleffe fleepe
Abote ye tombe wilde garlick keepe
For if fhee wake much woe will boaft
Prayfe Faither, Sonne & Holie Goaft.

"Did you bring me out here to study the orthographical eccentricities of the early settlers?" I demanded in disgust.

"Ah bah!" he returned. "Let us consult the *ecclésiastique*. He, perhaps, will ask no fool's questions."

"No, *you'll* do that," I answered tartly as we knocked at the rectory door.

"Pardon, *Monsieur*," de Grandin apologized as the white-haired old minister appeared in answer to our summons, "we do not wish to disturb you thus, but there is a matter of great import on which we would consult you. I would that you tell us what you can, if anything, concerning a certain grave in your churchyard. A grave marked 'Sarah,' if you please."

"Why"—the elderly cleric was plainly taken aback—"I don't think there is anything I can tell you about it, sir. There is some mention in the early parish records, I believe, of a woman believed to have been a murderess being buried in that grave, but it seems the poor creature was more sinned against than sinning. Several children in the neighborhood

died mysteriously—some epidemic the ignorant physicians failed to understand, no doubt—and Sarah, whatever the poor woman's surname may have been, was accused of killing them by witchcraft. At any rate, one of the bereft mothers took vengeance into her own hands, and strangled poor Sarah with a noose of well-rope. The witchcraft belief must have been quite prevalent, too, for there is some nonsense verse on the tombstone concerning her 'deathless sleep' and an allusion to her waking from it; also some mention of wild garlic being planted about her.''

He laughed somewhat ruefully. ''I wish they hadn't said that,'' he added, ''for, do you know, there are garlic shoots growing about that grave to this very day. Old Christian, our sexton, declares that he can't get rid of it, no matter how much he grubs it up. It spreads to the surrounding lawn, too,'' he added sadly.

''*Cordieu!*'' de Grandin gasped. ''This is of the importance, sir!''

The old man smiled gently at the little Frenchman's impetuosity.

''It's an odd thing,'' he commented, ''there was another gentleman asking about that same tomb a few weeks ago; a—pardon the expression—a foreigner.''

''So?'' de Grandin's little, waxed mustache twitched like the whiskers of a nervous tom-cat. ''A foreigner, do you say? A tall, rawboned, fleshless living skeleton of a man with a scar on his face and a white streak in his hair?''

''I wouldn't be quite so severe in my description,'' the other answered with a smile. ''He certainly was a thin gentleman, and I believe he had a scar on his face, too, though I can't be certain of that, he was so very wrinkled. No, his hair was entirely white, there was no white streak in it, sir. In fact, I should have said he was very advanced in age, judging from his hair and face and the manner in which he walked. He seemed very weak and feeble. It was really quite pitiable.''

''*Sacré nom d'un fromage vert!*'' de Grandin almost snarled. ''Pitiable, do you say, *Monsieur? Pardieu,* it is damnable, nothing less!''

He bowed to the clergyman and turned to me. ''Come, Friend Trowbridge, come away,'' he cried. ''We must go to Madame Norman's at once, right away, immediately.''

''WHAT'S behind all this mystery?'' I demanded as we left the parsonage door.

He elevated his slender shoulders in an eloquent shrug. ''I only wish I knew,'' he replied. ''Someone is working the devil's business, of that I am sure; but what the game is, or what the next move will be, only the good God can tell, my friend.''

I turned the car through Tunlaw Street to effect a short-cut, and as we drove past an Italian green grocer's, de Grandin seized my arm. ''Stop a moment, Friend Trowbridge,'' he asked, ''I would make a purchase at this shop.

''We desire some fresh garlic,'' he informed the proprietor as we entered the little store, ''a considerable amount, if you have it.''

The Italian spread his hands in a deprecating gesture. ''We have it not, *Signor,*'' he declared. ''It was only yesterday morning that we sold our entire supply.'' His little black eyes snapped happily at the memory of an unexpected bargain.

''Eh, what is this?'' de Grandin demanded. ''Do you say you sold your supply? How is that?''

''I know not,'' the other replied. ''Yesterday morning a rich gentleman came to my shop in an automobile, and called me from my store. He desired all the garlic I had in stock—at my own price, *Signor,* and at once. I was to deliver it to his

address in Rupleysville the same day.''

''Ah?'' de Grandin's face assumed the expression of a cross-word fiend as he begins to see the solution of his puzzle. ''And this liberal purchaser, what did he look like?''

The Italian showed his white, even teeth in a wide grin. ''It was funnay,'' he confessed. ''He did not look like one of our people, nor like one who would eat much garlic. He was old, very old and thin, with a much-wrinkled face and white hair, he——''

''*Nom d'un chat!*'' the Frenchman cried, then burst into a flood of torrential Italian.

The shopkeeper listened at first with suspicion, then incredulity, finally in abject terror. ''No, no,'' he exclaimed. ''No, *Signor; santissima Madonna,* you do make the joke!''

''Do I so?'' de Grandin replied. ''Wait and see, foolish one.''

''*Santo Dio* forbid!'' The other crossed himself piously, then bent his thumb across his palm, circling it with his second and third fingers and extending the fore and little fingers in the form of a pair of horns.

The Frenchman turned toward the waiting car with a grunt of inarticulate disgust.

''What now?'' I asked as we got under way once more; ''what did that man make the sign of the evil eye for, de Grandin?''

''Later, my friend; I will tell you later,'' he answered. ''You would but laugh if I told you what I suspect. He is of the Latin blood, and can appreciate my fears.'' Nor would he utter another word till we reached the Norman house.

''DR. TROWBRIDGE—Dr. de Grandin!'' Mrs. Norman met us in the hall; ''you must have heard my prayers; I've been 'phoning your office for the last hour, and they said you were out and couldn't be reached.''

''What's up?'' I asked.

''It's Mr. Eckhart again. He's been seized with another fainting fit. He seemed so well this afternoon, and I sent a big dinner up to him at 8 o'clock, but when the maid went in, she found him unconscious, and she declares she saw something in his room——''

''Ha?'' de Grandin interrupted. ''Where is she, this servant? I would speak with her.''

''Wait a moment,'' Mrs. Norman answered; ''I'll send for her.''

The girl, an ungainly young Southern negress, came into the front hall, sullen dissatisfaction written large upon her black face.

''Now, then,'' de Grandin bent his steady, unwinking gaze on her, ''what is it you say about seeing someone in the young Monsieur Eckhart's room, *hein?*''

''Ah *did* see sumpin', too,'' the girl replied stubbornly. ''Ah don' care *who* says Ah didn't see nothin', Ah says Ah *did.* Ah'd just toted a tray o' vittles up to Mistuh Eckhart's room, an' when Ah opened de do', dere wuz a woman—dere wuz a woman—yas, sar, a skinny, black-eyed *white woman*—a-bendin' ober 'um an'—an'——''

''And what, if you please?'' de Grandin asked breathlessly.

''*A-bitin' 'um!*'' the girl replied defiantly. ''Ah don' care *whut* Mis' Norman says, she *wuz* a-bitin' 'um. Ah seen her. Ah knows whut she wuz. Ah done hyeah tell erbout dat ol' Sarah woman what come up out 'er grave wid a long rope erbout her neck and go 'round bitin' folks. Yas, sar; an' she *wuz* a-bitin' 'um, too. Ah *seen* her!''

''Nonsense,'' Mrs. Norman commented in an annoyed whisper over de Grandin's shoulder.

''*Grand Dieu,* is it so?'' de Grandin explained, and turning abruptly,

leaped up the stairs toward the sick man's room, two steps at a time.

"See, see, Friend Trowbridge," he ordered fiercely when I joined him at the patient's bedside. "Behold, it is the mark!" Turning back Eckhart's pajama collar, he displayed two incised horizontal arcs on the young man's flesh. There was no room for dispute, they were undoubtedly *the marks of human teeth*, and from the fresh wounds the blood was flowing freely.

As quickly as possible we staunched the flow and applied restoratives to the patient, both of us working in silence, for my brain was too much in a whirl to permit the formation of intelligent questions, while de Grandin remained dumb as an oyster.

"Now," he ordered as we completed our ministrations, "we must back to that cemetery, Friend Trowbridge, and, once there, we must do the thing which must be done!"

"What the devil's that?" I asked as we left the sickroom.

"*Non, non,* you shall see," he promised as we entered my car and drove down the street.

"Quick, the crank-handle," he demanded as we descended from the car at the cemetery gate, "it will make a serviceable hammer." He was prying a hemlock paling from the graveyard fence as he spoke.

We crossed the unkempt cemetery lawn again, and finally paused beside the tombstone of the unknown Sarah.

"Attend me, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin commanded, "hold the searchlight, if you please." He pressed his pocket flash into my hand. "Now——" He knelt beside the grave, pointing the stick he had wrenched from the fence straight downward into the turf. With the crank of my motor he began hammering the wood into the earth.

Farther and farther the rough stake sank into the sod, de Grandin's blows falling faster and faster as the wood drove home. Finally, when there was less than six inches of the wicket projecting from the grave's top, he raised the iron high over his head and drove downward with all his might.

The short hair at the back of my neck suddenly started upward, and little thrills of horripilation chased each other up my spine as the wood sank suddenly, as though driven from clay into sand, and a low hopeless moan, like the wailing of a frozen wind through an ice-cave, wafted up to us *from the depths of the grave.*

"Good God, what's that?" I asked, aghast.

For answer he leaned forward, seized the stake in both hands and drew suddenly up on it. At his second tug the wood came away. "See," he ordered curtly, flashing the pocket lamp on the tip of the stave. For the distance of a foot or so from its pointed end the wood was stained a deep, dull red. *It was wet with blood.*

"And now forever," he hissed between his teeth, driving the wood into the grave once more, and sinking it a full foot below the surface of the grass by thrusting the crank-handle into the earth. "Come, Friend Trowbridge, we have done a good work this night. I doubt not the young Eckhart will soon recover from his malady."

His assumption was justified. Eckhart's condition improved steadily. Within a week, save for a slight pallor, he was, to all appearances, as well as ever.

The pressure of the usual early crop of influenza and pneumonia kept me busily on my rounds, and I gradually gave up hope of getting any information from de Grandin, for a shrug of the shoulders was all the answer he vouchsafed to my questions. I relegated Eckhart's inexplicable hemorrhages and the blood-

stained stake to the limbo of never-to-be-solved mysteries. But——

2

"Good mornin', gentlemen," Detective Sergeant Costello greeted as he followed Nora, my household factotum, into the breakfast room, "it's sorry I am to be disturbin' your meal, but there's a little case puzzlin' th' department that I'd like to talk over with Dr. de Grandin, if you don't mind."

He looked expectantly at the little Frenchman as he finished speaking, his lips parted to launch upon a detailed description of the case.

"*Parbleu,*" de Grandin laughed, "it is fortunate for me that I have completed my breakfast, *cher Sergent,* for a riddle of crime detection is to me like a red rag to a bullfrog —I must needs snap at it, whether I have been fed or no. Speak on, my friend, I beseech you; I am like Balaam's ass, all ears."

The big Irishman seated himself on the extreme edge of one of my Heppelwhite chairs and gazed deprecatingly at the derby hat he held firmly between his knees. "It's like this," he began. " 'Tis one o' them mysterious disappearance cases, gentlemen, an' whilst I'm thinkin' th' young lady knows exactly where she's at an' why she's there, I hate to tell her folks about it.

"All th' high-hat folks ain't like you two gentlemen, askin' your pardon, sors—they mostly seems to think that a harness bull's unyform is sumpin' like a livery—like a shofur's or a footman's or sumpin', an' that a plain-clothes man is just a sort o' inferior servant. They don't give th' police credit for no brains, y'see, an' when one o' their darters gits giddy an' runs off th' reservation, if we tells 'em th' gurrl's run away of her own free will an' accord they say we're a lot o' lazy, good-fer-nothin' bums who are tryin' to dodge our laygitimate jooties be castin' mud on th' young ladies' char-ac-ters, d'ye see? So, when this Miss Esther Norman disappears in broad daylight—leastwise, in th' twilight—o' th' day before her dance, we suspects right away that th' gurrl's gone her own ways into th' best o' intentions, y'see; but we dasn't tell her folks as much, or they'll be hollerin' to th' commissioner fer to git a bran' new set o' detectives down to headquarters, so they will.

"Now, mind ye, I'm not sayin' th' young lady *mightn't* o' been kidnaped, y'understand, gentlemen, but I do be sayin' 'tis most unlikely. I've been on th' force, man an' boy, in unyform and in plain clothes fer th' last twenty-five years, an' th' number of laygitimate kidnapin's o' young women over ten years of age I've seen can be counted on th' little finger o' me left hand, an' I ain't got none there, at all, at all."

He held the member up for our inspection, revealing the fact that the little finger had been amputated close to the knuckle.

De Grandin, elbows on the table, pointed chin cupped in his hands, was puffing furiously at a vile-smelling French cigarette, alternately sucking down great drafts of its acrid smoke and expelling clouds of fumes in double jets from his narrow, aristocratic nostrils.

"What is it you say?" he demanded, removing the cigarette from his lips. "Is it the so lovely Mademoiselle Esther, daughter of that kind Madame Tuscarora Avenue Norman, who is missing?"

"Yes, sor," Costello answered, "'tis th' same young lady's flew the coop, accordin' to my way o' thinkin'."

"*Mordieu!*" the Frenchman gave the ends of his blond mustache a savage twist; "you intrigue me, my

friend. Say on, how did it happen, and when?"

" 'Twas about midnight last night th' alarm came into headquarters," the detective replied. "Accordin' to th' facts as we have 'em, th' young lady went downtown in th' Norman car to do some errands. We've checked her movements up, an' here they are."

He drew a black-leather memorandum book from his pocket and consulted it.

"At 2:45 or thereabouts, she left th' house, arrivin' at th' Ocean Trust Company at 2:55, five minutes before th' instytootion closed for th' day. She drew out three hundred an' thirty dollars an' sixty-five cents, an' left th' bank, goin' to Madame Gerard's, where she tried on a party dress for th' dance which was bein' given at her house that night.

"She left Madame Gerard's at 4:02, leavin' orders for th' dress to be delivered to her house immeejately, an' dismissed her sho-fur at th' corner o' Dean an' Tunlaw Streets, sayin' she was goin' to deliver some vegytables an' what-not to a pore family she an' some o' her friends was keepin' till their old man gits let out o' jail—'twas meself an' Clancey, me buddy, that put him there when we caught him red-handed in a job o' housebreakin', too.

"Well, to return to th' young lady, she stopped at Pete Bacigalupo's store in Tunlaw Street an' bought a basket o' fruit an' canned things, at 4:30, an'——" He clamped his long-suffering derby between his knees and spread his hands emptily before us.

"Yes, 'and'——?" de Grandin prompted, dropping the glowing end of his cigarette into his coffee cup.

"An' that's all," responded the Irishman. "She just walked off, an' no one ain't seen her since, sor."

"But—*cordieu!*—such things do not occur, my friend," de Grandin protested. "Somewhere you have overlooked a factor in this puzzle. You say no one saw her later? Have you nothing whatever to add to the tale?"

"Well"—the detective grinned at him—"there are one or two little incidents, but they ain't of any importance in th' case, as far as I can see. Just as she left Pete's store an old gink tried to 'make' her, but she give him th' air, an' he went off an' didn't bother her no more.

"I'd a' liked to seen th' old boy, at that. Day before yesterday there was an old felly hangin' 'round by the silk mills, annoyin' th' gurrls as they come off from work. Clancey, me mate, saw 'im an' started to take 'im up, an' darned if th' old rummy wasn't strong as a bull. D'ye know, he broke clean away from Clancey an' darn near broke his arm, in th' bargain? Belike 'twas th' same man accosted Miss Norman outside Pete's store."

"Ah?" de Grandin's slender, white fingers began beating a devil's tattoo on the tablecloth. "And who was it saw this old man annoy the lady, *hein?*"

Costello grinned widely, " 'Twas Pete Bacigalupo himself, sor," he answered. "Pete swore he recognized th' old geezer as havin' come to his store a month or so ago in an autymobile an bought up all his entire stock o' garlic. Huh! Th' fool dago said he wouldn't a gone after th felly' for a hundred dollars—said he had th' pink-eye, or th' evil eye, or some such thing. Them wops sure do burn me up!"

"*Dieu et le diable!*" de Grandin leaped up, oversetting his chair in his mad haste. "And we sit here like three *poissons d'avril*—like poor fish—while *he* works his devilish will on her! Quick, sergeant! Quick, Friend Trowbridge! Your hats, your coats; the motor! Oh, make haste,

my friends, fly, fly, I implore you; even now it may be too late!"

As though all the fiends of pandemonium were at his heels he raced from the breakfast room, up the stairs, three steps at a stride, and down the upper hall toward his bedroom. Nor did he cease his shouted demands for haste throughout his wild flight.

"Cuckoo?" The sergeant tapped his forehead significantly.

I shook my head as I hastened to the hall for my driving clothes. "No," I answered, shrugging into my topcoat, "he's got a reason for everything he does; but you and I can't always see it, sergeant."

"You said a mouthful that time, doc," he agreed, pulling his hat down over his ears. "He's the darndest, craziest Frog I ever seen, but, at that, he's got more sense than nine men out o' ten."

"To Rupleysville, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin shouted as he leaped into the seat beside me. "Make haste, I do implore you. Oh, Jules de Grandin, your grandfather was an imbecile and all your ancestors were idiots, but you are the greatest zany in the family. Why, oh, why, do you require a sunstroke before you can see the light, foolish one?"

I swung the machine down the pike at highest legal speed, but the little Frenchman kept urging greater haste. "*Sang de Dieu, sang de Saint Denis, sang du diable!*" he wailed despairingly. "Can you not make this abominable car go faster, Friend Trowbridge? Oh, ah, *hélas*, if we are too late! I shall hate myself, I shall loathe myself—*pardieu*, I shall become a Carmelite friar and eat fish and abstain from swearing!"

We took scarcely twenty minutes to cover the ten-mile stretch to the aggregation of tumbledown houses which was Rupleysville, but my companion was almost frothing at the mouth when I drew up before the local apology for a hotel.

"Tell me, *Monsieur*," de Grandin cried as he thrust the hostelry's door open with his foot and brandished his slender ebony cane before the astonished proprietor's eyes, "tell me of *un vieillard*—an old, old man with snow-white hair and an evil face, who has lately come to this so detestable place. I would know where to find him, right away, immediately, at once!"

"Say," the boniface demanded truculently, "where d'ye git that stuff? Who are you to be askin' ——"

"That'll do"—Costello shouldered his way past de Grandin and displayed his badge—"you answer this gentleman's questions, an' answer 'em quick an' accurate, or I'll run you in, see?"

The innkeeper's defiant attitude melted before the detective's show of authority like frost before the sunrise. "Guess you must mean Mr. Zerny," he replied sullenly. "He come here about a month ago an' rented the Hazelton house, down th' road about a mile. Comes up to town for provisions every day or two, and stops in here sometimes for a——" He halted abruptly, his face suffused with a dull flush.

"Yeah?" Costello replied. "Go on an' say it; we all know what he stops here for. Now listen, buddy"—he stabbed the air two inches before the man's face with a blunt forefinger—"I don't know whether this here Zerny felly's got a tellyphone or not, but if he has, you just lay off tellin' 'im we're comin'; git me? If anyone's tipped him th' office when we git to his place I'm comin' back here and plaster more padlocks on this place o' yours than Sousa's got medals on his blouse. Savvy?"

"Come away, *Sergent;* come away, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin besought almost tearfully. "Bandy not

words with the *cancre;* we have work to do!''

Down the road we raced in the direction indicated by the hotelkeeper, till the picket fence and broken shutters of the Hazelton house showed among a rank copse of second-growth pines at the bend of the highway.

The shrewd wind of early spring was moaning and soughing among the black boughs of the pine trees as we ran toward the house, and, though it was bright with sunshine on the road, there was chill and shadow about us as we climbed the sagging steps of the old building's ruined piazza and paused breathlessly before the paintless front door.

''Shall I knock?'' Costello asked dubiously, involuntarily sinking his voice to a whisper.

''But no,'' de Grandin answered in a low voice, ''what we have to do here must be done quietly, my friends.''

He leaned forward and tried the doorknob with a light, tentative touch. The door gave under his hand, swinging inward on protesting hinges, and we tiptoed into a dark, dust-carpeted hall. A shaft of sunlight, slanting downward from a chink in one of the window shutters, showed innumerable dust-motes flying lazily in the air, and laid a bright oval of light against the warped floor-boards.

''Huh, empty as a pork-butcher's in Jerusalem,'' Costello commented disgustedly, looking about the unfurnished rooms, but de Grandin seized him by the elbow with one hand while he pointed toward the floor with the ferrule of his slender ebony walking stick.

''Empty, perhaps,'' he conceded in a low, vibrant whisper, ''but not recently, *mon ami.*'' Where the sunbeam splashed on the uneven floor there showed distinctly the mark of a booted foot, two marks—a trail of them leading toward the rear of the house.

''Right y'are,'' the detective agreed. ''Someone's left his track here, an' no mistake.''

''Ha!'' de Grandin bent forward till it seemed the tip of his high-bridged nose would impinge on the tracks. ''Gentlemen,'' he rose and pointed forward into the gloom with a dramatic flourish of his cane, ''they are here! Let us go!''

Through the gloomy hall we followed the trail by the aid of Costello's flashlight, stepping carefully to avoid creaking boards as much as possible. At length the marks stopped abruptly in the center of what had formerly been the kitchen. A disturbance in the dust told where the walker had doubled on his tracks in a short circle, and a ringbolt in the floor gave notice that we stood above a trap-door of some sort.

''Careful, Friend Costello,'' de Grandin warned, ''have ready your flashlight when I fling back the trap. Ready? *Un—deux—trois!*''

He bent, seized the rusty ringbolt and heaved the trap-door back so violently that it flew back with a thundering crash on the floor beyond.

The cavern had originally been a cellar for the storage of food, it seemed, and was brick-walled and earth-floored, without window or ventilation opening of any sort. A dank, musty odor assaulted our nostrils as we leaned forward, but further impressions were blotted out by the sight directly beneath us.

White as a figurine of carven alabaster, the slender, bare body of a girl lay in sharp reverse silhouette against the darkness of the cavern floor, her ankles crossed and firmly lashed to a stake in the earth, one hand doubled behind her back in the position of a wrestler's hammerlock grip, and made firm to a peg in the floor, while the left arm was extend-

ed straight outward, its wrist pinioned to another stake. Her luxuriant fair hair had been knotted together at the ends, then staked to the ground, so that her head was drawn far back, exposing her rounded throat to its fullest extent, and on the earth beneath her left breast and beside her throat stood two porcelain bowls.

Crouched over her was the relic of a man, an old, old, hideously wrinkled witch-husband, with matted white hair and beard. In one hand he held a long, gleaming, double-edged dirk while with the other he caressed the girl's smooth throat with gloating strokes of his skeleton fingers.

"Howly Mither!" Costello's County Galway brogue broke through his American accent at the horrid sight below us.

"My God!" I exclaimed, all the breath in my lungs suddenly seeming to freeze in my throat.

"*Bonjour, Monsieur le Vampire!*" Jules de Grandin greeted nonchalantly, leaping to the earth beside the pinioned girl and waving his walking stick airily. "By the horns of the devil, but you have led us a merry chase, Baron Lajos Czuczron of Transylvania!"

The crouching creature emitted a bellow of fury and leaped toward de Grandin, brandishing his knife.

The Frenchman gave ground with a quick, catlike leap and grasped his slender cane in both hands near the top. Next instant he had ripped the lower part of the stick away, displaying a fine, three-edged blade set in the cane's handle, and swung his point toward the frothing-mouthed thing which mouthed and gibbered like a beast at bay. "A-ah?" he cried with a mocking, upward-lilting accent. "You did not expect this, eh, Friend Blood-drinker? I give you the party-of-surprize, *n'est-ce-pas?* The centuries have been long, *mon vieux;* but the reckoning has come at last. Say, now, will you die by the steel, or by starvation?"

The aged monster fairly champed his gleaming teeth in fury. His eyes seemed larger, rounder, to gleam like the eyes of a dog in the firelight, as he launched himself toward the little Frenchman.

"*Sa-ha!*" the Frenchman sank backward on one foot, then straightened suddenly forward, stiffening his sword-arm and plunging his point directly into the charging beast-man's distended, red mouth. A scream of mingled rage and pain filled the cavern with deafening shrillness, and the monster half turned, as though on an invisible pivot, clawed with horrid impotence at the wire-fine blade of de Grandin's rapier, then sank slowly to the earth, his death cry stilled to a sickening gurgle as his throat filled with blood.

"*Fini!*" de Grandin commented laconically, drawing out his handkerchief and wiping his blade with meticulous care, then cutting the unconscious girl's bonds with his pocket-knife. "Drop down your overcoat, Friend Trowbridge," he added, "that we may cover the poor child's nudity until we can piece out a wardrobe for her.

"Now, then"—as he raised her to meet the hands Costello and I extended into the pit—"if we clothe her in the motor rug, your jacket, *Sergent,* Friend Trowbridge's topcoat and my shoes, she will be safe from the chill. *Parbleu,* I have seen women refugees from the *Boche* who could not boast so complete a *toilette!*"

WITH Esther Norman, hastily clothed in her patchwork assortment of garments, wedged in the front seat between de Grandin and me, we began our triumphant journey home.

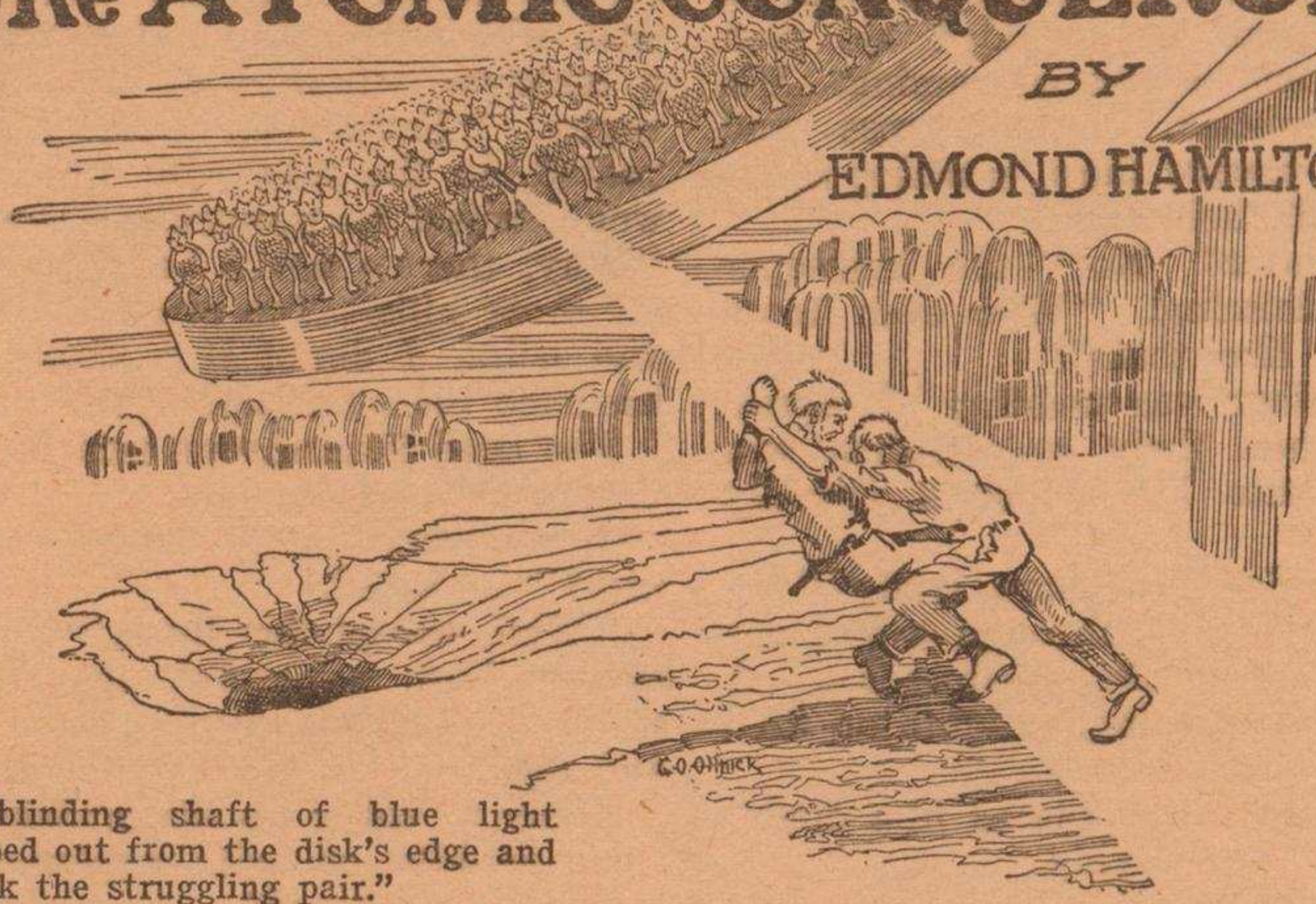
"An' would ye mind tellin' me how ye knew where to look for th'

(Continued on page 278)

The ATOMIC CONQUERORS

BY

EDMOND HAMILTON



"A blinding shaft of blue light stabbed out from the disk's edge and struck the struggling pair."

LOOKING back, one is struck with wonder that we know as much of the story as we do; that we comprehend as fully as we do the nature of the strange doom that rushed out onto humanity from a lonely hill in southern Scotland. Had it not been for one small thing, the casual curiosity of a young student, that appalling invasion would remain to this day quite unexplained. A trifle, certainly, that passing interest of a rather commonplace young man, but except for that interest, and what it led to, we would understand nothing of the vast drama that was played around and above us.

Not that our ignorance or knowledge could have affected the outcome of that drama! Beside the tremendous forces that rose and fought and crashed, mankind was but a mass of tiny, frightened pigmies, running about beneath battling giants. Yet one remembers that it was one of those same pigmies, it was a single embittered, insane man who loosed all of that ancient terror upon us and caused an age-old cosmic feud to flare out in dreadful war, universe struggling with universe in titanic combat, immense, unthinkable. . . . .

The story, as we know it, begins on that sultry afternoon in August when young Ernest Hunter came into the village of Leadanfoot and dismounted wearily from his battered bicycle. A day of pedaling over the Scotch hills had made him regret, somewhat, his decision to visit Glasgow on his holiday trip. One of the numberless students who swarm over the English highways each summer, on cycles and afoot, he began to think that this side-trip over the border was, after all, a mistake.

But once inside the dark, cool little inn, with a mug of foaming cider at hand, these doubts fled and the world again seemed a very pleasant place. This Hunter, lengthy and stooping of figure, with a thin, humorous face, was a social type, and looked about now for possible company. Except for himself there was no one in the long, low room but the two men

who stood near the open door, the stocky, aproned innkeeper and a white-whiskered, wrinkled old man with whom he was conversing. His cider finished, Hunter rose and lounged toward them, catching a few words of their talk.

"Thunder? No!" the innkeeper was exclaiming. "Who ever heard thunder like that?"

The other was nodding his agreement when their conversation was broken into by Hunter's friendly voice.

"Thunderstorm here lately?" he asked. "I came through a bad one down at Carlisle, Wednesday. A messy sort of thing. Lightning fired a house there."

The host contemplated him doubtfully before replying.

"It was not a thunderstorm we spoke of," he told him. "There was a queer thing here — I don't just know — McAndrews here heard it, and so did I——"

He paused, but Hunter was interested, and questioning him further, found that the subject of discussion was a series of strange detonations that had been heard throughout the village on the night before, a succession of deep-toned, rumbling explosions that seemed to come from the group of hills west of Leadanfoot. All in the village had heard the sounds, and most had set it down as distant thunder, but the innkeeper quite evidently disagreed.

"Like no thunder you ever heard," he assured Hunter. "Boom—boom — boom — boom — boom! Regular, like a big cannon firing. I've heard enough thunder in my time, and this sound was not like it, not like it at all. Eh, McAndrews?"

The wrinkled oldster sagely nodded agreement.

"Maybe it was blasting you heard," Hunter suggested. "Some farmer up there doing something of that kind, perhaps?"

For a moment the innkeeper contemplated him with that fine scorn with which the rural native regards a stranger ignorant of local geography. "Farmer up there!" he repeated, in the tone with which one would reject an unworthy statement. "Why, there's not a house through all those hills. Too steep they are, and wild. I doubt if a single soul has lived there for the last ten years."

The aged McAndrews removed his pipe from his mouth to voice dissent. "How about the scienteefic chappies?" he asked.

"Well, except for them," conceded the host, somewhat discomfited, while the older man replaced the pipe and regarded him with stern gravity. Possibly to cover up his mistake, he went rapidly on with explanations for Hunter's benefit.

"Two science professors they are, that have a cabin on one of the hills. For near a year they've been there, studying the glassy forts, I hear. I never saw them, myself, for they get everything they need over at Dykirk."

A term in his speech caught Hunter's interest. "The glassy forts?" he repeated, interrogatively.

"There's some piles of old stone ruins on some of the hilltops around here," the innkeeper explained. "Some of them have parts of stones all melted into glass. Lightning did it, I suppose. Around here we call them the glassy forts, and it's them that these men are working with, digging and such."

"Oh, I see," said Hunter. More slowly, he continued, "Do you know, I'd like to see some of them if it wouldn't take too long. Do you suppose I could, in a day?"

"Well, you can if you're a good climber," his host informed him. "Lowder Hill is the nearest to here, and they say there's such ruins on top of it. It's not so steep, either. There's another hill right next to

Lowder, Kerachan Hill, but it's too high and rough to get up and down in a day, hardly. It's on Kerachan that the science men are staying, I think. You'd best try Lowder, though."

"I'll stay here tomorrow, then," Hunter told him, "and make the trip. I'm so infernally tired of pedaling that a day of tramping will be a rest."

The prospect had intrigued the young student, and before retiring for the night he acquired enough information to guide him on the next day's trip. Also he had been furnished with a number of weird anecdotes concerning the glassy forts, which were evidently objects of local superstition.

The sun was an hour high the next morning when he left the inn, a small package of lunch in his pocket. He swung quickly through the village and tramped steadily over stony roads and rough moor toward the dark, looming bulk of the western hills, whose sides were almost completely hidden by dense forests of fir.

Hunter had been advised to climb Lowder Hill from its farther side, so on reaching it he walked in a great circle around its base, through a narrow, wooded valley that separated it from Kerachan Hill. As he passed along this valley, he was struck by its utter peace and quiet. The smaller forest creatures were frightened away by the sound of his coming, but once he glimpsed the vague dun shape of a deer slipping through the trees in the distance, and now and then startled groups of birds burst up through the trees at his approach, noisily discussing him in disparaging terms, in their flight. The busy, shouting, bellowing world seemed inconceivably remote, in that tranquil spot.

The sun swung higher and higher while he pushed his way forward. And in the world that seemed so very far, in Leadanfoot and London and New York and Peking, other men were pushing their way forward, in their particular groove in life, scheming for disks of metal and slips of paper, for the admiration of their fellows, for riches or fame or knowledge. A vast mass of tiny conspirators, each intent on his own plots, each sublimely confident of the importance of his especial business and its outcome.

And hidden in those quiet hills into which Hunter advanced was that which was to upset all of those minute conspiracies like little houses of cards, a door through which was to come a menacing terror unknown to man, so that presently, through this world, and worlds above and beyond, would run death, and confusion, and an ancient dread. . . . . .

2

THE sun was near its greatest height when Hunter came to the farther side of Lowder Hill, and the rude path that twisted up that side. He stared at it rather doubtfully, for the hill seemed very steep and the day was almost half gone. Then, with a shrug, he was about to step forward to the path when the sound of a step behind him made him wheel in surprize.

A strange figure was walking toward him, a small, middle-aged man whose clothes were dirty and torn by briars. He was hatless, and on his pink, round, spectacled face was an expression of dazed wonder. He came forward until he was within a few yards of the astonished Hunter, then stopped and regarded him mildly.

"Not Powell," he whispered, softly, confidentially. "Not——"

He ceased speaking suddenly, looked around with a certain surprize, then sank to the ground in a dead faint.

In a moment Hunter was by the man's side, applying his vague ideas of first aid. He got his pocket flask between the man's teeth, and a little brandy down his throat, which almost instantly pulled him back to consciousness. The man lay there, his eyes sweeping over Hunter's face, then asked, quite unexpectedly, "What time is it?"

On finding that it was almost noon, he straightened to a sitting position. "I'm all right now," he assured the student, motioning the latter to a seat on the ground beside him. His glance wavered about the scene, then came back to Hunter, whom he regarded intently before addressing him.

"Who you are, I don't know," he began, and as Hunter started to explain, he added, "and it doesn't matter. You've had some education, haven't you? Ah, medical student! That makes it easier—much easier."

Hunter began to think that the man was still dizzy, delirious. "Hadn't I better help you back to Leadanfoot?" he asked.

"There would not be time," the other answered, strangely. "I was going to Leadanfoot myself, for—— But there, you do not know. There is time to get back, though. You and I. But first you should hear——"

He caught the doubting, half-fearful expression on the young man's face. "No, I'm not a madman," he assured him, almost gently. "But I need help, badly. Need your help."

"But help for what?" asked Hunter. "I think if you would just go back with me to the village——"

"No!" answered the other, decisively. There was a pause, in which the older man stared across the green silence of the valley with unseeing eyes. Suddenly he turned to the watching, puzzled student. "I will put it this way," he began. "Suppose someone was planning to kill every living person in the village yonder, to wipe it out utterly, would you try to prevent it?"

At Hunter's wondering reply he continued, "Of course you would. Now go farther still. Suppose someone, something, was trying to kill every human being on Earth, to annihilate the world as we know it. Would you try to stop that, too?"

The younger man stared at him blankly. "Would you?" persisted the other.

"Why, yes—naturally," answered the student, and the older man sighed.

"It is to prevent that that I need your help," he said, quietly.

Before Hunter could comment on that startling statement the man rushed on. "I am going to tell you enough of the matter to help you understand what threatens. You will not think me a madman, when you hear! We have little time here, an hour perhaps, before we must start back. But it is enough for me to tell——

"You will wish to know who I am. Marlowe is my name, and until a year ago I held a position on the staff of the Trent Museum, in London. It was there that I met Powell, some three years ago.

"Dr. Henry Powell he was, an elderly physics professor, lately retired from Cambridge. That was all he ever told me of his past, for even after we became better acquainted he was close-mouthed about his former career. By chance I found the reason for that. A friend told me that Powell had left Cambridge under a cloud. It seems that he had been working for many months in collaboration with a fellow professor, Wooding by name, on an element-changing experiment. You know, transmute uranium into radium, or radium into lead. Modern alchemy

they were attempting. After a year of work together the two had split over some disagreement, each carrying on the experiment alone. Wooding was the first of the two to publish his results, and immediately Powell claimed that his former partner in work had stolen his own results.

"There was rather a scandal over the matter, but an investigating committee ruled that Powell's charges were unproved, so he was retired from the university. I never talked with Powell on the matter, and never learned the right of it, but I could see that the thing had embittered him greatly, so that he was wont to snarl viciously at all scientific people, and in fact, nearly all people, of any kind. He grated on me considerably, sometimes, for he was like an animated bottle of acid, thin-lipped, sardonic, sneering. But one thing drew us together, a common interest in archeology. In fact, that branch of knowledge was my work, at the museum, and Powell had taken it up as a sort of hobby, to occupy his restless mind, I suppose. We got acquainted through his visits to the museum and had many a talk thereafter.

"He was intensely interested in the 'vitrified forts' of Scotland, as they are called. Piles of stone ruins on some of the Scottish hills, and in a few valleys, with some of the stones melted into glass. You've heard of them? Well, it was Powell's radical theory that those glassy streaks were not made by lightning, as is commonly supposed, but by some powerful weapon or ray, striking from above. You will see what a revolution in conventional archeological thought would be the result if he could prove that. He got to be a fanatic on the subject, and spent most of his time roaming about Scotland and hunting and digging in such ruins.

"He had been off on such a trip for several weeks when he sent me an urgent wire, from a Scotch village named Dykirk. He had made a great discovery, he said, but needed my help, and offered me a handsome salary for my aid. My own interest was aroused by his message, so I procured the necessary leave from the museum and went at once, being met by Powell when I stepped off the train.

"It turned out that his discovery was on the summit of a hill some miles from Dykirk, named Kerachan Hill. He had had a little cottage, or cabin, built on the hill, and had lived in it for some weeks. It took us most of the day to get to his little home, so we stowed my luggage and waited until the next morning to inspect his discovery.

"And it was really astounding. The summit of the hill was flat, and there, with a few crumbling stone blocks scattered about, but in the center of that level expanse, was a shallow pit, newly dug, that was circular in shape and perhaps twenty feet across. At its bottom, a foot or so from the surface of the ground, lay a flat round stone, the surface of which was almost completely covered by a mass of strange characters, carven into it deeply.

"It was to decipher this inscription that Powell needed my help, for I am by way of being an expert in hieroglyphics, cuneiform writing, and such. He said that he had found this inscription beneath a protecting layer of cement of some kind, and was afire to learn its meaning, as he well might be.

"So I settled in the little cabin and began work that very day. To my surprize, I found the inscription quite easy to decipher, for all that the characters were totally strange and unknown. Whoever had carved it had placed in it, here and there, small pictures, symbols, giving a key

for its translation purposely. Within a month I had translated and arranged my translations of it, and found that the inscription told a stupendous, incredible story.

"According to it, these ruins of forts that lay scattered through Scotland had been built ages before by a race of strange folk who had invaded the Earth then. And these strangers had come, not from another planet, as one might suppose, but from a single atom in the Earth.

"This will sound incredible to you, as at first it did to me, but consider. We know that each atom of our Earth consists of a number of electrons revolving about a nucleus, and what is that but a miniature solar system? Just as our sun and its circling planets may be an atom in a vastly larger system, and so on infinitely, perhaps. The idea is not new, it was advanced years ago. And in this particular atom of the Earth, on its electrons, its tiny planets, dwelt a race proportionately tiny, the atomic people, I will call them. They had crowded over every one of their electron-planets, and were now gradually stifling from their ever-increasing numbers.

"They had science, a strange sort of science, and now, at the time of their greatest need, one of their scientists announced a startling discovery. He had found a way by which the size of any object could be increased or decreased indefinitely, at will. And the secret of this was stunning in its very simplicity.

"We know that the universal, all-pervading ether is the base of everything. Vibrations of that ether, in a certain octave, cause light; in a different octave, radio waves; in still another, chemical rays. But what we do not know as yet, what the scientists of the atomic people had learned, is that all matter itself is but another vibration of that ether, in a different lower octave. That stone, that tree, you and I, all but different vibrations in the ether. And the atomic scientists had found that as a stone is simply an etheric vibration, by raising the frequency of vibration the stone would be made larger, by lowering that frequency it would be made smaller.

"Their method of changing that frequency was told by the inscription. They would ascertain the frequency of vibration of an object, then concentrate on it other artificial electric vibrations, much like radio waves, which would change the vibratory frequency of the object just as the rate of swing of a pendulum can be raised or lowered by a tiny force applied to it at the correct moment. Thus these atomic people could make any object, make even themselves, large enough to dwarf their world or small enough to disappear entirely.

"It was a chance to relieve their crowding numbers and they seized it at once. Using their discovery to grow in size, they burst up from their own atom into this world, into our Earth, and found that the atom that was their universe was an atom of a simple grain of sand, on Earth. That sand-grain, though, held their world, so they built a great structure around it, in what is now Scotland, so that it would always be there as a refuge for them to flee to, in case of need. That attended to, up from the atom, out of the sand-grain, streamed their people, gigantic masses of them.

"The Earth then was savage and forbidding, but nothing daunted, they spread over its surface, began to raise their structures of stone, to shape this world to their will. It must have seemed to them that they were secure forever in this greater universe.

"But now came disaster. Certain adventurous spirits among them were not satisfied to stop in this universe. They saw the sun and its attendant planets and realized that this, our own solar system, was after all only

an atom in a still greater universe. So a number of them, using the same method of changing size, grew again until they had entered the world above this, the universe in which ours is but an atom.

"Now in that greater universe, in that superworld, as I shall call it, there was civilization, a civilization of beings who had advanced far beyond the crude semi-barbarism of the people of the atom. So when the atomic invaders entered their world, the superpeople knew they had come from beneath, from an atom, for they themselves had long possessed that power of changing size which the atomic people had just discovered. Although these superpeople promptly beat back the invaders in that first attack, time after time in the years that followed the warlike people of the atom persisted in attempting to enter the superworld, which was so much fairer than either their own world or this one.

"A long while their attacks continued until finally the patience of the superpeople was exhausted and they gathered together all their forces to crush these atomic invaders forever. They poured down from their greater universe to this Earth, and then was a battle such as was never known before, the people of the superworld and the people of the atom locked in a death-struggle, smiting with strange weapons, a colossal war raging over the shuddering Earth that reeled beneath them.

"The atomic invaders could not stand against the mighty weapons of the superpeople, and soon all of them not slain were fleeing in dread to their own world, that sand-grain that held their universe. They sped back to that grain and down into it, dwindling in size and vanishing, until of all their number, only their dead remained on Earth.

"And now the superpeople set about to seal them forever within that atom, within that sand-grain, so that never again should they break out and carry war and death through the superworld. To accomplish this they set that grain of sand within a circle of perpetual electric force, a field of strange force within which it was impossible to grow or dwindle in size, as the atomic people had done, by changing the frequency of etheric vibration. Thus the people of the atom were locked forever within their own tiny universe.

"This accomplished, they covered the sand-grain and the forces they placed around it, setting over them a great stone, on which was written the history of what had happened, and which warned whoever might find the stone in the future never to tamper with or change what had been done, lest they loose again the atomic invaders upon the Earth and the superworld alike. Having done this, the superpeople left the Earth to its own devices, and passed up into their own greater universe.

"Came then, on Earth, the painful upward surge of changing, ascending species, the long road from anthropoid to troglodyte to modern man. The structures of the atomic people crumbled soon, until only a few remnants were left. Over all the world it was as if their invasion had never been, nor did men dream that such people had held the Earth ages before themselves. And up in a Scottish hill, under a great stone that was covered by the drifting dirt of ages, lay a grain of sand that held war and death and terror, in a single atom of which the atomic people were prisoned for all time.

3

"SUCH was the colossal epic the inscription narrated. And it was so convincing that neither Powell nor I doubted it. But now a dispute arose between us. I believed that we

should heed the warning of the inscription and not delve farther into the thing, lest we loose dread upon the world. But Powell was afire with curiosity and would not listen. So, with help, we removed the great circular stone and set it to one side. And beneath it, as it had foretold, we found the sand-grain that held the atomic world.

"Under the circular stone was a cube of the same smooth rock, some six feet square. On the upper surface of this cube was set a small plate of smooth metal, at the center of which lay the sand-grain, set in the metal. Around this metal plate, embedded within the surface of the cube, was a circle of seven little blocks, that glowed steadily with a feeble purple light. In daylight the little blocks seemed merely purple in color, and it was only in darkness that their luminosity became apparent. Without doubt that circle of glowing blocks was the producer of the force mentioned in the inscription, the force that made size-changing impossible within their field, that held the atomic people prisoners in the sand-grain.

"From that day onward Powell took me less and less into his confidence. He had fitted up a small laboratory near the cabin, and began working there on some problem connected with what he had found. Once or twice he consulted me concerning the meaning of certain technical parts of the inscription, but aside from that he told me nothing of what he was doing, and I decided that I was wasting time to stay. It was on the very day that I meant to tell Powell so, and leave, that he came running toward me excitedly, with the news that his experiment had succeeded.

"And when I found the nature of that experiment I was astounded. He had been attempting to follow up the sparse details given in the inscription and rediscover the method of changing size. And he had done it! He showed me the apparatus he had worked out, a compact black case which strapped around his chest and which would cause everything within its field of action to grow or decrease in size. And standing there on the hilltop, he grew in size until he towered up a giant of a hundred feet, then dwindled until he was an inch in height, a tiny manikin.

"He was exultant, and I thought that at last he would leave the hilltop, and cover the sand-grain once more. I pointed out to him what good he might accomplish in the world with that great power, but he only snarled at me and for the first time revealed his intention. He was planning to dwindle in size until he could enter that atomic world, to go down into the sand-grain, to the atomic universe.

"Short of force, I used all my efforts to prevent him, for I was aghast at such a plan. But he went on, unheeding, making his preparations for the trip. He dug out and removed the little circle of blocks around the sand-grain, then gradually began to dwindle in size until he was a tiny figure a few inches high, standing on the metal circle near the grain of sand. Smaller and smaller he became, until he vanished entirely from my sight, and I knew that he had entered the sand-grain.

"For three days I watched beside the stone cube, waiting for his return. It was toward evening of the third day that he finally came back, a tiny upright form on the metal plate that grew swiftly to the man I knew. He had come back.

"He had come back—but changed. He seemed to be filled with an immense excitement, to be spurred on by some hidden purpose. He gave small answer to my flood of questions. He had found the atomic world, had been guided down into

that particular atom of the grain by 'certain signs,' a phrase which he did not explain. As to the people of the atom, he said only that there were many of them and that they were 'different.' More he would not tell me, and my fear, my misgivings, increased.

"The night of disaster rushed upon us, a week after his return. I was asleep in the cabin while Powell worked, as I thought, in the laboratory. Some time after midnight I woke and sensed that Powell was not in the cabin. I dressed hurriedly, and found that he was not in the laboratory either. Instantly I knew where he was and hurried up to the hilltop, and to the pit on that hilltop that held the stone cube and the sand-grain.

"He was standing on the edge of that pit, watching intensely, but at the sound of my approach he wheeled instantly, holding a little stone cone in his hand, the end of which glowed suddenly with dull green light.

"At the same moment I fell in a heap to the ground and lay there quite motionless, seemingly paralyzed, unable to move a muscle. And Powell laughed. He mocked and taunted me and for the first time disclosed the depth of his plans. He was going to loose once more the atomic invaders upon our world. He had gone down into their world and conspired with those in power there, promising to free them from the world where they were prisoners, to release them upon the Earth and the superworld.

"First, he boasted, the atomic invaders were to strike at the world beyond this, at the superworld, to stab out unexpectedly at their ancient enemies in that greater universe, crushing them by an unlooked-for attack. Then, free from any possible interference, the invading hordes would sweep over Earth; and he laughed wildly as he pictured to me the destruction of the races of man and their works, dwelling especially on the fear and terror of his (Powell's) enemies. For the first time I saw that the man was completely insane, an embittered maniac who secreted hate for all mankind as the result of his wrongs, real or fancied.

"Even while he spoke, a slight humming sound arose from the pit. The humming waxed swiftly to a loud droning, then up from the pit floated a black disk, some three feet across and swiftly growing. Hovering a few feet above the ground, it continued to grow, and the droning became a loud booming, a tremendous rumbling thunder. Even as I stared at it, lying there, I fathomed the cause of that rolling thunder, knew that it was the sudden expansion of the disk that beat out those thick waves of sound. The disk grew until it was perhaps thirty feet across, then ceased expanding. It slid gently down toward us until it was nearly touching the ground, and I saw that it was crowded with dark shapes that pushed toward the rail to stare down at us.

"Then down from the edge came a folding metal ladder, and clambering down this ladder came three creatures, shapes grotesque and terrible, three of the atomic people.

"I had thought of them as being somewhat human, perhaps with different features or coloring, but still essentially human. But these things! They were reptilian, saurian! In height they were a little under the human standard, and their figures were even roughly human in shape, with the head carried erect, a squat, powerful body, two thick, bowed lower limbs, and two short arms, ending in cruel, curved talons. But with that rough travesty on the human shape, all resemblance ceased. To begin with, the things were completely covered with thick, hard scales, like

those of a crocodile. Their heads were peaked, instead of round, with gaping, fanged mouths and small, black, glittering eyes, browless and lashless like the eyes of a snake. They were noseless and earless, and their only sign of clothing was a queer sort of metallic armor that seemed more designed to carry their weapons than as clothing.

"Lying there motionless, regarding them with sickened horror, I saw the three advance to Powell, who greeted them with a queer gesture. One brought forth a tablet like a small slate, on which he wrote, then passed it to Powell, who studied it, then wrote in turn and handed it back. Evidently such writing was Powell's only means of communication with the things. For a few minutes they conferred in that fashion with Powell, then returned to the disk, which immediately ascended from its hovering position on the hill-top.

"As it rose it grew, spreading out swiftly in ever-expanding size, growing until it had shut off the light of all the stars for a few seconds, then seemingly breaking up into small masses, cloudily disappearing. It had become so large that it was invisible, had passed from this universe into that greater one. For a moment I wondered if its momentary eclipse of the stars would cause any star-gazer to guess at what was happening, then realized that to any chance watcher of the sky it would seem only like a drifting cloud, if noticed at all.

"Again rose the humming from the pit, many times louder, growing to an ear-splitting thunder as another force of the atomic people floated up from the pit, a great mass of tiny black circles, miniatures of the first disk, that drifted up and rose at once into the air, not stopping to confer with Powell as had the first. And as that mass of disks rose above the hill-top, the familiar droning was again waxing louder as another mass of them came up.

"How many of the disks streamed up from the atom while I lay there, I can not guess. Their number seemed infinite, but my memories are fragmentary, disjointed. I must have been unconscious for a few minutes at least, for I remember that amid the rumbling thunder of the rising disks, as I watched Powell, who was gazing triumphantly at their coming, a dizzying blackness seemed to descend on my brain, and when consciousness returned the last mass of disks was rising from the pit, vanishing like the others in the sky above.

"UNTIL now Powell had held me prisoner with the glowing cone, which he had placed on the ground before conferring with the atomic people, so that it held me prisoner without his attention. Now he picked it up and permitted me to re-enter the cabin, where he forced me to lie down in the bunk, then placed the cone again on the table in the room, still pointing toward me, still holding me a prisoner, powerless to move.

"Why he did not kill me outright, I can not say. I think it was only because he desired someone, even a prostrate enemy, to whom he might boast of what he was doing, that he desired someone to know the power and the menace that he really was. It must have been so, for the next day he boasted for hours to me of what he was doing. He spoke of the great force of invaders I had seen, and said that even by that time their numbers and mighty weapons would have crushed into submission the people of the superworld.

"He spoke, too, of the paralyzing cone that held me prisoner, a weapon which he had brought back from the atomic world, and revealed that he had another one on his person also. It was, he said, a ray that neutralized

the electric messages in the nervous system, thus wiping out the commands of the brain in that system, so that while reflex actions like the breathing of the lungs and beating of the heart were unaffected, the conscious commands of the brain to the muscles were nullified, paralyzing those muscles.

"All of that day, and all through the next night, I lay in the bunk without moving a muscle, save only an hour in which he permitted me to eat. I heard him leave the cabin early the next morning, the second after the coming of the invaders, this very morning. Lying there, I listened with dull despair to the wind slamming the door of the cabin. The cone on the table was in the line of my vision and suddenly I gasped with hope, for at a particularly hard slam that cone had rolled a little way toward the table's edge. I waited breathless. Then, just as my hope was beginning to die, the door slammed to with all the wind's force behind it and the cone rolled from the table to the floor, breaking and exploding there in a flash of intense green light.

"My first move was to search the cabin for a gun, but there was none. The cabin stood at the edge of the bare and treeless hilltop, and from its window I could see Powell's head bobbing about in the pit of the sand-grain, as he prepared for the coming of the second force of invaders. I knew that he must be imprisoned or killed at once, but knew too that he carried with him another of the paralyzing cones, so that I dared not rush him on the open hilltop. Neither could I remain in the cabin, so my only chance was to make my way to the nearest village and get help, or at least, a gun.

"So I slipped out a rear window and got safely away without being seen by him. All of this morning it took me to get down the hill, and when I met you here I knew I should not have time to get to a village as I had planned, but must go back and do what I could myself. And now I have told you all. Up on that hill Powell is awaiting the second invasion of those monsters from the atom, an invasion that will annihilate our world. If we can overpower him and replace the glowing blocks around the sand-grain, we shall have prevented disaster. If not—— But do you believe the story? Will you help me?"

Hunter answered slowly, his brain whirling from the things he had heard. "It's so incredible," he began, "but the booming sounds you mentioned, they heard that in Leadanfoot. It seems so queer, though ——" Suddenly he thrust a hand toward Marlowe. "I believe you," he told him. "I want to help."

The other gripped his hand silently, then glanced up at the sun. "We have, perhaps, four hours," he said, rising. Hunter, too, jumped to his feet, and for a moment they looked together up the dark sides of Kerachan Hill.

Presently the two men were forging steadily up that hillside. They spoke little and their faces were set, drawn. The sun was falling ever more swiftly toward the west, and always their eyes measured the distance between that descending sun and the horizon.

By the time they surmounted the first rough heights and began their progress up the thinly-wooded upper half of the hill, the gray veils of twilight were already obscuring the surrounding country. Over peaks and valleys, over forests and grassy fields, lay a strange silence, ominous, foreboding. As they toiled up toward the summit through the thickening dusk, it seemed to Hunter that the whole world was silent, breathless, tensely waiting. . . . . .

4

COMPLETE darkness had fallen when Marlowe turned and made a cautioning gesture.

"We are very near the summit now," he told Hunter, in a whisper. "For God's sake, go quietly."

Together they crept upward, through thick underbrush and over jagged rocks, until they crouched at the edge of the smooth, grassy space that was the hill's summit. This summit was not exactly level, but sloped down from them in a slight grade, and at its center Hunter saw the black, yawning hole Marlowe had mentioned, the pit that held the sand-grain.

Marlowe was tugging at his sleeve. "Powell—down at the other edge," he whispered, excitedly.

Glancing down to that farther edge of the summit, Hunter saw there a thin, spare figure dimly outlined against the stars, the figure of a man who was gazing silently at the twinkling lights of a distant village. And over to their right, at the very edge of the bare summit, was the rough dark mass that he knew must be the small cabin. Again Marlowe twitched his sleeve.

"We must rush him from both sides," he told Hunter. "You crawl around the right side of the summit and I will take the left, and when you get near enough, go for him. Don't give him time to get that cone out." With a whispered "good luck," he wrung Hunter's hand and began to creep stealthily around the left edge of the hilltop.

His heart pounding violently, Hunter crept forward on the right side, toward the man at the summit's edge, who still stood motionless, watching the distant lights. Hunter wondered where Marlowe was, in the darkness. By now he was crawling past the open door of the cabin, keeping close within the shadow of the little building.

From that point he could glimpse, in the starlight, the profile of the man they stalked. A strong, mad face it was, with burning eyes beneath a mass of gleaming, iron-gray hair, a face that was turned toward the south and its distant lights as though fascinated by them.

Suddenly Powell laughed, and at the unexpected sound Hunter stopped short, on hands and knees. A bitter, mocking laughter it was, that sickened the listening student. As it ceased, the man at the hill's edge raised a clenched fist and shook it at the distant lights. And his voice rang out over the silent hilltop like the note of a warning bell.

"O man, take heed!"

Even while Powell voiced that cry of hate and menace, Hunter moved forward again. And at his first movement, his knee pressed down on a small stick that broke with the sound of a pistol-shot.

Instantly Powell turned, his hand flashing down to his pocket and emerging with a small object in its grasp. As Hunter gathered himself for a swift, desperate spring, that object glowed out, a tiny circle of luminous green, and the young student sank back to the ground, deprived of all power of motion by the paralyzing cone. Powell advanced toward him, holding the cone outstretched.

"So you escaped, Marlowe," he said, and Hunter realized that in the darkness the man had mistaken him for his former prisoner. Powell was speaking on. "I think that I'll stop your interference now, for good. Not that I have any personal animus against you, I assure you, but I can't allow you to disrupt the plans I have made." As he said this, mockingly, he carefully placed the cone on a small mound of earth, so that its rays still held Hunter paralyzed. Then he

straightened, and was reaching for the pistol at his belt when a dark figure sprang from behind, dashing him to earth. Marlowe!

The thought beat through Hunter's brain as he lay, unable to twitch a muscle, watching the combat of those two figures that reeled about, striking, kicking, twisting. But what was that——? What? That thin humming that suddenly made itself heard, that grew to a droning, to a rumbling, reverberating thunder. Out of the pit a dark shape was drifting up, a black disk that grew, grew, grew.

Boom! Boom! Boom! It grew until it had attained a diameter of thirty feet, then hovered above the pit, near the struggling men. As he glimpsed it, Marlowe cried out despairingly, and Powell's mad laughter flung up. And now was a sudden stir at the edge of the hovering disk, a flurry of movement there. Hunter darkly glimpsed shapes that crowded about the disk's edge, that peered at the struggling men. Did they mistake the two as a menace to themselves, did they fail to recognize Powell? For even as the two men reeled in battle toward the disk, a blinding shaft of blue light stabbed out from the disk's edge and struck the struggling pair. Under that ray and in its light, Hunter saw the faces of the two men change horribly, stiffen, draw, crack, and over him swept a breath of utter cold, an icy little wind that seemed to freeze his blood.

An instant he saw Powell and Marlowe thus, staggering, reeling, falling, then they had collapsed to a shapeless heap on the ground, and the blue ray, striking out past them, had touched the glowing cone on the little mound, which instantly exploded with a flash of light, releasing Hunter from its prisoning power.

The blue ray was sweeping in a circle about the hilltop now, and with sudden frantic fear he crawled through the open door of the dark cabin, crouching in a corner of it fearfully. Suddenly the ray swept up to the cabin, and beneath its touch the glass of the windows cracked instantly. An icy puff of air again swept over Hunter, in his corner, as the ray swept through the open door and hung steady for a moment.

Its blue light illumined a little metal stove opposite the door, a stove that covered instantly with a rime of frost and ice at the ray's touch. A moment the ray hung thus, steadily, doubtfully, then abruptly vanished, as though snapped out. Hunter sighed chokingly.

The humming sounds began again outside, and his fear mastered by curiosity, he crept to the cracked window. A mass of tiny black circles was rising from the pit, floating up and growing at the same time, while the first disk hung to one side, watching. The black circles rose high, expanded almost instantly to the size of the first, were joined by that first disk.

For a minute Hunter watched the disks circling above, swirling about in an eddying mass. Then three detached from those above and sank down to the hilltop, hovering close above it and sweeping it ever and again with the deadly blue ray that came and went across the cabin while he watched. The other disks, more than a score in number, grouped in a compact formation, then raced swiftly south.

The vanguard of the atomic conquerors, loosed at last upon the world of man!

5

It is doubtful if we shall ever know the exact purpose of that first raid on the atomic invaders. That question might be solved if we knew how much information they had received from Powell regarding our Earth. As it is, we look on that first coming

as an effort, not so much to destroy as to disorganize, to terrorize. Doubtless it was their plan to break up all chance of organized opposition in England by a series of swift and deadly blows, then take over the island at their leisure and make it the base of their future operations.

Whatever their intentions, they passed over all northern England without stopping, and the world first became aware of their presence when they struck with terrific force at Manchester and Liverpool, successively.

There is no clear, coherent account of their coming to Manchester. The survivors saw that hour of dread through a haze of terror, and it was long before all accounts were pieced together to make a reasonably complete story of the happenings there. One sees, through those horror-stricken tales, a terror descending without warning out of the darkness, on the unsuspecting city beneath. No doubt the streets were crowded, and theaters and show-windows ablaze, all the life and stir of early evening. Then a swift gathering of dark shapes above, the deadly blue ray flashing down on the streets, searing an icy path of death across the city.

It must have been utterly incomprehensible destruction to those below. Even now we scarcely understand the nature of that blue ray, the Cold Ray, as it is now called. We know that all things in its path acted as if under the influence of extreme, unheard-of cold, absolute zero. It was exactly as if the invaders had concentrated utter cold and hurled it forth in a single stabbing ray. Strictly speaking, of course, there is no such thing as positive cold, only absence of heat. The theory generally accepted now is that in some unexplained manner the ray had the power of instantly sucking away the heat of anything it touched.

Certain it is that the ray was a terrible weapon. Beneath it, flesh and blood froze immediately into black hard lumps, metal cracked, trees and plants shriveled instantly. It is curious to note that the action of the ray was highly localized, that it could slay one man while another man ten feet away would feel only a sudden breath of intense cold.

As it swept steadily along the streets of Manchester that night, overtaking the fleeing crowds and leaving them in shapeless heaps, it must have seemed like the very day of doom to those below. They speak of it as enduring for hours, that time that the invaders hung above the city, while in reality the disks remained over Manchester somewhat less than twenty minutes. How many were slain in that time it is impossible to guess. The city, at least, was thrown into a wild intense panic, and no doubt that was the purpose of the invaders. That accomplished, they gathered together and sped away to the west, to Liverpool.

The story of the massacre at Liverpool is almost identical with that at Manchester. There too the disks struck down with icy death at the city, but one curious feature differentiates the Liverpool account. It seems that as the Cold Ray swept around the city, it crossed, ever and again, the city's harbor and the sea outside. And for many days afterward, immense icebergs of unprecedented size ranged the English coast, born of that striking of the ocean by the blue ray.

At Manchester and Liverpool, and even as far south as Birmingham, the invaders came down without warning, striking unexpectedly, spreading death and dread, then racing away. But some time before they reached London, word of the attacks on the northern cities had been received, and men waited, ready for battle, so that it was over London that the atomic

people and the forces of man clashed for the first time.

It was the assumption of the War Office in London that Manchester and Liverpool had been attacked by the airplanes of some continental power, without the formality of a declaration of war. Certainly they did not dream of the real nature of the menace that was speeding toward them.

Presently, from all the air-stations around the city, plane after plane was spiraling up, while in a great ring around London the giant searchlights stabbed the night, sweeping the sky in search of the invaders. Even while the planes ascended and hung in a thin line high above the city, thunder was growling, low and ominous, and lightning flickering across the sky.

It was with this gathering storm that the disks raced down toward the city, never glimpsing the line of planes above. For a space of minutes they hung motionless, surveying the shining, splendid metropolis. The streets below, temporarily deserted beneath the coming storm, were like brilliant rivers of light, connecting the lakes of luminescence that were the squares. One imagines the invaders in the disks staring down at the city in amazement, if their reptilian natures possessed the power. As they hung there, the beam of one of the questing searchlights caught them and held them, and the stabbing rays of the other lights shifted to them at once, bathing the disks in a flood of white light. Then, from high above, the airplanes drove down upon them and the battle had begun.

One can see that battle clearest, perhaps, through the eyes of a single individual, a certain young Brownell who was the pilot of a single-seater combat plane. At the first orders he had taken the air almost joyously, with the exciting thought that at last his training was to be tested in actual battle. He thrilled to the thought, as with the other planes he swooped down upon the disks.

Down he went and down, diving toward a single disk that hung at some distance from the mass of its fellows. His hands grasped the control of the plane's machine-gun, and even above the roar of the motor he heard the pup-pup-pup-pup of the gun, spraying bullets on the disk. He swept down onto that disk and over it in a great curve, passing above it at a height of a few yards. As he flashed over it, the lightning flared out blindingly above, and as he caught momentary sight of the things on the disk, his hands trembled on the controls. He had glimpsed a mass of upturned heads, scaled and peaked, with fanged and gaping mouths. For the first time he saw the creatures of dread he was fighting. As he drove up above the battle and banked and circled for another swoop, his hands were still trembling.

From below came the popping of bombs, a few of which scored hits on the disks, most of which plunged down toward the city below, misses. The roar of their detonation seemed feeble beside the crash of the thunder, which was now rumbling forth almost continuously. Away to the left of the battle, two planes collided and dropped swiftly to earth, trailing long streamers of red flames, blazing comets plunging earthward through the upper darkness.

And now, their first shock of surprize over, the invaders struck back, and the blue ray flashed up, searching out and finding the planes, whose wings shriveled and collapsed beneath its touch. Two of the disks had been forced down by lucky hits with bombs, but the others were almost unscathed, and now the planes were falling ever more rapidly beneath the Cold Ray.

Suddenly, from high above, a single plane rushed down toward the massed disks, in a dizzying nose-dive. The blue ray stabbed up from a dozen disks to meet it, but it plunged on, smashed down into one of the disks, and plane and disk whirled together down to earth, the latter spilling out a mass of grotesque figures that raced it in its fall.

Brownell shouted hoarsely as he saw. From all around planes were diving down now, smashing squarely into the disks and falling with them, a deliberate heroic suicide on the part of their pilots. An immense exaltation ran through Brownell, that vast, forceful rapture of heroism that can sweep men up to titanic heights. He circled again, then dipped the plane's nose sharply and rushed down upon a single disk like a falling plummet.

Pup-pup-pup—at the last moment he clung to the gun-control. Rush of wind past him—flash of lights—a roaring in his ears—the disk was nearer, rushing swiftly up to him—nearer—nearer—crash!

Then plane and disk were tumbling down to earth together, speeding down to the brilliant streets below, crashing down near the docks, where something in the wrecked disk exploded with stunning force.

Above, the battle was all but finished. Only a few of the planes remained and the blue ray was searching these out, one by one. Presently the invaders held the air alone, nine disks remaining of the twenty or more that had begun the attack. The city below was at their mercy, but they did not heed it. Circling and forming, they massed again together, then moved away to the north, seemingly daunted by the fierce and unexpected resistance they had met. They had conquered, but at a price that disinclined them for further battle at that time.

The people in the city below waited tensely, but no more aerial wrecks whirled down upon them. And the ever-questing searchlights revealed no sign of plane or disk over the city. Through all London reigned a deathlike silence, that first moment of astounded silence before the hoarse roar of fear and rage that would roll through the city. Only the deep rumble of thunder broke the stillness.

Across the sky the lightning flared again, once, twice. Then down upon the city swept the lashing, flooding rain.

6

It is to young Hunter's story that one must turn again for an account of the invaders' movements after that first raid. Crouched by the window, he saw them returning from the battle, nine scarred disks returning where more than a score had gone out. For the first time it struck him that possibly the forces of man might have checked the first rush of the invaders. He wondered intensely as to that.

During all of that period of hours while the disks had been fighting and killing and terrorizing England, he had not dared to escape from the cabin, for the three guardian disks still hung very low above the hilltop, and the blue ray constantly swept about that summit, marking a path of death. The guardians were taking no chances of anyone tampering with the sand-grain, of doing harm to their own world, that lay within that grain.

And now, when the defeated nine returned, he saw that his chances of escape were even less. For except for one disk, that dropped down into the pit, dwindling and vanishing, these returned disks took up a position with the watchful three, hovering low over the hilltop. Now and then one would sweep up into the sky, circle for a time, then return to its position over the summit of Ker-a'chan.

Hunter wondered intensely what the mission of the disk that returned into the sand-grain had been. A call for aid, for reinforcements? The waiting attitude of the others seemed to indicate that. Dawn had come, and with its gray light he moved silently about the little cabin, finding food in plenty and bolting a hasty, uncooked meal, then returning to his position of observation by the window.

All over the world that day was wonder. The news of the battle over London, of the death that smote the northern cities, had flashed out over all the Earth, bringing surprize and doubt and fear to cities far away. A wave of terror rolled over the British Isles, and already the Channel was crowded with the shipping that bore away the first great crowds of the impending exodus.

The theory of attack by a foreign power had collapsed, and as men examined the crushed, mangled bodies found in the wreckage of the disks at London, they realized that Earth was invaded by creatures wholly different from man, but superior in power. It was but natural that they should conceive these invaders as arriving from another planet, and that was the theory held by all.

In every mind was the thought that the invaders had retired only temporarily, that they would return to spread terror and death again. The disks had been discovered, hovering watchfully over Kerachan Hill, and from all the country about that hill the inhabitants poured forth, choking the roads in their frantic haste to escape from the vicinity. By evening of that day, less than twenty-four hours after the first coming of the disks, it is doubtful if a single living person with the exception of Hunter remained within ten miles of the hill.

It strikes one as curious that the invaders, during all that day, made no effort to destroy or kill in that vicinity. They simply hung above the hill, hovering and circling restlessly, waiting, as it seemed to Hunter. Waiting, he thought, for the return of the messenger who had gone back down into the atomic world.

Once only they struck, late in the day. A force of field artillery had been ordered down from Glasgow with orders to shell the hill that was evidently the base of the invaders. Men and guns and horses rattled south along the rough road, under the hot afternoon sun. High above them a black speck suddenly appeared in the blue, the shape of a watching disk that swept down to investigate. A few ineffectual rifle-shots were fired as the disk sank down toward them, then there was a bolting of men into the neighboring fields and hedges, a plunging of panic-maddened horses as the dark shape loomed above. Then the frosty blue Cold Ray, springing down from the disk, leaping swiftly along the road in a trail of icy death, pursuing and exterminating the running men in the fields. A moment the disk hovered and turned, then swept swiftly back up into the blue.

No man in that battery returned to Glasgow to report its fate, and when three planes were ordered south to investigate, none returned. Thereafter no more such futile attempts were made.

That night there was utter darkness in every city in England, for strict orders were given and enforced that no spark of light should betray a city's presence to the invaders. But though in all England, Europe, America, anxious people waited through the night for news of another attack, the disks of the invaders still hovered above Kerachan Hill, waiting, waiting.

In southern England masses of aircraft collected, the combined air-power of England and France, await-

ing the invaders' return. And through the English roads, meeting and passing the sea-bound masses of refugees, rolled the tanks, the guns, the long brown masses of marching soldiers. Mankind was gathering itself for the struggle, but through all those masses ran an unspoken thought, an unvoiced fear. What avail were rifles and bombs against the smiting ray? Or airplanes and dirgibles against the swift and mighty disks?

On a hilltop miles away from Kerachan men lay hidden, with powerful telescopes and radio-transmitters, ready to flash word of the invaders' movements to all the Earth. And all the Earth waited tensely for that word, wondering, hoping, fearing.

The bright morning of that day passed, the second since the first night raid of the invaders. And all through that morning no word came from the hidden watchers. Two hours of the afternoon had passed when a message finally came, short, concise. It said only, "Disks are gathering in immense force above Kerachan Hill and are evidently preparing to move."

That message, short as it was, was sufficient to cause the last stable forms of life in England to break up, melt away. Those crowds of people who had remained, hoping against hope, now fought their way madly toward the sea-coast, to escape, to life. Over those fleeing hordes ran a shout, a threat, a warning. "They are coming!" They called it to one another, autos racing through country villages shouted it, the mobs on the roads voiced it fearfully, soldiers resting by the wayside repeated it thoughtfully, looking toward the north. Over England, over Europe, over the whole world it ran, swiftly, terribly:

"They are coming! They are coming!"

7

And now the last great hour of Earth's destiny was swiftly closing down, with that massing of the invaders above the Scottish hills. Crouched beside the window of the cabin, Hunter watched them pouring up from the pit, from their atomic world, masses of tiny disks that grew with inconceivable speed to full size, that moved away and made room for the others to rise. Up, up, up, gigantic masses of the disks, countless hordes of the monsters they held, a vast force of invaders before which all human resistance would be vain, he knew.

After that night of the invaders' first attack on Earth, that night of his imprisoning in the cabin, he had watched through a day and another night and now well into this day, except for a few hours of sleep that he had snatched. Watching, waiting, fearful of the ever-present guardian disks above, like them waiting, waiting. And now this flood of the disks, this up-springing of all their mighty forces. As he gazed at them now, floating up from the pit in dark, endless masses, it seemed to him that the malignant spirit of Powell laughed again beside him.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The rumbling thunder of the expanding disks seemed to him like the sound of a mighty bell, tolling the end of the reign of man. Boom! Boom! Boom!

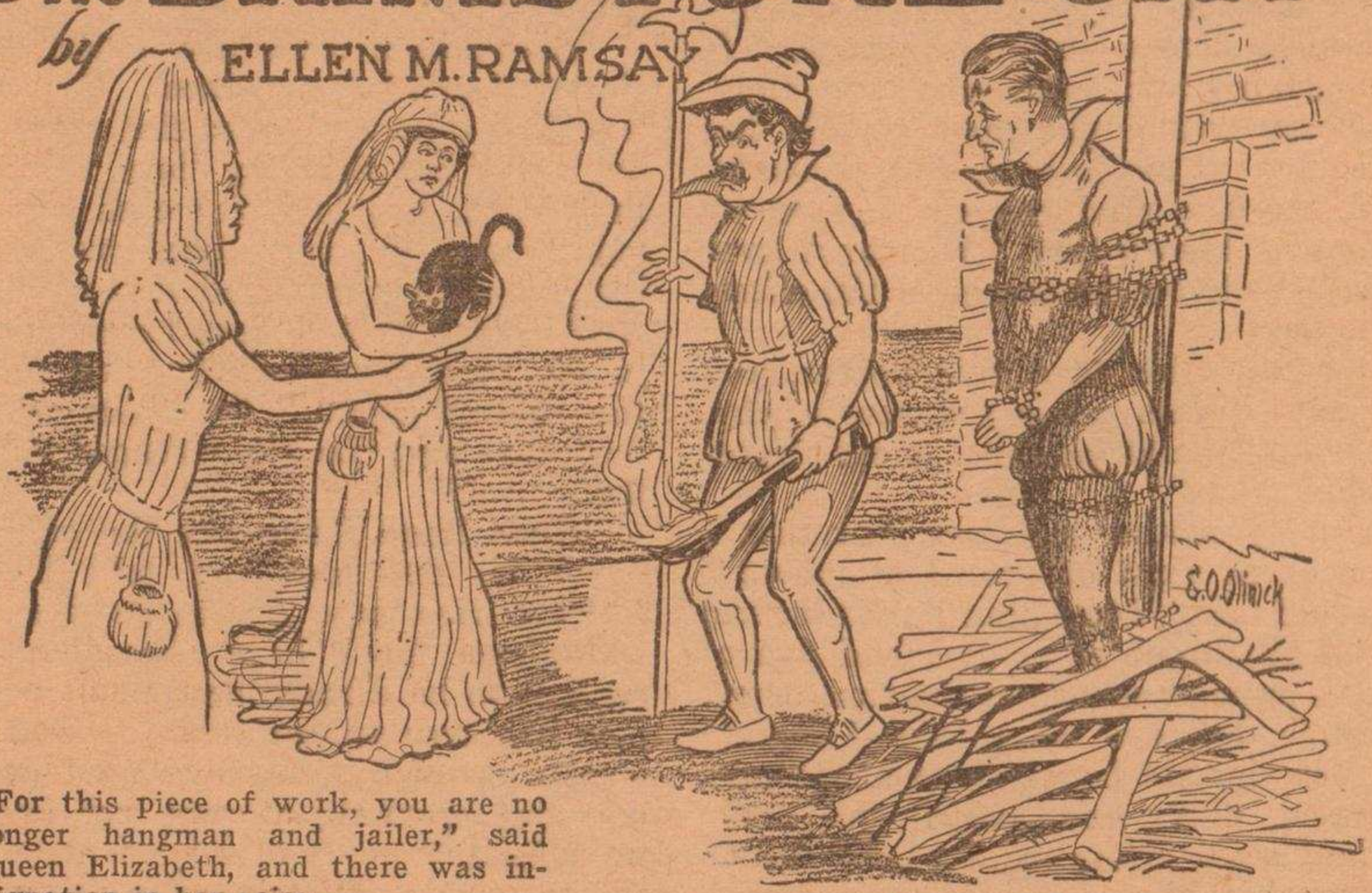
He glanced up, saw the hundreds of disks above spreading out in a long double line, in an irresistible formation, awaiting the others that were still rising from the pit. But as Hunter watched them circling and forming above, the sky seemed to darken suddenly, the sunlight to be cut off, to vanish. And along the line of invaders above ran a quick start, a sudden nervous shock.

Darker and darker grew the sky,

(Continued on page 282)

The BRIMSTONE CAT

by ELLEN M. RAMSAY



"For this piece of work, you are no longer hangman and jailer," said Queen Elizabeth, and there was indignation in her voice.

FROM my earliest memory as a small child, I have hated cats. They fill me with an indescribable feeling of dread and horror that amounts almost to an illness in their presence. Snakes I can bear, and of all other animals I am fond, but cats to me are creatures most loathsome.

Mrs. O'Flynn, my landlady, has a gray cat with a yellow spot on its head, as though the devil had branded his servant with brimstone before sending it into the world. Such has always been my fancy of Mrs. O'Flynn's cat.

But then I am queer. My friends —certain of them—apologize for me as queer. I have some fame as a writer of stories and they forgive me my queerness on that score.

My name is Govern Aristé, a queer name. I have queer fancies and I number among my friends (those friends who do not apologize for me) queer people. Such a friend is Amir Das, who does not laugh at my hatred of cats, nor think me queer because of it.

"For everything in the world, my friend, there is a reason," this Amir Das, who is a Hindoo philosopher, has often told me.

Tonight we discussed the matter again over our tea. Amir Das, it should be mentioned, is a graduate of Oxford, where he acquired an English fondness for afternoon tea. When he appears at my rooms before 5 o'clock of an afternoon—and this is the time he most often chooses for his visits—it is Mrs. O'Flynn herself who steps in and brews the cheering beverage for us, after the manner that only one brought up in the "ould counthry" can.

"As I have said," the Hindoo continued, "for everything in this world or any other world, there is a reason. That is the law of all nature. For

every cause there is an effect. For every effect there has been a cause.

"I place my hand in that fire which flames on your hearth. It burns me and I take my hand away. Never will I put my hand in fire again. It has hurt me and I fear it. Cause has produced effect. Do we desire knowledge? We must ever seek to know the causes of the effects we see.

"Now this fear, this horror, you have for cats: when you were a baby, a small child perhaps, a cat frightened you?"

"My mother says not, but that I cried at sight of one, even before I could talk," I told him. "And she had always loved cats. She had five of the animals as pets at the time of my birth, but even as a baby I showed such signs of fright at them, she gave them, every one, away. We never had a cat afterward, and my dislike of the creatures continued as I grew older."

"Then, my friend, your feeling for these animals is the unconscious remembrance of another life. Sometime, somewhere, misfortune came to you in the guise of a cat. We people of the East know these things to be true.

"But you of the West, with your numerous schools and your much education, laugh at the thought that the soul may live through many lives, coming into different bodies, and acting different dramas, but learning each time a little bit more of that which it has willed to learn, and working all these experiences into one perfect plot in the end.

"You laugh, although daily you see about you proof of the truth of these things, which my people have taught and known for ages. A man is introduced to a maiden, and with the meeting of their eyes he knows that she is the one among all others for whom he has been seeking. And she, too, meeting his ardent glance (for the soul looks out through the eyes) knows that he is the man of her heart.

"Recognition leaps like a flash of electric flame between them. You of the West term it 'love at first sight;' but we of the East say 'love, not at first sight, but love for each other many times in many lives has been the joy of that man and that maid.' And insofar as they have loved truly in the past, they seek for and find the beloved again. Does not your Scripture say, 'Love is stronger than the grave'?

"Then have I not met the one I loved in the past," I told him. "Many lives must I have loved myself alone, for I have always been content to be a bachelor, and no woman has ever appeared to me as desirable above all other women. But we were speaking of cats, not love, my friend."

"We speak of reincarnation, the chapters of life," replied the Hindoo. "And your hatred of cats, Aristé, is doubtless part of a chapter now past —a chapter perhaps you are happier for not remembering."

After some further talk of the same nature but more deeply philosophical, Amir Das left me to ponder his statements in the cozy firelight of the old-fashioned fireplace. This fireplace, together with Mrs. O'Flynn's tea-making abilities, has kept me for many months a contented lodger in the warm-hearted Irishwoman's house, in spite of the detestable cat that she insists on keeping.

The fiendish voice of this cat I now heard wailing from a distant part of the house. I presumed that probably it had been locked into some room, as it accompanied Mrs. O'Flynn, a prowling shadow, on one of her busy housewifely rounds.

I watched the red fire on the hearth and thought of what my Hindoo friend had said. I thought of

love and of cats, and holding my mind stilled, while I looked at the dancing flames, I tried to bring out of my memory some reason for my hatred of cats.

2

I MUST have dozed, for I started up from my seat confused and somewhat dazed. As one who recalls the dim memories of a dream I remembered that I was Govern Aristé, a writer of stories, who lived in—— The memory of dreams dims as one wakes, and so did the memory of Govern Aristé slip into the inaccessible places of my consciousness.

But what matter? I, Peter Byfield, poor young student in London Town, had long been given to dreaming. I laughed at myself somewhat grimly to find that I had been entertaining but one more fantastic fancy.

"Ay! Peter! didst thou not dream so much, more wouldst thou accomplish," I scoffed to myself. Having lived for many years alone, I had acquired the habit of lonesome people who talk with themselves in lieu of better (or worse) company.

The fire on the hearth was almost dead and I stooped to place upon it another fagot. Then I looked at the small pile of unburned fagots by the hearthside, wondering how long they would last to keep some of the chill of London rain and fog out of my attic room. More fagots meant money, of which I had but little store.

The hearth was of roughly cut stone and the attic room was humbly furnished with cot and chair and in one corner a table on which were strange crucibles and retorts, and above it a shelf whereon were books and manuscripts. But however humble my room, it contained all the mysteries of life for me, save only one.

That one I had met some days past in the queen's hunting park, where unlawfully I sought for herbs and rocks that would help me in my studies of alchemy. I had come upon this arch mystery of all, in an open space between the trees, dismounted beside her horse. In her hands she nursed a falcon with a broken wing.

She was a tiny thing with red-gold curls, and in one cheek was a dimple that a man might not look upon over-long without a mad desire to kiss it.

I, who should have fled because I broke the law by being in this place at all, stood transfixed, looking with heart and eyes at the vision before me.

Then the maiden turned, raising her gaze to mine, and I saw that her eyes were of a blue like that of the sea on a calm summer afternoon. But more had they than color. They gave the man that looked into them a feeling of rest and harbor such as a voyager might have when after a long and weary journey to many ports, he comes at last home.

As I looked into her eyes and she into mine, I knew not only that this was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen, but that she was my true love and that I could never care for any other. I forgot that I, although ambitious and the son of a noble father, was but a poor student, who might scarcely dare to love a high lady such as her appearance proclaimed her to be.

True, my studies were of alchemy, and should I find the philosopher's stone, in which men of that day believed and for which they spent long years of study and search, I would have all power at my command.

My father had been a noble of Henry VIII's court, but had displeased the king and been forced to flee England. An adventurer, he had journeyed in many far countries, where he had studied strange sciences with stranger teachers, among them the Moorish teachers of Araby.

In one of these foreign lands—I knew knew not where nor of what mother —I had been born.

And he had brought back to England with him in his old age, along with the small boy that was I, a marvelous collection of books and manuscripts. Some of these he had taught me to read. For others he had given me a clue to the inner meaning they contained. And for all he had inspired in me the thirst to understand, a thirst that had continued with me unquenched after his death several years previously.

Something I knew of the philosopher's stone, by which base metal, such as lead, might be transmuted to gold, and by which old men had their old age renewed as youth. And for this philosopher's stone I became one of the searchers, hoping with my experiments and the knowledge contained in my precious books that I might some day find the miracle-working talisman.

Thus had my room, with its crucibles, retorts, books and potions among which I daily experimented, contained all the mysteries of life for me, until the day I met in the royal park the Lady Edith Estes, attendant to Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth.

Then had I, Peter Byfield, taken back to my attic with the injured falcon, whose wing I had promised to try to cure, the greatest and sweetest mystery of all—a mystery that pulsed in my heart like a song and that brought between my eyes and the books I would fain have studied, visions of golden curls, a magic dimple and eyes like blue pools of heaven.

The last mystery bid fair to put to rout and take the place of all the other mysteries whose solution I had so long sought.

In my study of alchemy, I do not boast but say truly, I had learned more of physic than many physicians of my time. It thus happened that on the day I awoke from my strange dream of a life in which my name was Govern Aristé, I found the injured falcon apparently recovered.

With all the skill that I possessed I had wound strips of cloth to bind the wing to the bird's body, until the broken bones could grow together again. I had kept the restless falcon quiet by having it hooded all that time. Now I removed the hood and the bird flew about my room with wing but slightly stiff. I had made good my promise to the Lady Estes that I could cure her pet.

Exultant that I had served my beloved in even so small a thing, I caught the bird, hooded it again and chained it to my wrist. Then I went forth to seek its mistress.

She had told me that I could ask for a certain servant at the palace, who in turn would call her. This I did and shortly found myself again in that radiant presence. Doffing my cap, I bowed low in the fashion of a courtier.

My tongue, false friend, had left me. As at that other meeting in the park, I could say but a few stiff words, the while I told her of how it had been my great pleasure to cure so fine a bird.

She had a purse in her hand, but my courtly manner must have made her know that I was no hireling to be paid with a gift of money. Instead she gave me a more precious gift—the memory of her smile as she thanked me with gracious words.

And I, having reflected well on the difference in station between a great court lady and a poor student, hastened to excuse myself, lest I forget and throwing myself at her feet declare the passion I felt.

Neither at the time she had found me in the park, nor now, did she make reference to the fact that it had been unlawful for me to wander in the royal hunting preserves. But any fear I might have had that

she would make known her discovery of my presence there, had been forgotten from the first glimpse of her.

Even prison or punishment were well worth enduring for the rapture that had become mine. So I mused as I turned my steps from the palace toward the poor tenement that held my attic room.

In such a frame of mind it was that I came upon young Tom Smythe, the jailer's son, and the cat that he tortured as sport for his companions. It was a gray cat, which later I discovered had a sulfur-colored patch upon its head.

But at the time, I saw only the manner in which young Tom had tied the animal stretched out on its back with its four feet drawn by cords to four stakes, so that the boy might draw and quarter it, even as his father, Tom the hangman, had that day executed a poor wretch, sentenced to be drawn and quartered for treason to the crown.

Around young Tom had gathered a crowd of admiring youngsters. Tom with a knife—who knows where small boys obtain the instruments for their devilments?—had raised his arm for the first stroke that would slit the cat's body lengthwise. Meanwhile, the animal yowled in an agony that but added to the glee of the spectators.

Surely the memory of Govern Aristé was far from the thought of Peter Byfield, for I, Peter Byfield, on that day did not hate cats. I loved them, as I did all other animals, and the sight of the tormented creature before me filled me with a great pity and a great rage at the young fiend who had undertaken this cruelty.

With two strides I had parted the surprized children and seized the knife from the would-be executioner. Four strokes I made with it at the binding ropes, and the gray cat with a yellow spot upon its head bounded from the earth as only a frightened cat can and whisked up the roof of the nearest house to live eight more lives, fate favoring.

Even then all might have been well, had not the rage of my heart demanded vengeance upon the person of the young rascal. The boy was a bully, the leader of all the lads of the neighborhood, but now I humbled him before the eyes of his frightened playmates. Right lustily I laid onto him, holding him across my knee with one hand and applying stout strokes with the other, until he wailed as loud as the cat had done. Nor did I heed nor care that a black hatred was born in the blubbering bully's mind, when finally I released him. With short words I told him what measures I would take, should I again find him ill-treating a cat or any other animal.

Then, wearied, and my thoughts once more turning to the vision of the Lady Edith Estes, I sought my lodging, determined to work with renewed effort in my search for the philosopher's stone that meant wealth and fame and perchance the winning of my love.

Late that night I worked, measuring and mixing new potions that might lead me to the elixir of life. As I bent to my task I was startled by a wailing cry from the roof of an adjoining house upon which my attic window looked out.

I opened the window, and a cat sprang into the room. It was a gray cat, with a yellow spot upon its head, a most vile and draggled-appearing cat, and it cried to me with plaintive insistence which bespoke its opinion that a life saved—even a cat's life—was worth little, unless that life might have food and shelter.

I gave the beast some of the gruel and milk that formed my simple supper. It ate and curled up on the hearth, purring and content.

Such was the manner in which I, Peter Byfield, came to make a companion and pet of the gray cat.

3

In the day and age when Peter Byfield rescued the gray cat, men held many superstitions. It was not well, even in that England which was then coming to birth as a great nation and which allowed more freedom of thought and action to its inhabitants than any other country, for a man to be too markedly different from his neighbors. Those who studied alchemy might well be careful that they be not accused in the popular mind as pursuing other and unsanctified studies.

Young Tom Smythe, whom Peter Byfield held over his knee and beat on the day the youth tried to draw and quarter the gray cat, chanced to fall ill of a colic the week after that episode. Young Tom had told his father, who was the chief hangman of London Town, of the treatment accorded him by the alchemist.

The elder Tom, although a brutal, evil fellow who could, and did, on occasion beat his son most cruelly, yet in this case resented the fact that a stranger had taken upon himself this parental task. He resented, furthermore, that the stranger had done this for so simple a cause as anger at the innocent boyish sport of executing a stray cat. Tom, the elder, when he heard the story, cursed that stranger and swore that he would have revenge upon him.

When young Tom fell ill, after he had feasted uninvited of green apples stolen from a private garden, an ugly thought raised itself in the brain of his father. (Young Tom, it may be said, had told no one of the green apples.)

Only a few days before, it had been the hangman's pleasant duty to officiate at the last events in the life of a poor old woman, accused by her neighbors of witchcraft and of causing a sickness among some children in her neighborhood. The wretched creature had been tried, tortured, and confessing under the torture, had been condemned to die as a witch.

Tom senior had carried out the torture which had made the victim admit her guilt, and it had fallen to him, nothing loth, to tie the frantic woman to the stake and pile and light the fagots that destroyed her body and presumably carried her soul back to its master in his flaming pit.

Now a cunning train of thought built itself up in Tom's mind. A man of more or less mystery, a student of strange things, whom all his neighbors knew to spend long hours in brewing unknown compounds—for what devilish purpose no one knew—had recently shown anger against the hangman's child. More, he had beaten that child and threatened him, and the lad had fallen ill shortly afterward.

This surely was the working of sorcery and the deed of one who had sold himself to the devil. To verify his suspicions, the elder Tom, who lived not far from the lodging of Peter Byfield, made inquiry among the neighbors of the alchemist, nor was he adverse to starting strange rumors about the student.

Then it was that those who knew the alchemist began to spread queer tales of the man. They recalled that this Peter Byfield spent much time alone in his attic room, to which he seldom if ever invited guests. It was rumored that the room contained strange things, crucibles, retorts and drugs—all the paraphernalia for making a witch's brew.

They remembered that the alchemist had never been over-neighborly, although he had been known to do such deeds of charity as to give bread to the hungry. He had even bestowed money on those in need.

Doubtless a man who was the servant of Satan could easily make bread by black magic or even produce money by his sorcery. It was known that he had magically cured a falcon with a broken wing which he had been seen bringing home one day almost dead and had later taken away with him apparently sound.

Those whom Peter Byfield had helped in their need now began to pray God that they had not taken aid from a servant of the devil, or having done so innocently, that this would not be accounted a sin to them.

They began to watch this man of mystery. And then it was that they discovered damning and crowning proof of their suspicions.

Peter Byfield, it was learned, had as companion a cat—a gray cat with a yellow spot upon its head—verily the cat that the alchemist had rescued from the hands of young Tom Smythe.

This solved the matter completely and made the evidence conclusive. Why else would a man take pains to save a cat from death, were that cat not his familiar, his demon companion?

Tom, the elder, sought the judge, a friend of his, to whom he told his suspicions and the hearsay evidence he had gathered.

Of all these things, meanwhile, was Peter Byfield happily ignorant. But the young alchemist undertook more diligently than ever the studies that he sought to master, spurred on by the vision in his lonesome young heart, the vision of the beautiful Lady Edith Estes.

4

And so it chanced on a day not more than two weeks after the day on which I rescued the cat, that I, Peter Byfield, unaware of the evil plotted against me by the hangman, had my experiments rudely interrupted by the entrance into my attic room of four armed men of the law. Without ceremony, I found myself arrested and carried to jail, accused of one of the most serious charges of the day—witchcraft.

The gray cat, reposing before my hearth in all the purring content of a well-fed animal, was taken as proof against me. Tom, the elder, who was among the men that arrested me, had cunningly provided a sack for the cat, and it had been the triumph of young Tom, now somewhat recovered from his sickness, to capture the animal and throw it into the bag.

I found myself in a dark dungeon and in a most perilous position, for of all the crimes at that time recognized by law, witchcraft was accounted especially heinous, and had as its punishment the most terrible forms of death.

Likewise, it was the most difficult charge of all, from which a man could vindicate himself. A man under suspicion of being a sorcerer might be—and was—tortured in the most brutal manner to obtain a confession. If he did not confess, he laid himself liable to conviction for that very reason, as being protected by his master, the devil.

The law dealt hardly with persons accused of witchcraft—all of which I knew. Even the image of the maid with the blue eyes, the golden curls and kiss-inviting dimple, faded from my thoughts, though still held deep in my heart, as the realization of my plight came upon me.

My fears were well-founded. When I refused to acknowledge guilt of the crime of which I was accused, the ignorant, cruel judge, urged on by the brutal hangman, ordered me to be tortured until I should confess such guilt.

First they pricked me with needles to find if I had on me anywhere the invulnerable spot. This was the spot,

supposed to be without feeling, where I had been sealed by my master, the devil.

When this torture failed, my flesh ever quivering at the needle's thrust, they put me on the rack. However, I, Peter Byfield, used the strength of my will and refused to confess myself guilty of that of which I was innocent. I denied that the sickness of young Tom had been the result of any evil work on my part.

I admitted that I was a student of alchemy, seeking the philosopher's stone. But I maintained that I sought this stone, not for myself alone, but for the good I might do with it to mankind. As proof of my honest intention, I pointed out the charitable deeds I had done to those in need. My rescue of the gray cat, I explained, had been because of my love for dumb creatures.

But a judge and accusers who could authorize and witness such torture of a human being as the torture to which I was put could not understand one whose plea was that he had saved an animal from suffering.

They gave me respite from the rack and sought other means of making me confess. And then it was that the genius of Tom, the hangman, invented a torture more diabolical than Satan himself, it would seem, could have devised.

Tom's attention had been called to the sack, which held the gray cat, by continued and frenzied caterwaulings on the part of that animal, which the jailer's brutal kicks did not still. Putting his hand within the sack, he sought to bring forth my companion in guilt and misery.

The cat had sharp claws, and Tom had been well scratched before he finally gave up the attempt and retied the creature in the bag. Then there had flashed into his mind the fiendish scheme for an excruciating torture on me, the cat's master: Peter Byfield and the gray cat should be tied into a sack as fellows. So might this sorcerer's own familiar spirit of evil be used to bring about the man's ruin. Tom told his plan to the judge, who immediately saw its possibilities and ordered its execution.

Thus I found myself stripped and tied from the neck down in a huge sack, and with me as companion the gray cat, crazed and frantic, now ready to claw its erstwhile master as though indeed it were a demon.

This sack was then tied by ropes to posts so that it hung hammock-fashion; while Tom, the hangman, swung it, turning me first face down and then on my back, as he prodded the cat with a rod to keep it ever moving in its clawing frenzy.

Horror of horrors, beyond the power of words to tell! The agony of that torture! The screaming pain, as the sharp claws tore my body, already so brutally tortured and racked.

The human body can stand much, but the human nerves have a limit of endurance. And I, as Peter Byfield, had a sensitiveness of nerves ahead of my day. Otherwise, I would not have had the sympathy that had made me stoop to free a tormented cat in the streets.

The tearing of that cat's claws on my bare body was now the most frightful torture that human (say rather satanical) ingenuity could have devised. By will, almost more than human, I fought with myself that I should not confess to a crime I had not committed.

Then did I beg of my torturers that they put me to death, for death —even death by the fire and stake— appeared to me as a haven of rest and peace.

And at last, finding that I would not confess, they freed me from the sack. The judge was loth to condemn without a confession, but since it appeared that this could not be ob-

tained, he deliberated weightily and finally gave it as his opinion that there was sufficient criminal evidence for conviction.

The very fact that I had not confessed, the judge averred, was due to the hardening of my heart and will through strength given me in my hour of trial by my unholy master.

So upon me he pronounced sentence that I should on the following day, at high noon, be burned at the stake as a warning to other witches, wizards and sorcerers.

With me, condemned to share my fate, was the gray cat. The judge had noted the yellow spot on the creature's head, and with the logic of the day had made it another link in the chain of evidence that led to my undoing.

This yellow spot was, doubtless, a smoke-spot of brimstone, said the judge, which had left its mark upon the cat when the creature came from the bottomless pit. Fitting, indeed, that the flames should return it thither.

I heard my death sentence as a boon, granted in mercy by heaven. Then I was taken back to my rude dungeon to suffer a night of pain from my broken and bleeding body, and from my heart which said that never again should I stand in the bright glory of a May morning and see her, as I had first seen her—the fair, dear lady of my heart.

IT WAS a gray tomorrow that followed that gray day of torture. As noon approached, I was led to the place of execution, a public square, while a ribald crowd followed and hooted me, adjuring me to call upon my master, the devil, to save me from death.

Tom, the hangman, was to have his final triumph, for he it was who chained me to the iron stake. At my feet he tethered by another chain the brimstone-spotted cat, now somewhat subdued by torment. High about us he piled fagots, and then, everything being ready, approached with his lighted torch, while on his surly face was the smile of a fiend.

Grimly I shut my eyes and prayed to the God of love, in whom I had believed until that yesterday of torture, that he might give me strength to die as befitted the son of a noble father.

Surely the hangman had lighted the fagots by now—or was he holding back to prolong my agony? I waited to feel the breath of the flame. Almost I thought my body would not shrink from its warm embrace, but would welcome its fiery kiss of death, as setting free a soul prisoned in a body that had been a dungeon of terrors.

And then—perchance it were a delusion born of my weakness and pain—I heard a voice speak, staying my executioner. It was a voice with a clear, sweet tone, such a voice as an angel might have, but in it was command that would not be denied.

"Stay!" it commanded. "What is this you do and why is this poor man so condemned?"

The gruff voice of the hangman answered.

"He is a wizard, your ladyship. He cast a spell upon my child, who would have perished of a strange sickness, had we not found this man and put him here, where shortly the flames will take him back to his master, Satan, and his vile cat with him."

"Is there a cat?" asked the voice. "Let me see this animal."

" 'Tis beneath the fagots, your ladyship."

"I would see it, I say."

There was a rustle as Tom moved the fagots, and perceiving that this must be more than delusion, I opened my eyes, to see what person had dared interfere with the course of the law, and whom it was the hangman obeyed.

I gazed into the face of an angel, indeed.

Little she was, with red-gold curls and a dimple in one cheek that a man might not look upon without a mad desire to kiss it. And her eyes—in the blue of them, like the blue of the sea on a calm summer afternoon, there was rest and harbor for a man's soul. But more than that, there was such a flame of pity and indignation that I knew—what I had almost doubted—that a God of love still reigned in a dark age and that there was one human being in the world, besides myself, who would understand the kindness I had done a cat.

To the lady of the curls and eyes of blue, Tom, the hangman, held out the cat, the while telling the story of Peter Byfield, wizard, and his familiar who possessed this animal. The lady listened, looking at the condemned man, but the horror that showed in her face at the recital was at the hangman's story of Peter Byfield's sufferings rather than horror of the sorcerer himself.

Then a strange thing happened. The girl stretched forth her hand as though she would pet the cat, and when the jailer would have remonstrated, commanded him haughtily and took the half-dead animal in her hands.

As if by magic, the tormented beast ceased its struggles, and raising its head sought with evident fondness for the stroking caress of her fingers. Another voice—a deep, mellow voice, albeit that of a woman—spoke.

"Be careful, my Lady Edith," it chided, "or this hangman will accuse you, also, of witchcraft, when you so easily charm Satan's servants."

"Do you look, Your Majesty," replied the girl. "It is the cat that we rescued in the Royal Park a half-year ago. See! here is the brown spot upon its head. Remember you not how the dogs had the animal at bay and how it turned and faced them so pluckily? You and the Earl of Leicester and I came upon them, and the earl made quip of the fact that this cat wore upon its head, hair of the color of Your Majesty's hair, that denotes in its possessor unconquerable spirit, as Spanish galleons so lately sunk off our coasts bear witness for England's unconquerable queen."

"I do remember the happening," replied the second voice. "You took the cat and made of it your pet, but it has been lost some days now, as you say."

With effort, I turned my eyes for a minute from the fair face that held them so adoringly enthralled. Then I saw that the other speaker was a woman of most royal presence. No need to note the color of the hair which England's virgin queen had made the fashion of court ladies; no need to hear the tiny lady-in-waiting address her as "Your Majesty." I knew that I stood before Elizabeth, Queen of England, and that by miracle a chance had opened that might give me my life.

"Mercy! in the name of God, mercy, Your Majesty!" I cried. "If this be your cat, then do not let them kill me for having saved its life. They accuse me as a dealer in witchcraft, but as God is my witness, I have done no wrong. I but saved this cat from the hands of the son of this vile hangman. The boy would have killed it most cruelly, had I not taken the beast from him. Of the lad's illness, I know nothing and am guiltless."

"Is the boy yet ill?" asked the queen, turning to the hangman.

"He was most ill, Your Majesty," said the man somewhat sullenly, "though now he seems recovered. But who can say how long he may stay thus sound, if he be under the spell of a wizard?"

"This man is not a wizard. Nor would he hurt any lad, Your Majesty.

On that I would pledge my soul," said the Lady Edith, now stepping forward. "The guilty confess their crimes and he has not so done."

"Nay, he would not," said the hangman. "The devil gave him strength to stand even the torture of being in the sack with the cat."

Then he told them with evil glee of the fiendish torment he had devised.

The small lady-in-waiting, who had, since first my gaze met hers, comforted me with her blue eyes of pity, shuddered at the recital even more than she had before. She turned so white I thought she would swoon.

"Ah! Your Majesty!" she again pleaded, as the jailer finished his recital; "this man could not hurt a lad. He it is who healed your pet falcon of its broken wing. Do you not recall how I told you of him?"

"Give us your story, my man!" commanded the queen. "I remember the falcon, and chided the Lady Edith that she did not bring you to my presence for a fitting reward of your skill."

So commanded, I told her all my story—how I had studied alchemy and physic that would teach me to heal a sick bird, how I had rescued the cat, how the animal had come to me for shelter and how Tom, the hangman's son, having fallen ill of colic during green apple season, his father had wrongly accused me of witchcraft and evil practise against the lad.

Then I told her of the tortures I had endured, but that I had not confessed even when they put me in the sack with the cat.

The Lady Edith Estes shuddered again and again during the narrative of my tortures, but the queen listened quietly. However, there was indignation in her voice as she asked at the end of my story:

"What judge condemned you? And how came he to practise on you a torture not in accordance with our laws? It shall go hardly with this judge, and with you, too, man," she added, addressing the hangman. "For this piece of work, you are no longer hangman and jailer, but must earn your living by other means than such zealous practises of cruelties on gentlemen. You are indeed a gentleman's son?" she queried me.

I replied that I was and told her my father's history, making much of the fact that coming back to England in the beginning of her reign, he had ever been a loyal adherent of the crown.

As I talked, the Lady Edith Estes continued to pet the gray cat, now quite calmed. Then she turned beseeching eyes upon the queen, beseeching eyes that won from her sovereign a smile. So sweet was my little lady that she might even woo favors from members of her own sex. Now it seemed that the queen had listened to her pleading and made judgment thereby.

"Serious and grievous wrong has been done to Peter Byfield," said the queen. "I am convinced that he is an innocent man and therefore I pardon him fully and freely. Unloose the man," she commanded the hangman.

Faint and weak, I had almost fallen when Tom, sullen albeit abashed, released me. A soldier from the queen's retinue supported me, while Her Majesty commanded that I be taken to the palace for treatment by her court physician.

"We shall make you physician to our animals," she announced. "And perchance if we find your story true and yourself worthy, we shall restore you to your father's rank and title. What think you of that, my Lady Edith? Will that be reward sufficient for this wonderful doctor of yours, of whom you have talked so much since

the day he mended our falcon's wing?''

Bracing myself against my faintness, I turned to make thanks to the Lady Edith, who had saved my life. And I saw in the blush on her cheek, which had followed the queen's words, a hope that perchance there should be even greater reward for me than the queen had mentioned.

I reached forward to raise the small lady's hand to my lips. It lay upon the cat that she had been petting. I touched the animal as I did so, and at that touch there rose in me such an abhorrence, such a dread and loathing and hatred for this creature through which I had suffered so much, that I staggered back in my weakness. I remember falling, falling, and then——

5

"SURE, and don't start so, Mr. Aristé! I'm but come in to clear away the tea things.''

So spoke the voice of my landlady, Mrs. O'Flynn, waking me from a strange dream that I, Govern Aristé, had had—a dream wherein I played a rôle under the name and being of Peter Byfield; a dream of such vividness that it did not depart as most dreams do, but remained with me, clear, distinct in every detail.

"Is that your cat that is howling so, Mrs. O'Flynn?'' I asked.

"It is, and it may kape on its howling, for all of me,'' replied my landlady. "It tried to eat up me lovely new singer canary, and I'm locking the ungrateful baste up for a lesson to it not to jump on the cages of tin-dollar birds. I know you don't like the animal, Mr. Aristé, nor any cats. But it's really a good crayture and kills many a mouse.''

"Mice are well enough, but when it brings about the death of a man ——'' I reflected, but aloud I merely announced my intention of strolling forth for a walk.

I felt that I needed the calming effect of the cold night air. Many stories I have written. Writing is my trade. But never before had I lived my plot as I had tonight.

Was it merely a fantastic idea for a story that had come to me, I wondered. Or had I, Govern Aristé, once lived in the body of Peter Byfield? Had Peter Byfield been a real person? It had been a real enough experience, those several days in the life of the young alchemist that I had lived through, during the half-hour between the going of Amir Das and the coming of Mrs. O'Flynn; while Govern Aristé slept in his chair before the open fire and Mrs. O'Flynn's gray cat yowled its penance for the attempted massacre of a "tin-dollar'' canary.

What a tale it would make! But I must turn it over in my mind and clear my thoughts. I walked down the hall and stepped outside, closing the door on a last despairing wail from the imprisoned cat.

The thought came to me that I might be losing my mind. People sometimes did. Perhaps I was having hallucinations, or it might be that my friend Amir Das had hypnotized me and sent me this dream to make me believe his strange theories of reincarnation.

Such was my thought as I walked, I knew not where. Suddenly my revery was broken by a woman's shrill scream. I paused and looked up a side street whence the cry seemed to come.

There was the sound of running steps and a girl flung herself upon me, almost into my arms.

"Help me! help me!'' she cried.

Behind her came two men of rough appearance. I am not tall, and I suppose I did not look formidable. The men did not stop but continued

(Continued on page 286)



"She screamed at the demon, but it lunged toward us, flapping its great hideous wings and dragging her out after it onto the bridge."

DROME

by **John Martin Leahy**

The Story So Far

MILTON RHODES and his friend Bill Carter go to Mount Rainier to find out what caused the dreadful murders that are supposed to have been committed by a frightful "Demon" in custody of an "Angel" (so they are described by those who saw them). Rhodes suddenly disappears when he and Carter are among the Tamahnowis Rocks, and Carter is startled by a fearful scream that seems to issue from the very heart of the rock.

CHAPTER 15

THE ANGEL

THE scream ceased as suddenly as it had come. I drew my revolver, snapped on the electric light and, stooping low, looked into that spot where, a few moments before, Milton Rhodes had so suddenly and mysteriously disappeared.

Nothing but the unbroken rock before me. And yet Rhodes had vanished. I turned the light full upon the low roof, and then I exclaimed aloud: the entrance was there!

I dropped to my hands and knees and moved under, the pack not a little impeding my movements. An instant, and I was standing upright, peering into a high, narrow tunnel, which some convulsion of nature, in some lost age of the earth, had rent right through the living rock.

Nothing was to be seen, save the broken walls, floor and roof, deep, eery shadows crawling and gliding as the light moved. The view, however, was a very restricted one, for the gallery, which sloped gently upward, gave a sudden turn at a distance of only thirty feet or so. What awaited me somewhere beyond that turn?

For a few moments I listened intently. Not the faintest sound—nothing but the loud beating of my heart. What had happened to Rhodes?

"Milton!" I called softly. "Oh, Milton!"

No answer came.

I grasped a projection of rock, drew myself up into the tunnel and advanced as rapidly and silently as possible, the light and the alpenstock in my left hand, the revolver in the right. But it was not very silently, what with the creepers. At times they grated harshly; it was as if spirit things were mocking me with suppressed, demoniacal laughter. Yet I could not pause to remove those grating shoes of toothed steel. Every second might be precious now.

I drew near the turn, the revolver thrust forward in readiness for instant action. I reached it, and, there just beyond, a dark figure was standing, framed in a blaze of light.

It was Milton Rhodes.

He turned his head, and I saw a smile move athwart his features.

"Well, we've found it, Bill!" said he.

I was now drawing near to him.

"That scream!" I said. "Who gave that terrible scream?"

"Terrible? It didn't sound terrible to me," said Milton Rhodes. "Fact is, Bill, I'd like to hear it again."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

" 'Tis so."

"Who was it? Or what was it?"

"Why, the angel!" he told me.

"Where is she now?"

"Gone, Bill; she's gone. When she saw me, she fetched up, gave that scream, then turned and vanished—around that next turn."

"What was she like, Milton?"

"I wish I could tell you! But how can a man describe Venus? I know one thing, Bill: if all the daughters of Drome are as fair as this one that I saw, I know where all the movie queens of the future are coming from."

I looked at him, and I laughed.

"Wait till you see her, Bill. Complexion like alabaster, white as Rainier's purest snow! And hair! Oh, that hair, Bill! Like ten billion dollars' worth of spun gold!"

"And the demon?" I queried.

"I didn't see any demon, Bill."

There was silence for a little space.

"Then," I said, "the whole thing is true, after all."

"You mean what Grandfather Scranton set down in his journal—and the rest of it?"

I nodded.

"I never doubted that."

"At times," I told him, "I didn't doubt it. Then, again, it all seemed so wild and weird that I didn't know what on earth to think."

"I think," he said with a wan smile, "that you know what to think now—now when you are standing in this very way to Drome, whatever Drome may be."

"Yes. And yet the thing is so strange. Think of it! A world of which men have never dreamed, save in the wildest romance! An underground world! Subterranean ways, subterranean cities, men and women there——"

"Cavernicolous Aphrodites!" said Milton Rhodes.

"And all down there in eternal darkness!" I exclaimed. "Why, the thing is incredible. No wonder that I sometimes find myself wondering if I am not in a dream!"

Said Milton Rhodes:

"All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.

"But come, Bill," he added, "don't let this *a priori* stuff bowl you over. In the first place, it isn't dark down there—when you get down far enough."

"In heaven's name, how do you know that?"

"Why, for one thing, if this subterranean world was one of unbroken darkness, the angel (and the demon) would be blind, like those fishes in the Mammoth Cave. But she is no more blind than you or I. Ergo, if for no other reason, we shall find light down there."

"Of course, they have artificial light, or——"

"I don't mean that. If there had not been some other illumination, this strange race (of whose very existence science has never even dreamed) would have ceased to exist long ago—if, indeed, it ever could have begun."

"But no gleam of sunlight can ever find its way to that world."

"It never can, of course. But there are other sources of light—nebulas and comets in the heavens, for example, and auroras, phosphorus and fireflies here on earth. The phenomena of phosphorescence are by no means so rare as might be imagined. Why, as Nichol showed—though any man who uses his eyes can see it himself—there is light inherent *even in clouds*."

All this, and more, Rhodes explained to me, succinctly but clearly.

"Oh, we'll find light, Bill," said he.

All the same this subterranean world for which we were bound presented some unpleasant possibilities, in addition, that is, to those concomitant to its being a habitat of demons—and heaven only knew what besides.

"And, then, there is the air," I said. "As we descend, it will become denser and denser, until at last we shall be able to use these ice-picks on it."

Rhodes, who was removing his creepers, laughed.

"We will have to make a vertical descent of three and one-half miles below the level of the sea—a vertical descent of near five miles from this spot where we stand, Bill—before we reach a pressure of even two atmospheres."

"The density then increases rapidly, doesn't it?"

"Oh, yes. Three and a half miles more, and we are under a pressure of four atmospheres, or about sixty pounds to the square inch. Three and a half miles farther down, or ten and one-half miles in all below the level of the sea, and we have a pressure upon us of eight atmospheres. Fourteen miles, and it will be sixteen atmospheres. At thirty-four miles the air will have the density of water; at forty-eight miles it will be as dense as mercury, and at fifty miles we shall have it as dense as gold."

"That will do!" I told him. "We can never get down that far."

"I have no idea how far we can go down, Bill."

"You know that we could never stand such pressures as those."

"I know that. But, as a matter of fact, I don't know what the pressures are at those depths. Nor does any other man know. What I said a moment ago is, of course, according to the law; but there is something wrong with the law, founded upon that of Mariotte—as any physicist will tell you."

"What's wrong with it?"

"At any rate, the law breaks down as one goes upward, and I have no doubt that it will be found to do so as one descends below the level of the

sea. If the densities of the atmosphere decrease in a geometrical as the distances from sea-level increase in an arithmetical ratio, then, at a distance of only one hundred miles up, we should have virtually a perfect vacuum. The rarity there would be absolutely inconceivable. For the atmospheric density at that height would be only *one billionth* of what it is at the earth's surface.''

''And what is the real density there?''

''No man knows or can know,'' replied Rhodes, ''until he goes up there to see. But meteors, rendered incandescent by the resistance they encounter, show that a state of things exists at that high altitude very different from the one that would be found there if our formulæ were correct and our theories were valid. And so, I have no doubt, we shall find it down in Drome.

''Formulæ are very well in their place,'' he went on, ''but we should never forget, Bill, that they are often builded on mere assumption and that a theory is only a theory until experiment (or experience) has shown us that it is a fact. And that reminds me: do you know what Percival Lowell says about formulæ?''

I said I didn't.

'' 'Formulæ,' says the great astronomer, 'are the anesthetics of thought.' I commend that very highly,'' Milton added, ''to our fiction editors and our writers of short stories.''

''But——''

''But me no buts, Bill,'' said Milton. ''And what do your scientists know about the interior of this old earth we inhabit, anyway? Forsooth, but very little, Billy me lad. Why, they don't even know what a volcano is. One can't make a journey into the interior of the earth on a scratch-pad and a lead-pencil, or if he does, we may be pardoned if we do not give implicit credence to all that he chooses to tell us when he comes back. For instance, one of these armchair Columbuses (he made the journey in a machine called d^2y by dx^2 and came out in China) says that he found the interior in a state of igneous fluidity. And another? Why, he tells us that the whole earth is as rigid as steel, that it is solid to the very core.''

''It seems,'' said I, ''to be a case of

> '''Great contest follows, and much learned dust
> Involves the combatants; each claiming truth,
> And truth disclaiming both.' ''

''The truth in this case is not yet known,'' replied Rhodes, ''though I trust that you and I, Bill, are fated to learn it.''

He smiled a queer, wan smile.

''Whether we are fated, also, to reveal it to the world, *our* world—well, *quién sabe?*'' said Milton Rhodes.

''Then,'' I remarked, my fingers busy removing my ice-creepers, ''what we read about the state of things in the interior of the earth—the temperature, the pressure, the density—then all that is pure theory?''

''Of course. How could it be anything else? All theory, save, that is, the mean density of the earth. And that mean density gives us something to think about, for it is just a little more than twice that of the surface materials. With all this enormous pressure that we hear so much about and the resultant increase of density with depth, the weight of the earth certainly ought to be more than only five and one-half times that of a globe of equal size composed of nothing but water.''

''Kind of queer, all right,'' was my comment.

''It is queer, all right—as the old lady said when she kissed the cow. However, as old Dante has it, 'Son! our time asks thriftier using.' ''

As the last word left his lips, I straightened up, the toothed shoes in

my hand;; and, as I did so, I started and cried: "Hear that?"

Rhodes made no answer. For some moments we stood there in breathless expectation; but that low mysterious sound did not come again.

"What *was* that?" I said.

"I wish I knew. It was faint and —well, rather strange."

"It seemed to me," I told him, "to be hollow—like the sound of some great door suddenly closing."

My companion looked at me rather quickly.

"Think so, Bill?" he said. "I thought 'twas the sound of something *falling*."

There was a pause, during which pause we stood listening and waiting; but the gallery remained as silent as though it had never known the tread of any living thing.

"Well, Bill," said Milton Rhodes suddenly, "we shall never learn what Drome means if we stay in this spot. As for the creepers, I am going to leave mine here."

Milton then wrote a short note, which recorded little more than our names, the date of our great discovery and that we were going farther. This, carefully folded, he placed beside the creepers and put a rock-fragment upon it. I wondered as I watched him whose would be the eyes that would discover it. Some inhabitant of this underground world, of course, and to such a one the record would be so much Greek. 'Twas utterly unlikely that anyone from that world which we were leaving would ever see that record. I wondered if we should ever see this spot again.

"And now, Bill," said Milton, "down we go!"

And the next moment we were going—had begun our descent into this most mysterious and dreadful place.

CHAPTER 16

"ARE WE ENTERING DANTE'S INFERNO ITSELF?"

When Scranton came with his weird story of Old He, I was, I confess, not a little puzzled by his and Milton's reference to the extraordinary scientific possibilities that it presented. At first I could not imagine what on earth they meant. But I saw all those possibilities very clearly now, and a thousand more I imagined. I knew a wild joy, exultation, and yet at the same time the wonder and the mystery of it all made me humble and sober of spirit. I admit, too, that a fear—a fear for which I can find no adequate name—had laid its palsied and cold fingers upon me.

In a few moments we reached that spot where the angel had vanished. There we paused in curiosity, looking about; but nothing was to be seen. The gallery—which from this point swung sharply to the right and went down at a rather steep angle—was as silent as some interstellar void.

"Bill," smiled Milton Rhodes, "he is idle who might be better employed."

And he started on, or, rather, down. A hundred feet, however (we were now under the glacier) and he halted, turned his light full upon the left-hand wall, pointed and said: "There you are, Bill—the writing on the wall."

I pressed to his side and stood staring. The rock there was as smooth, almost, as a blackboard; and upon it, traced in white chalk, were three inscriptions, with what we took to be names appended to them. That on the right was clearly a very recent one—had been placed there, doubtless, at the most but a few days since, by that "cavernicolous Venus" that Milton Rhodes had seen for so fleeting a moment.

It was Milton's opinion that the characters were alphabetical ones, though at first I was at a loss to understand how they could be anything to him but an utter mystery. The letters were formed by straight lines only. The simplest character was like a plain capital T, with the vertical line somewhat elongated. And it was made to perform the office of another letter by the simple expedient of standing it upon its head. The number of cross-lines increased up to six—three at the top and three at the bottom; and in one or two characters there were two vertical lines, placed close together.

"Evidently," observed Milton Rhodes, "this alphabet was constructed on strictly scientific principles."

For a space we stood there looking, wondering what was recorded in that writing so strange and yet, after all, so very and beautifully simple. Then Milton proceeded to place another record there, and, as he wrote, he hummed:

"'When I see a person's name
Scratched upon a glass,
I know he owns a diamond
And his father owns an ass.'"

The inscription finished, we resumed our descent. The way soon became steep and very difficult.

"That Aphrodite of yours," I observed as we made our way down a particularly rugged place, "must have the agility of a mountain-goat."

"Your rhetoric, Bill, is horrible. Wait till you see her; you'll never be guilty of thinking of a goat when she has your thoughts."

"By the way, what kind of a light did the lady have?"

"Light? Don't know. I was so interested in the angel herself that I never once thought of the light she carried. I don't know that she needs a light, anyway."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Why, I fancy, Bill, that her very presence would make even Pluto's gloomy realm bright and beautiful as the Gardens of the Hesperides."

"Oh, gosh!" was my comment.

"Wait till you see her, Bill."

"I'll probably see her demon first."

"Hello!" exclaimed Milton.

"What now?"

"Look at that," said he, pointing. "I think we have the explanation of that mysterious sound, which you thought was like that of a great door suddenly closing: in her descent, she dislodged a rock-fragment, and that sound we heard must have been produced by the mass as it went plunging down."

" 'Tis very likely, but——"

"Great heaven!" he exclaimed.

"What is it now?"

"I wonder, Bill, if she lost her footing here and went plunging down, too."

I had not thought of that. And the possibility that that lovely and mysterious being lay somewhere down there, crushed and bleeding, perhaps lifeless, made me feel very sad. We sent the rays of our powerful lights down into the silent depths of the tunnel, but nothing was visible there, save the dark rock and those fearful shadows—fearful, what with the secrets that might be hidden there.

"The answer won't come to us, Bill," said Milton.

"No," I returned as we started down; "we must go get it."

The gallery at this place had an average width of, I suppose, ten feet, and the height would average perhaps fifteen. The reader must not picture the walls, the roof and the floor as smooth, however. The rock was much broken, in some spots very jagged. The gallery pitched at an angle of nearly forty-five degrees, which will give some idea of the difficulties encountered in the descent.

At length we reached what may be called the bottom; here the tunnel gave another turn and the pitch became a gentle slope. And there we found it, the rock-fragment, weighing perhaps two hundred pounds, that the angel had dislodged in her descent—which doubtless had been a hurried, a wild one.

"Thank heaven," I exclaimed, "she didn't come down with it!"

"Amen," said Milton.

Then a sudden thought struck me, a thought so unworthy that I did not voice it aloud. But to myself I said: "It is possible that we may find ourselves, before we get out of this, wishing that she had."

If a human being, one of the very best of human beings even, were to voice his uttermost, his inmost thoughts, what a shameful, terrible monster they would call him—or her!

And the demon. Where was her demon?

I could give no adequate description of those hours that succeeded. Steadily we continued the descent—now gentle, now steep, rugged and difficult. Sometimes the way became very narrow—indeed, at one point we had to squeeze our way through, so closely did the walls approach each other—then, again, it would open out, and we would find ourselves in a veritable chamber. And, in one of these, a lofty place, the vaulted roof a hundred feet or more above our heads, we made a strange discovery—a skeleton, quasi-human and *with wings*.

"Are we," I cried, "entering Dante's Inferno itself?"

A faint smile touched the face of Rhodes.

"Don't you," he asked, "know what this is?"

"It must be the bones of a demon."

"Precisely. Grandfather Scranton, you'll remember, wounded that monster, up there by the Tamahnowis Rocks. Undoubtedly the bullet reached a vital spot, and these are the creature's bones."

"But," I objected, "these are *human* bones—a human skeleton with wings. According to Scranton, there was nothing at all human about the appearance of that thing which he called a demon."

"I admit," said Rhodes, "that this skeleton, at the first glance, has an appearance remarkably human—if, that is, one can forget the wings. The skull, I believe, more than anything else, contributes to that effect; and yet, at a second glance, even that loses its human semblance. For look at those terrible teeth. Whoever saw a human being with teeth like those? And look at the large scapulæ and the small hips and the dwarfish, though strong, nether limbs. Batlike, Bill, strikingly so. And those feet: they are talons, Bill. And see that medial ridge on the sternum, for the attachment of the great pectoral muscles."

"A bat-man, then?" I queried.

"I should say a bat-ape."

"Or an ape-bat."

"Whichever you prefer," smiled Milton.

"Well," I added, "at any rate, we have a fair idea now of what a demon is like."

Little wonder, forsooth, that old Sklokoyum had declared the thing was a demon from the white man's Inferno. And this creature so dreadful—well, the angel had it for a companion. When Rhodes saw her, she was, of course, without that terrible attendant: undoubtedly the next time, though—how long would it be?—she would not be alone.

"Oh, well," I consoled myself, "we have our revolvers."

CHAPTER 17

LIKE BALEFUL EYES

ACCORDING to the aneroid, this great chamber is about four thousand feet above the level of the sea; in other words, we had already made a vertical descent of some four thousand feet. We were now about as high above the sea as the snout of the Nisqually. But what was our direction from the Tamahnowis Rocks? So sinuous had been this strange subterranean gallery, my orientation had been knocked into a cocked hat. It was Milton's belief, however, that we had been moving in a northerly direction, that we were still under the peak itself, probably under the great Emmons Glacier. I confess that I would not have cared to place a wager on the subject. Goodness only knew where we were, but of one thing there could be no doubt: we were there!

"Why," I asked, "didn't we bring a compass?"

"I think," returned Milton, slipping loose his pack and lowering it to the floor, "that, as it was, we had a case of another straw and the camel's back's busted. Let's take a rest —it's twenty minutes after 1—and a snack. And another thing: we wouldn't know whether to trust the compass or not."

"Why so?"

"Local attraction, Bill. Many instances of this could be given. One will suffice. Lieutenant Underwood, of the Wilkes Exploring Expedition, found a deviation of thirteen and a quarter points on the summit of the Cobu Rock, in the Feejees—one hundred and forty-nine degrees. The Island of Nairai was directly north, and yet, according to the compass, it bore southeast-by-south one quarter south, whilst, placed at the foot of the rock, that very same compass said Nairai bore north! So you see that that faithful friend to man, and especially to the mariner, has in its friendships some qualities that are remarkably human.

"Still," Rhodes added, "I wish that we had brought one along. Also, we should have brought a manometer, for the aneroid will be worthless after we have descended below sea-level. Oh, well, the boiling point of water will give us the atmospheric pressure: under a pressure of two atmospheres, water boils at 249.5° Fahrenheit; under a pressure of three atmospheres, at 273.3°; four atmospheres, 291.2°; five, 306°; six, 318.2°; seven, 329.6°; eight, 339.5°; and so on. On the summit of Rainier, it boils at about 185°."

"I wish that we were headed for the summit," said I. "Eight atmospheres! When we reach that pressure—if we ever do—we'll be ten and a half miles below the level of the sea, won't we?"

Rhodes nodded.

"According to the law. But, as I remarked, there is something wrong with the law. 'Tis my belief that we shall be able to descend much deeper than ten and one-half miles—that is, that the atmospheric pressure will permit us to do so."

"That qualification," I told him, "is very apropos, for there is no telling what the inhabitants of this underground world will permit us to do or will do to us—bat-apes or ape-bats, humans, or both."

"That, of course, is very true, Bill."

"And," said I, "we won't need a manometer, or we won't need to ascertain the boiling point of water, to know that the pressure is increasing. Our ear-drums will make us painfully aware of that fact."

"When that comes, swaller, Billy, swaller, and the pain will be no more."

"Swallow?"

"Swallow," Milton nodded.

"Great Barmecide, swallow what?"

"Swallow the pain, Bill. For look you. Deglutition opens the Eustachian tube. Some of the dense air enters the drum and counteracts the pressure on the outside of the membrane. You keep on swallowing. The air in the drum becomes as dense as that outside; there is no pressure on the membrane now—or, rather, the pressures are in perfect equilibrium—and, presto and abracadabra, the pain is gone."

"Who would have thought it?"

"A gink," said Rhodes, "going into compressed air had better think it. He may have his ear-drums burst in if he doesn't."

"But why does the Eustachian tube open only when we swallow?"

"To shut from the ear the sounds produced in the throat and the mouth. If the tube were always open, our heads would be so many bedlams."

"Wonderful nature!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, she does fairly well," admitted Milton Rhodes.

"And I suppose," I said, "that the pain in the ears experienced by those who ascend high mountains is to be explained in the same way, only vice versa. They, too, ought to swallow."

"Of course. At lofty heights, the dense air in the drum presses the membrane outward. Swallowing permits the dense air to escape. One swallows until the pressure on the inside equals that of the rarefied outside air, and, hocus-pocus and presto, the pain has evaporated."

"I hope," I said, "that all our difficulties will be as easily resolved."

"Hey!" cried Milton.

"What's the matter now?"

"Stop *swallowing* that water! We've got food sufficient for a week, but we haven't got water to last a week or anything like it. Keep up that guzzling, and your canteen will be empty before sunset."

"Sunset? Sweet Pluto! Sunrise, sunset or high noon, it's all the same here in Erebus."

"You'll say that it's very different," dryly remarked Milton Rhodes, "if you find the fingers of thirst at your throat."

"Surely there is water in this place—somewhere."

"Most certainly there is. But we don't know how far we are from that somewhere. And, until we get to it, our policy, Bill, must be one of watchful conservation."

A silence ensued. I sank into profound and gloomy meditation. Four thousand feet down. A mile deeper, and where should we be? The prospect certainly was, from any point of view, dark and mysterious enough to satisfy the wildest dreams of a Poe or a Doré. To imagine a Dante's Inferno, however, is one thing and to find yourself in it is quite another. 'Tis true, we were not in it yet; but we were on our way.

I hasten to say, though, that I had no thoughts of turning back. No such thought, even the slightest, was entertained for one single moment. I did not blink, that was all. I believed our enterprize was a very dangerous one; I believed it was very probable that we should never return to the light of the sun. Such thoughts are not pleasant, are, indeed, horrible. And yet, in the very horror of them, I found a strange fascination. Yes, we might leave our bones in this underground world, in this very gallery even. Even so, we should have our own exceeding great reward. For ours would be the guerdon of dying in a stranger, a more wonderful quest, than any science or discovery ever had known. A strange reward, and perhaps you wonder what such a reward can mean to a dying or a dead man. All I have to say is that,

if you do, you know naught of that flaming spirit which moves the scientist and the discoverer, that such as you should never—indeed, can never—seek the dread secrets of nature or journey to her hidden places.

We rested there for exactly one hour. The temperature, by the way, was 57° Fahrenheit. When we resumed the descent, I was using the phosphorus lamp instead of the electric one. It was not likely that even our electric lights would fail us; still there was no guessing what might happen, and it might be well, I thought, to adopt a policy of light-conservation also. As for the phosphorus lamps, these would furnish light for *six months*. In this, they were simply wonderful; but there was one serious drawback; the light emitted was a feeble one.

The manufacture of this lamp (at one time used, I believe, in Paris, and probably elsewhere, in the magazines containing explosives) is simplicity itself. Into a glass phial is put a small piece of phosphorus. The phial is filled two-thirds full of olive oil, heated to the boiling point. The thing is hermetically corked, and there you are. When you wish to use your wonderful little pharos, you simply allow air to enter. The space above the oil becomes luminous then. You replace the cork, and the phial remains sealed until there is occasion to restore the waning light, which you do, of course, by allowing more air to enter. As has been said, such a phial will furnish light for a half-year.

These phials of ours were set each in a metal frame and protected by a guard in such fashion that it would take a heavy blow to break the glass. When not in use, they were kept in strong metal cylinders. Of course, the electric light could be turned on at any instant.

There were places where the gallery pitched in a way to make the head swim, many spots in which we had to exercise every caution; a false step might have spelled irrevocable disaster. I wondered how the angel had passed down those difficult places, and many pictures of that mysterious creature, as I wondered, came and went. Well, she had passed down and that without mishap. Where was she now? Indeed, where were we ourselves?

Steadily we toiled our downward way. For a long distance, the gallery ran with but slight deviation either to the right or to the left, though the descent was much broken—I mean now was steep and now gentle, now at some angle intermediate. Rhodes thought that we were now moving in an easterly direction; it might have been north, east, south or west for all I knew. Not a trickle of water had we seen, not even a single drop, which I confess caused some unpleasant thoughts to flicker through my mind.

At 5 o'clock we were two thousand feet above sea-level; at half past 7, about half a thousand. And we then decided to call it a day. Nor was I at all sorry to do so, even though we might be near some strange, even great discovery, for I was very tired, and sore from the top of my head to the end of my toes. I was in fair trim, and so was Rhodes; but it would take us some time to get used to such work as this.

A very gentle current of air, so slight that it required experiment to detect it, was passing down the gallery. The temperature here was 62° Fahrenheit.

We had stopped before a cavity in the wall, and in that little chamber we passed the night, one holding watch whilst the other slept.

My dreams were dreadful, but otherwise the night was as peaceful as any that ever passed over Eden. Neither Rhodes nor I, during that strange eery vigil there in the heart

of the living rock, heard even the faintest, most fleeting sound. As the watcher sat there waiting and listening, whilst the minutes slowly passed, he found himself—at any rate, I know that I did—almost wishing that some pulsation would come, so heavy and awful was the stillness of the place.

But a sound we were to hear. We had been journeying for about an hour and a half and had just passed below sea-level. In that place Rhodes had left the aneroid. Of a sudden Milton, who was leading the way, halted with a low, sharp interjection for silence. When my look struck him, he was standing in an attitude of the most riveted attention.

"There!" he exclaimed. "Did you hear that, Bill?"

The air had pulsed to the faintest sound; now all was still again.

"What was it?" I asked, my voice a whisper.

"Don't know, Bill. There!"

Again that gentle pulsation touched the ear, and again it was gone. And a strange thing was that, for the life of me, I could not have told whether it came from below or from behind us.

"There it is again!" said Rhodes.

I flashed on my electric light, to the full power.

"A whisper!" I exclaimed. "And, great heaven, Milton!"

"What now, Bill?" he asked quickly.

"It's something *behind us!*"

He started. He turned his light up the tunnel, and for some moments we stood peering intently. Not a moving thing was to be seen there, however—only the moving shadows.

"Again!" said Milton Rhodes. "But it isn't a whisper, Bill. And it didn't come from up there."

"The thing," I told him, "could be hiding in shadow."

"It's not up there; it is ahead."

"Wherever it is, what on earth can it be?—what does it mean?"

"That we shall learn."

WE RESUMED our descent, every sense, you may be sure, on the *qui vive*. The tunnel here inclined rather steeply; a little space, however, and the dip was a gentle one. The sounds soon became one steady, unbroken whisper; then a dull melancholy murmur.

Abruptly Rhodes stopped, turned to me, and he laughed.

"Know now what it is, Bill?"

This was not a moment, I thought, for laughter or anything like it.

"Sounds like the growling of beasts," I said, peering intently down the passage. "I wonder if the angel—there are two kinds of angel, you know—has turned loose a whole pack, or flock, of those demons."

To my surprize and astonishment, Rhodes burst into outright laughter.

"Well?" said I rather testily. "Why all the cachinnation?"

"Forgive me, Bill. But it isn't a pack of demons—or a flock."

"How on earth do you know *what* it is?"

"It's water."

"Water?"

"Yes. H-two-O."

"Water? I'm from Missouri. You'd better see that your revolver is handy. Who ever heard water make a shivery sound like that?"

"You'll see, though I think that you'll hear first."

Ere long there could be no doubt about it: Milton was right; it was the sound of falling water.

"Must be at quite a distance," I said; "sounds carry a long way in tubes, and that is what this tunnel is."

Steadily we made our way along and down, and, just as steadily, the sound increased in volume. The gallery made several sharp turns, and then of a sudden the sound rose from

a loud growl to a roar, and an exclamation burst from us.

It were impossible to convey to the reader the eery effect of that sudden, strange transition. One moment we were in the gallery; the next we had issued from it and stood in a most tremendous cavern—or, rather, on a ledge or shelf high up on one of the walls of that cavern.

The opposite side was but dimly visible. The roof swept across a hundred feet or more above our heads. And the bottom? I gazed at the edge of the rock shelf on which we stood, out and down into that yawning abyss, and I felt a shudder run through me and on through my heart. The roar of the falling waters came from our right. We turned the rays of our lights in that direction, but nothing was visible there, save the dark limestone rock and Cimmerian blackness.

We then moved to the edge and turned our lights down into those awful depths—to depths perhaps never before touched by ray of light since time began. Far down the beams went plunging and farther still; but we could not see the bottom. Bottom there was, however, for the water was tumbling and growling down there.

I was glad to draw back from the edge, and I leaned against the rock wall and gazed upon the dark scene in wonder, amazement and awe. Rhodes joined me.

"Well, what do you think of it, Bill?"

"Milton, this is awful."

"It is. I have never seen a sight more strange and terrible."

"And the angel?" I queried.

"What about her, Bill?"

"How on earth did she make her way through this awful place?"

"Why, along this ledge on which we are standing. There is no other way."

I glanced along that shelf, and I felt very sad.

"She's got a better head," I told him, "than I have. Why didn't we bring along an airplane? I wonder if the way lies down or up, toward the fall."

We bent over and examined the rock.

"Down," I observed.

"Down," Milton nodded.

Whilst I stood there pondering this and wondering what was down there in the blackness of that frightful chasm, Rhodes moved off to the right and examined the ledge there.

"And *up* too," he announced. "Somebody or something, or both, has gone up toward the fall."

"Great heaven, if we get caught between them!"

"The program is becoming interesting," Rhodes admitted.

For a time we stood in silence, then Milton said: "I suggest that we go up and take a look-see."

I nodded. So far as I could perceive, one way was just as good—I mean just as bad—as the other.

That shelf was, as a whole, not an easy thing to negotiate, and some spots made my head swim and made me wish mightily that I was somewhere else. Undoubtedly, some thousands of years in the dim and mysterious past, the stream once flowed at this level—at any rate, that is the only theory that, in my opinion, will explain that ledge, and something we were soon to discover. Not that I ever spent much time in worrying about theories and hypotheses; the facts themselves gave me enough to think about, enough and to spare.

At times the shelf would be twenty or thirty feet in width or even more, and then the going was easy enough; but at other times the space would contract to a couple of yards, and then it was another story. Once or twice Milton Rhodes himself, an experienced and fearless mountain-

climber, was glad, I believe, that the way was no narrower. As for what those moments meant to me—well, I never posed as a mountaineer or a steeplejack.

For fifteen minutes or so, I believe, we toiled along that terrible place, and then of a sudden came to the end. Nothing before us but the bare precipitous rocky wall and the black profundity of the chasm, and up above a ghostly thing crawling, crawling down, ever down, and filling the place with thunder—the fall itself. Where did the water come from? And, a question more interesting, where did it go?

"We must go back," said Milton Rhodes. "The road to Drome does not lie here."

Scarcely had we turned when I started, and then I cried out sharply.

"Look!" I said, pointing with my alpenstock down the cavern. "Look at that!"

Far down the cave a light was gleaming, where a moment before no light had been. And on the instant another shone beside it. A second or two, however, and they had vanished.

"Moving," was Rhodes' explanation.

"No!" I told him. "And look! *Again!*"

There they were—gleaming at us for all the world like the dim and baleful eyes of some waiting monster.

CHAPTER 18

"THAT'S WHERE THEY ARE WAITING FOR US!"

For some moments those yellow eyes gleamed at us, then vanished. The lids of that waiting monster (so to speak) had closed over them.

I had watched them very closely, and I was sure that there had been no movement of the eyes themselves. Milton, however, was just as sure that they had moved.

"To the right or to the left?" I queried.

"Neither. Down," said Rhodes.

"Then it must have been straight down."

"It was—behind a rock mass or something."

We waited, watching closely, but those yellow eyes did not gleam again through that Stygian gloom.

"Must have been at quite a distance," I remarked at last.

"It seems so, Bill; and that means that this cavern is very straight for a mile or more or that it is one of enormous size."

"It may be both."

"It may be. And it may be that those lights were not so far away as they appeared to be. One may easily be deceived in such matters."

"We don't know what it means," I said, "but we know this: we're spotted."

"Oh, we're seen, all right, Bill. Our every movement will be watched."

Some minutes passed, during which we stood peering down the cavern and waiting; but no light gleamed forth again. Then we started back.

"We'd better keep a sharp lookout," I said suddenly. "Remember, a demon doesn't have to come along the ledge."

"I have not forgotten that, Bill; but we are armed."

As I believe was made sufficiently obvious, the crossing of those places where the ledge narrowed to the width of but a couple of yards had been no pleasant matter; but during the return the thing assumed an aspect truly sinister. That we were being watched both of us regarded as certain. That we might at any moment find a demon or a dozen demons driving at us—well, that was a possibility which never left our thoughts for one single second. And, in those narrow places, where the ledge contracted to a mere ribbon of rock, it

was all one wanted to do to hug the wall and make sure of his footing. A frightful place, truly, in which to meet, even with a revolver, the attack of even one of those winged monsters; and we might find ourselves attacked by a dozen.

It can easily be imagined, then, the relief which I felt when we had passed the last narrow spot, though, forsooth, we might be going toward something far more terrible than any we had left behind us. But the angel had gone down, and where a woman could go, there, I told myself in masculine pride, could we also.

"That is," I subjoined, "supposing we do not meet ape-bats or something more terrible."

At length we stood once more at the mouth of the gallery. And scarcely had we stopped there when an unpleasant thing flashed into my thoughts—which, as it was, resembled anything but the rainbow.

"Great heaven!" I cried, peering into the tunnel, which, at the distance of only thirty feet or so, gave a sudden turn to the right.

Something could be in there, very close to us and yet unseen!

"What is it, Bill?"

"Could those lights that we saw have been *here?* Are they waiting in there to dog our steps or to do something worse?"

Rhodes, peering into the gallery with a curious, half-vacuous expression on his face, made no reply.

"Well," I queried, "what do you think of it? We could not tell where those lights were, how far away—anything."

"I don't think that they were here," Milton Rhodes returned. "I think they were much farther down and *on the other side.*"

"On the other side? How on earth could anyone cross that chasm?"

"We don't know what it is like down there. And, of course, I don't ***know*** that the lights were on the other side. But I believe that they were."

A silence ensued, which at length I broke:

"What is the next thing on the program?"

"Make our way down the ledge. That is the only way we can go. But first we'll try a little finesse."

He took a position in the mouth of the tunnel, one that permitted him to look down the cavern. He signed to me to follow suit, and, when I stood at his side, he said: "Off go the lights!"

Off they went, and the terrible blackness was upon us. So terrible was it and so strange and fearful that place in which we stood, I actually found myself wondering if it would not all prove a dream.

"Why," I asked at last, "did we do this?"

"To see if the lights will show again. They may think that we have lost heart and started back."

I saw it all now: instead of our advancing to those mysterious beings somewhere down the cavern, he would bring them to us.

But they did not come. They did not show even the faintest light. We waited there for many minutes, but nothing whatever was seen.

"Hum!" said Rhodes at last, snapping on his light. "Wary folk, Bill, these Hypogeans."

"And so," I replied, "we'll have to go to them."

"That's what we shall have to do."

"Walk maybe right into a trap."

"It is possible," Rhodes admitted. "But it is possible too that the trap may not prove so terrible—possible, indeed, that there is no trap at all. I tell you, I certainly would like to see that angel again."

"Then let's go see her."

"That's what we'll do."

And so we started.

A STRANGE, indefinable dread had its grip upon me, and yet I was anxious to go, to put the thing to an issue. In all probability, we should not have far to travel. Nor, in fact, did we.

The way was much like the one that we had traversed in the opposite direction. One or two spots were even more dangerous than any we had found up there. And, over these dangerous, terrible places, where a false step or a slip of the foot on the smooth rock would have meant a most horrible death—along this airy, dizzy Stygian way, the angel had passed. Well, she was a brave angel, at any rate.

We were descending all the while, sometimes at an angle that I was glad was no steeper. This does not mean, however, that our distance from the bottom of that terrible chasm, on our right, was decreasing. The sounds that came up from the black depths of it told plainly that the descent of the stream was as pronounced as that of the ledge we were following, and perhaps more so.

"And here's something that I don't understand," was my remark as we stopped in a particularly broken spot: "to say nothing of our being below sea-level, here this stream has been pouring down for untold centuries, for how many thousands of years no man can even guess, and yet the place isn't full. Where does all the water go?"

"Think," was Milton's answer, "of all the rivers that, for how many *millions* of years no man can tell, have been running into the sea, and yet the sea is not overflowing."

"I don't see the application of that to this underground world, don't see how all the water—there must be more streams than this—can possibly return as vapor to the region above."

"I admit," Rhodes said, "that the problem is a formidable one and that, with our present paucity of data, we can not hope to solve it. Still I think my suggestion sound."

"But where are the openings to permit the escape of so enormous—for enormous it must be—an amount of water vapor?"

"There may be countless vents, fissures, Bill, ways of egress that man will never know. Whatever the explanation, there can be no doubt that the water is going down and that this subterranean world is not full."

"But where does it go? Down to some sunless sea, perhaps, though, if that hypothesis of yours is a sound one, bathed in light, light never seen, in that world we have left, on land or sea."

Rhodes was a silent for a moment, leaning on his alpenstock. Then: "It is strange, truly, the descent of the waters. And yet it would not, I believe, have been to you so very strange a thing had you known that the sea itself flows into the earth."

"The sea itself?"

Rhodes nodded.

"Surely, Milton—why, the thing is Jules Vernesque!"

"On the contrary, the fact has long been known. At Argostoli in the Island of Cephalonia, the sea flows right into the limestone rock."*

"Shades of Lemuel Gulliver, but this old ball that men call the earth is certainly a strange old sphere!"

"How strange," said Milton Rhodes, "no scientist has ever dreamed, though your scientist has thought of things far stranger than

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* "The cases are certainly not numerous where marine currents are known to pour continuously into cavities beneath the surface of the earth, but there is at least one well-authenticated instance of this sort—that of the mill streams at Argostoli in the island of Cephalonia. It had been long observed that the sea water flowed into several rifts and cavities in the limestone rocks of the coast, but the phenomenon has excited little attention until very recently. In 1833, three of the entrances were closed, and a regular channel sixteen feet long and three feet wide with a fall of three feet, was cut into the mouth of a larger cavity. The sea water flowed into this canal, and could be followed eighteen or twenty feet beyond its inner terminus, when it disappeared in holes and clefts in the rock."—George P. Marsh: *Man and Nature.*

any ever conceived by your wildest romancer, who, after all, Bill, is a pretty tame homo."

"I have an idea," I said, glancing down the cavern, "that we are going to find the homos here in this place anything but tame."

Milton laughed and, without any other answer, turned and resumed the descent.

For one thing I was profoundly thankful: the wall ran along without any pronounced cavities or projections in it, so that we had little to apprehend from a sudden attack on this our giddy way—except, of course, by a demon. Had the wall been a broken one, any instant might have found us face to face with a band of Hypogeans, as Rhodes called the denizens of this subterranean place.

But how long would the wall remain like that? And, after all, did it really greatly matter? Meeting, sooner or later, was inevitable. 'Tis true, I could not conceive of a worse place than this, supposing the meeting to be, in any measure, an unfriendly one. And, from what had happened up there at the Tamahnowis Rocks, I could not suppose that it would be anything else.

This, however, was to prove simply another instance of how inadequate the imagination, when confronted with the reality, is sometimes found to be, for even now we were drawing near a place more terrible even than this—and that was the place where we met!

It required but little imagination, though, to make us aware, and painfully so, of the extreme probability (regarded by ourselves as a certitude) that eyes were watching our every movement. But where were those eyes? And what were the watchers? To what fearful thing—or could it be wonderful?—were we drawing near at every single moment now?

Some minutes passed, perhaps fifteen, perhaps more; I can not say how long it was. Of a sudden, however, Rhodes, who was still leading the way, stopped. No sound had escaped him, and he stood there like a statue, peering intently straight ahead.

"Look there," he said in a low voice, pointing with his alpenstock, "and tell me what you see."

I was already looking, and already I had seen it. But what on earth was that thing which I saw?

I remained silent, gazing with straining eyes and wondering if I really saw what I thought that I did.

"What," asked Rhodes, "do you make of it?"

"The thing is so faint. 'Tis impossible, and yet, if it were not so, I would say that it is an arch—part of a bridge."

"Just what I thought. The thing is so strange, though, that I didn't know whether to believe my eyes or not."

"And so dim," I observed, "that it may be nothing of the kind. A bridge? Now, who on earth would build a bridge across this frightful chasm? And why?"

"*Quién sabe,* Bill?" said Milton Rhodes.

The next moment we were moving toward it.

"Look!" ejaculated Rhodes suddenly. "It goes clear across!"

"Yes," I said, stopping and gazing at that strange dim mass; "it goes clear across. And that's the place, over there on the other side—that's where they are waiting for us!"

CHAPTER 19

THE ANGEL AND HER DEMON

"I SHOULDN'T be a bit surprized," said Milton. "And a strange bridge, that, truly. It looks like a ruin, a ruin that has not fallen."

It was a ruin indeed. So ruinous was it that I wondered how the mass could possibly remain intact. A short advance, however, and the mystery was solved. The hand of man had not builded that great arch across this dreadful chasm; nature had fashioned it, there in that region of everlasting darkness. It has, Rhodes said, a remarkable semblance to the celebrated Natural Bridge in Virginia.

A short space, and we stood upon it, gazing across. Its width here was about sixty feet. The surface was, comparatively speaking, a smooth one, and it had a rather pronounced slope upward—a circumstance by no means conducive to security of footing. And a feature that I noticed with some unpleasant misgivings was the diminution of width at the farther end. Just how wide it was there we could not tell, what with the uncertain light that struggled to the spot; but we saw enough to know that that way which we should have to cross was a very narrow one indeed; and on either side the black chasm yawning to receive us. And just beyond, dim and ghostly as though seen in a dream, stupendous columns rose up and were involved in the darkness of the lofty cavern.

"What on earth are those?" I queried. "It reminds one of a Grecian temple."

"Limestone pillars, no doubt," returned Milton.

"And it's there," I exclaimed, my voice, however, low and guarded, "that they are waiting for us! That is where those lights were."

"I suppose so."

"They'll wait until we get in that cursed narrow place, and then——"

"And then?"

"Well," I told him, "we had better say our prayers before we start across."

Rhodes laughed. I thought, though, that there was a touch of the sardonic in his laugh. Little wonder, forsooth, if 'twas so, for the thing was fraught with terrible possibilities.

"What," I asked, "are we to do?"

"Cross over—if we are permitted to do so."

If we should be permitted to do so!

I gazed into the black profundity of the chasm, and felt very sad.

"Holy Gorgons," I said, "haven't we got into a fine pickle, though?"

"I'll tell you what we'll do, Bill: you remain here, like Horatius at the bridge, while I explore along the ledge."

"I don't like it," I told him. "United we stand—well, you know the rest of it."

He was silent for some moments. Then: "I think that we can risk it, Bill."

"Very well," I acquiesced, shrugging my shoulders. "But I tell you that I don't like it at all."

The next moment, however, he had turned and was moving down the ledge. I stepped back to the wall (upon which two inscriptions were traced) and waited the result with such composure as I could summon.

At last Rhodes moved behind a projection in the wall. A moment, and the glow of his light had vanished. He was gone, and I was alone in that terrible place.

The blackness seemed to increase, the shadows to thicken about me and grow denser. But one sound broke the awful silence, which sound seemed to have a quality tangible, crushing—the growl of the water in the abysmal depths of the chasm. And even that sound, as I stood there listening, watching, waiting, seemed to change; it seemed to sink to a murmur, then a whisper, as though evil spirits were hushing it to lull my suspicions and even my very senses.

What was that? I started, and something shot through my very heart, chilling and sharp as the needle point of an icicle.

Surely I had seen it. Yes! There it was again, dim but unmistakable, there by one of the great columns—a single point of light, an eye staring at me with a greenish fire.

Yes, there it was! Then of a sudden it was gone.

For a time I stood peering and waiting, the blood throbbing in my ears; but it was not seen again.

I turned and looked down the ledge, and I gave an exclamation that was one of relief and joy, for there was Rhodes just come into view around that projection in the wall.

"What," I asked as he drew near, "did you find down there?"

"We can't go down. The shelf is broken—nothing but sheer wall between. So it's across the bridge for us."

"We may never reach the other side."

And then I told him what I had seen.

"And," I asked, "didn't Grandfather Scranton say that the eyes of the demon burned with a greenish fire?"

Rhodes nodded.

"Of course, though," he said, "light has to reach them, or the eyes can't shine. In absolute darkness they would not do so."

"That eye shone, though ghostly, for the light that reaches that spot is dim. And so the angel at least—and heaven only knows what besides—is waiting there with her demon!"

"Yes, Bill; there can be no doubt that the eye which you saw belonged to a demon. The prospect is certainly a sinister one, I admit."

A silence ensued. Of a sudden Rhodes raised his voice and hallooed: "*Hello* there!"

The answer came almost on the instant: "Hello there—hello there—hello there—hello—hello!"

" 'Tis only Echo, lovely Echo," smiled Milton Rhodes.

Again he raised his voice, and again the words were thrown back at him.

"Hear that, Bill?" he cried whilst the echoes were still sounding.

"I heard it."

"*That* was no echo!"

"No," I said; "it was no echo!"

We waited, listening intently, but that sound which had come with the echoes was not heard again.

Rhodes drew his revolver and examined the weapon most carefully. He looked at me curiously, and then he said: "I have no desire, Bill, to disguise the fact that this crossing may prove a most, a most—Bill, it may prove——"

"You needn't tell me," said I. "I know very well what it may mean."

"But we can't turn back, Bill."

"No; we can't turn back."

He reached out his hand and grasped mine. And then, without another word, we started.

I had known some critical, terrible, horrible scenes in my life; but never anything like the suspense and mystery of those moments that now succeeded. What were we to see? What were we to meet? And, horror of horrors, it would be in that place where the bridge narrowed to a mere ribbon—the frightful depths yawning on each side, almost at our very feet.

Well, at last we reached it. My head began to swim, so terrible was the place, and I had to stop and get a grip upon my nerves. Rhodes too paused, and for some moments we stood there, so near to safety and yet—the mockery of it!—closer than ever to mystery and danger and perhaps horror unnamable.

"Now for it, Bill!" said Rhodes. "Keep your revolver ready for instant action!"

And we started across. The place was so narrow that we could not think of walking side by side. Rhodes was leading. And then it came—when we had taken eight or

ten steps, when we had reached the most dangerous spot on that ribbon of rock.

Of a sudden a dark figure, straining at its leash, moved from behind one of the limestone pillars, and two eyes shone horribly in the light, burning with a greenish fire, and the strong rays were flashed back in the horrid gleam of teeth. And, beside that demoniac shape, a tall figure appeared, a figure clothed in white, the eyes wide and blazing, the face white as snow and framed in gleaming gold, which fell in masses about the shoulders—a figure majestic, indescribably lovely and dreadful.

It was the angel and her demon!

CHAPTER 20

THE ATTACK

THAT strange, weird scene, like some terrible vision from the pages of Doré, often rises before me—the tall white figure of the angel, the dark, squatting winged monster before her, and we two men from the sunlit world standing there upon that narrow way, the black profundity of the chasm yawning on either side of us.

The angel had indeed well chosen the moment. If that hideous ape-bat, straining at its leash, were loosed at us, our position, despite our revolvers, would be a truly horrible one. Scarce twenty-five feet lay between the monster and ourselves. In case of attack, we would have to drop the monster in its spring—and only a lucky shot could do that—or the result would be a most disastrous one. For we could not meet an attack there; to step aside or to meet the demon in a struggle would mean a plunge over the edge.

It was indeed a critical, appalling scene, one in which I have no desire to see even my worst enemy placed. Our fate, I thought, was in the hands of that white-robed, white-faced being whom we knew as the angel. The demon, however, as will be seen in a moment, was to take the matter in his own hands, if I may use that expression in speaking of that monster, for hands the thing had none. I can easily see how the demon, in the obscurity of the fog, had seemed to old Scranton a thing that had no shape. But here, the strong rays of our lights turned full upon the demon, the sight was an altogether different one. And a stranger sight surely no man had ever seen up there in that world which we had left, that world so near to us still, and yet it seemed so very far away now. It was as though some Circe had changed us into figures in some dread story of ancient days. And this was what men called the Twentieth Century, the golden age of science and discovery! Well, science doesn't yet know everything—a fact that, I am sorry to say, some scientists themselves are very prone to forget.

"Heavens," said Rhodes, keeping his look fixed on those figures before us, "isn't she a wonderful creature!"

"And it," said I, "an awful thing! And I'd wait a while before saying that she is wonderful. She may prove to be something very different."

The next instant I gave a cry. The demon had made a sudden strain forward. Came a sharp word from the angel, and that cerberus sank back again. But, though it sank back, that greenish fire in its eyes seemed to burn more fiercely, malevolently, than before.

"I think," I suggested, "it would be a good plan to move back a little, back to a safer, a wider spot."

"Move back? Never!" said Milton Rhodes. "We are here to move forward, not to go back."

I thought this utterly Quixotic; but, of course, if he didn't want to go back, I couldn't make him. And, if he wouldn't step back, neither would I.

"Look," I said. "She is going to speak."

The angel raised her left hand and motioned to us rather vehemently, at the same time uttering some word—or words.

"No mistaking that, Bill," said Milton.

"No; it is as plain as any words could be: 'Go back!'"

"I am at a loss," said Rhodes, "how to answer."

Again the angel raised her hand; but she did not motion this time, for the demon, with a blood-curdling sound, deep in its throat, strained forward again, and so suddenly and strongly that the angel was drawn forward a step or two. A sharp word, however, from the angel, and the monster settled back, as a dog does after straining at its leash.

Once more the angel fixed her eyes upon us—or, rather, upon Milton Rhodes. Once more she raised her hand to sign to us to go back. But the sign was never given!

At that instant, as the angel stood there with upraised hand, it happened.

That sound came again, only more horrible than before, and the demon sprang at us. Caught thus off her guard, the angel was jerked, whirled forward. There was a wild, piercing cry, which rose to a scream; but the winged monster paid not the slightest heed. It was as though the thing had gone mad. The angel went down; in an instant, however, she was up again. She screamed at the demon, but it lunged toward us, flapping its great hideous wings and dragging her after it out onto the bridge. Her position now was one of peril scarcely less than our own.

All this had passed, of course, with the quickness of thought. We could not fire, for fear of hitting the angel, right behind the demon; we could not move back; and we could not stand there and let this nightmare monster come upon us. In a second or two, if nothing was done, it could do so. But what could we do? The thought of saving ourselves by killing the woman—and the chances were a hundred to one that we should kill her if we fired at the demon—was a horrible one. But to stand there and be sent over the edge was horrible too. And the angel, in all probability, would be killed anyway; that she had not already been jerked from the rock was nothing less than a miracle. Why didn't she loose her hold on the leash?

These are some of the things that flashed through my mind—yes, even then. I never before knew what a rapid thing thought can be. Oh, those things that shot through my brain in those brief, horrible seconds! My whole life, from childhood to that very moment, flashed before me like the film of a cinematograph, though with the speed of light. I wondered what death was like—what it would be like somewhere in the depths of that black gulf. And I wondered why the angel did not loose her hold on that leash! I didn't know that she had wrapped the chain around her hand and that the chain had in some way got caught. The poor angel could not free herself!

Little wonder, forsooth, that she was screaming so fearfully.

"We must risk it!" I cried.

"Hold!"

The next instant Milton Rhodes had stepped aside—yes, stepped right to the very edge of the rock. The demon whirled at him, and, as it whirled, one of its great wings struck me full across the face. I gave myself up for lost, but some-

how I kept my place on that ribbon of rock. Another instant, and the monster would be at Milton's throat. But no! From this dizzy position which he had so suddenly taken, the angel was no longer behind the demon, and on the instant Rhodes fired.

Oh, that scream which the monster gave! It struck the rock, and that Rhodes managed to keep his footing on the edge of that fearful place is one of the most amazing things that I have ever seen. But keep it he did, and he fired again and again. The demon flapped backward, jerked the angel to her knees and near the edge and then suddenly flat on her face. The next instant the monster disappeared. Its wings were beating against the rock with a spasmodic, hideous sound.

I gave a cry of relief and joy; but the next moment one of dismay and horror broke from me.

The monster was dragging the angel over the edge!

CHAPTER 21

INTO THE CHASM

MILTON RHODES threw himself prone on the rock and his right arm around the angel's waist.

"Quick, Bill, quick! Her arm—the whole weight of the monster!"

Her screams had ceased, but from her throat broke a moan, long, tremulous, heartrending—a sound to shake and rend my already quivering nerves to enhance most dreadfully the indescribable horror of the scene and the moment.

I could do nothing where I was, had to step over the prostrate forms, which, in my heated imagination, were being dragged over the edge.

The wings of the demon were still beating against the rock, the blows not so strong but more spasmodic—the sound a leathery, sickening tattoo.

It will probably be remembered that the angel had held the demon with her right hand. I was now on the angel's right; and, stretched out on the rock, I reached down over the edge in an effort to free her from that dragging monster, the black depths over which we hung turning me dizzy and faint.

I now saw how the angel had been caught and that she had been dragged so far over the edge that I could not, long-armed though I am, reach the leash. So I grasped her arm and, with a word of encouragement, began to pull. Slowly we drew the monster up. Another moment, and the chain would be within the reach of my other hand. Yes, there. Steady, so. I had reached down my other hand, my fingers were in the very act of closing on the chain, when, horrors, I felt myself slipping along the smooth rock—slipping over into that appalling gulf.

To save myself, I had to let go the angel's arm, and, as the chain jerked to the monster's weight, an awful cry broke from the angel and from Milton Rhodes, and I saw her body dragged farther over.

"Cut it, Bill, cut it!"

"It's a chain."

Rhodes groaned.

"We must try again. Great heaven, we can't let her be dragged over!"

"This horrible spot makes the head swim."

"Steady, Bill, steady," said Rhodes. "Here, hold her while I get a grip with my other arm. Then I'll get a hold on you with my right."

"We'll all be dragged over."

"Nonsense," said Rhodes. "And, besides, I've got a hold with my feet now, in a crack or something."

A few moments, and I was again reaching down, Rhodes' grip upon me this time. Again I laid hold on

the angel's arm, and again she and I drew the monster up. This time, though, I got my other hand on the chain. And yet, even then, the chain hanging slack above my hand, the angel was some time in freeing her own, from the fingers of which blood was dripping. But at last she had loosened the chain, and then I let go my hold upon it, and down the demon went, still flapping its wings, though feebly now, and disappeared into those black and fearful depths.

I have no recollection of any sound coming up. Undoubtedly a sound came. Little wonder, forsooth, that I did not hear it.

A moment, and I was back from the edge, and Milton and I were drawing the angel to the safety of that narrow way. She sank back in Rhodes' arms, her eyes closed, her head, almost hidden in the gleaming golden hair, on her shoulder.

"She's fainted," said I.

"Little wonder if she has, Bill."

But she had not. Scarcely had he spoken when she opened her eyes. At once she sat up, and I saw a faint color suffuse those snowy features.

"Well," said I to myself, "whatever else she may be, our angel is human."

We remained there for a little while, recovering from the effects of the horrible scene through which we had passed, then arose and started for that place of safety there amongst the wonderful, stupendous limestone pillars. I was now moving in advance, and I confess (and nothing could more plainly show how badly my nerves had been shaken) that I would gladly have covered those few remaining yards on all fours—if my pride would have permitted me to do so.

Yes, there we stood, by that very pillar behind which the angel had waited for us with her demon. There was her lamp—lantern rather —dark, of course, though not extinguished.

I looked at it and looked all around.

"We saw *two* lights," I said. "And yet she was waiting here *alone*."

"There certainly were two lights, Bill—two persons at least. Her companion went somewhere; that is the only explanation I can think of."

"I wonder where," said I, "and what for."

"Help, perhaps. You know, Bill, I have an idea that, if we had delayed much longer, our reception there," and he waved a hand toward the bridge, "would have been a very different one."

"It was interesting enough to suit me. And, as it is, heaven only knows what is to follow."

The angel, standing there straight and still, was watching us intently, so strange a look in her eyes—those eyes were blue—that a chill passed through my heated brain, and I actually began to wonder if I was being hypnotized. Hypnotized? And in this cursed spot!

I turned my look straight into the eyes of the angel, and, as I looked, I flung a secret curse at that strange weakness of mine and called myself a fool for having entertained, even for a fleeting moment, a thought so absurd.

Rhodes had noticed, and he turned his look upon me and upon the woman—this creature so indescribably lovely and yet with so indefinable, mysterious a Sibylline something about her. For some moments there was silence. I thought that I saw fear in those blue eyes of hers, but I could not be sure. That strange look, whether one of fear or of something else, was not all that I saw there; but I strove in vain to find a name or a meaning for what I saw.

Science, science! This was the age of science, the age of the airplane, the submarine, radium, television and radio; and yet here was a scene to make Science herself rub her eyes in amazement, a scene that might have been taken right out of some wild story or out of some myth of the ancient world. Well, that ancient world, too, had its science, some of which science, I fear (though this thought would have brought a pooh-pooh from Milton Rhodes) man has lost to his sorrow. And, like that ancient world, so perhaps had this strange underground world which we had entered—or, rather, were trying to enter. And perhaps of that science or some phases of it, this angel before us had fearful command.

One moment I told myself that we should need all the courage we possessed, all the ingenuity and resource of that science of which Milton Rhodes himself was the master; the next, that I was letting my imagination overleap itself.

My thoughts were suddenly broken by the voice of Milton.

"Goodness, Bill, look at her hand! I forgot!"

He stepped toward the angel and gently lifted her blood-dripping hand. The chain had sunk right into the soft wrist. The angel, however, with a smile and a movement with her left hand, gave us to understand that the hurt was nothing.

The next moment she gave an exclamation and gazed past me down the pillared cavern. Instantly I turned, and, as I did so, I too exclaimed.

There, far off amongst the columns, two yellow, wrathful lights were gleaming, and dark hurrying figures were moving toward us.

CHAPTER 22

WHAT DID IT MEAN?

"The help is coming, Bill," said Milton Rhodes. "And that reminds me: I haven't reloaded my revolver."

"I would lose no time in doing so," I told him.

He got out the weapon and proceeded to reload it. It was not, by the way, one of these new-fangled things but one of your good old-fashioned revolvers—solid, substantial, one that would stand hard usage, a piece to be depended upon. And that was what we needed—weapons to be depended upon.

The angel was watching Rhodes closely. I wondered if she knew what had killed her demon—knew, I mean that this metal thing, with its glitter so dull and so cold, was a weapon. It was extremely unlikely that she had, in that horrible moment on the bridge, seen what actually had happened. However that might have been, it was soon plain that she recognized the revolver as a weapon—or, at any rate, guessed that it was.

With an interjection, she stepped to Rhodes' side, and, with swift pantomime, she assured us that there was nothing at all to apprehend from those advancing figures.

"After all," Milton said, slipping the revolver into his pocket, "why should we be so infernally suspicious? Maybe this world is very different from our own."

"It seems to me," I told him, my right hand in that pocket which contained my revolver, "that we have good cause to be suspicious. Have you forgotten what Grandfather Scranton saw up there at the Tamahnowis Rocks (and what he didn't see) and the horrible death there of Rhoda Dillingham, to say nothing of what happened to us here a few minutes ago? That we

are not at the bottom of that chasm—well, I am not anxious to have another shave like that."

"I have not forgotten, Bill. I have an idea, though, that those awful tragedies up there were purely accidental. Certainly we know that the demon's attack upon ourselves was entirely so."

"Accidental? Great Scott, some consolation, that!"

I looked at Milton Rhodes, and I looked at the angel, who had taken a few steps forward and was awaiting those hurrying figures—a white-robed figure, still and tall, one lovely, majestic. And, if I didn't sigh, I certainly felt like doing so.

"No demon there, Bill," observed Milton at last, his eyes upon those advancing forms.

"I see none. Four figures."

"Four," nodded Rhodes. "Two men and two women."

A few moments, and they stepped out into a sort of aisle amongst the great limestone pillars. The figure in advance came to an abrupt halt. An exclamation broke from him and echoed and re-echoed eerily through the vast and gloomy cavern. It was answered by the angel, and, as her voice came murmuring back to us, it was as though fairies were hidden amongst the columns and were answering her.

But there was nothing fairylike in the aspect of that leader (who was advancing again) or his male companion. That aspect was grim, formidable. Each carried a powerful bow and had an arrow fitted to the string, and at the left side a short, heavy sword. That aspect of theirs underwent a remarkable metamorphosis, however, as they came on toward us, what with the explanations that our angel gave them. When they at last halted, a few yards from the spot where we stood, every sign of hostility had vanished. It was patent, however, that they were wary, suspicious. That they should be so was not at all strange, but just the same there was something in their manner that I could not understand—something that made me resolve to be on my guard whatever might betide.

The leader was a tall man, of sinewy and powerful frame. Though he had, I judged, passed the half-century mark, he had suffered, it seemed, no loss of youthful vitality or strength. His companion, tall and almost as powerful as himself, was a much younger man—in his early twenties. Their golden hair was bobbed, for all the world like your truly bobbified flapper's. The arms were bare, as were the legs from midway the thigh to half-way below the knee, the nether extremities being incased in buskins, light but evidently of excellent material.

As for the companions of the twain, one was a girl seventeen or eighteen years of age, the other a girl a couple of years older. Each had a bow and quiver, as did our angel. The older of these young ladies had golden hair, a shade lighter than the angel's, whilst the hair of the younger was white as snow. At first I thought that it must be powdered, but this was not so. And as I gazed with interest and wonder upon this lovely creature, I thought—of Christopher Columbus and Sir Isaac Newton. At thirty, they had hair like hers. That thought, however, was a fleeting one. This was no time, forsooth, to be thinking of old Christopher and Sir Isaac. Stranger, more wonderful was this old world of ours than even Columbus or Newton ever had dreamed it.

The age of our angel, by the way, I placed at about twenty-five years. And I wondered how they could possibly reckon time here in this underground world, a world that could have neither months nor years.

The quartet listened eagerly to the explanations given by our angel. Suddenly the leader addressed some question to Persephone, as Rhodes called her. And then we heard it!

"Drome," was her answer.

There it was, distinct, unmistakable, that mysterious word which had given us so many strange and wild thoughts and visions. Yes, there it was; and it was an answer, I thought, that by no means put the man's mind at ease.

Drome! Drome at last. But—what did it mean? Drome! There, we distinctly heard the angel pronounce the word again. Drome! If we could only have understood the words being spoken! But there was no mistaking, I thought, the manner of the angel. It was earnest, and yet, strangely enough, that Sibylline quality about her was now more pronounced than ever. But there was no mistaking her manner; she was endeavoring to reassure him, to allay, it seemed, some strange uneasiness or fear. I noticed, however, with some vague, sinister misgivings, that in this she was by no means as successful as she herself desired. Why did we see in the eyes of the leader, and in those of the others, so strange, so mysterious a look whenever those eyes were turned toward that spot where Milton Rhodes and I stood?

However, these gloomy thoughts were suddenly broken, but certainly not banished. With an acquiescent reply—at any rate, so I thought it—to the angel, the leader abruptly faced us. He placed his bow and arrow upon the ground, slipped the quiver from his back, drew his sword—it was double-bladed, I now noted—from its scabbard and deposited them, too, upon the ground. His companion was following suit, the two girls, who were now holding the lights, standing by motionless and silent.

The men advanced a few paces. Each placed his sword hand over his heart, uttered something in measured and sonorous tones and bowed low to us—a proceeding, I noted out of the corner of my eye, that not a little pleased our angel.

CHAPTER 23

THAT WE ONLY KNEW THE SECRET

"Well," remarked Milton Rhodes, his expression one of the utmost gravity, "when in Drome, Bill, do as the Dromans do."

And we returned the bow of the Hypogeans, whereupon the men stepped back to their weapons, which they at once resumed, and the young woman, without moving from the spot, inclined her head to us in a most stately fashion. Bow again from Rhodes and myself.

This ceremony over—I hoped that we had done the thing handsomely—the angel turned to us and told us (in pantomime, of course) that we were now friends and that her heart was glad.

"Friends!" said I to myself. "You are no gladder, madam, than I am; but all the same I am going to be on my guard."

The girls moved to the angel and with touching tenderness examined her bleeding wrist, which the younger at once proceeded to bandage carefully. She had made to bathe the wound, but this the angel had not permitted—from which it was patent that there would be no access to water for some time yet.

Our Amalthea and her companions now held an earnest consultation. Again we heard her pronounce that word Drome. And again we saw in the look and mien of the others doubt and uneasiness and something, I thought, besides. But this was for a few moments only. Either they acquiesced wholly in what the angel

urged, or they masked their feelings.

I wished that I knew which it was. And yet had I known, I should have been none the wiser, forsooth—unless I had been cognizant of what it was that the angel was urging so earnestly and with such confidence. That it was something closely concerning ourselves was, of course, obvious. That it (or part of it) was to the effect that we should be taken to some place was, I believed, virtually certain. Not that this made matters a whit clearer or in any measure allayed my uneasiness. For where were we to be taken? And to what? To Drome? But what and where was this Drome? Was Drome a place, was it a thing, was it a human being, or what was it?

Such were some of the thoughts that came to me as I stood there. But what good to wonder, to question, when there could be no answer forthcoming? Sooner or later the answer would be ours. And, in the meantime—well, more than sufficient unto the day was the mystery thereof. And, besides, hadn't Rhodes and I come to find mysteries? Assuredly. And assuredly it was not likely that we would be disappointed.

This grave matter, whatever it was, decided, the angel plunged into a detailed account of what had happened on the bridge. We thought that we followed her recital very closely, so expressive were her gestures. When she told how we had saved her from that frightful chasm, she was interrupted by exclamations, all eyes were turned upon us, and I felt certain in that moment that we were indeed friends. Still heaven only knew what awaited us. It was well, of course, to be sanguine; but that did not mean that we should blink facts, however vague and mysterious those facts might be.

There was a momentary pause. When she went on, I saw the angel's lower lip begin to tremble and tears come into her eyes. She was describing the death of her demon, her poor, poor demon. Well, as regards appearances, I must own that I would greatly prefer that hideous ape-bat of hers to many a bulldog that I have seen. The others, too, looked distressed. And, indeed, I have no doubt that we ourselves, had we known all about demons, would have been—well, at least troubled. Little did Milton and I dream that the loss of that winged monster might entail upon our little band the most serious consequences. So, however, it was, as we were soon to learn.

When she had ended her account, the angel turned to us forthwith and went through an earnest and remarkable pantomime. She and the others awaited our answer with the most intense interest. But the only answer we could give her was that we did not understand. That pantomime had been wholly unintelligible to Milton Rhodes and myself. I say wholly unintelligible; we could see, however, that it had something to do with ourselves and something to do with *something* up above; but everything else in it was an utter mystery.

The angel went through it again, more slowly, more carefully and more fully this time. But still we could not understand.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "she could tell us with paper and pencil."

"Not a bad idea, Bill."

Thereat Rhodes produced pencil and notebook. These he gave to the angel, with a sign that she put it down in the book. She regarded the pencil curiously for some moments, tried it upon the paper, and then—with some difficulty and undoubtedly some pain, what with her wound-

ed wrist—she began. Rhodes moved to her right side, I to her left.

Yes, there could be no mistaking that: she had drawn the Tamahnowis Rocks. Then she drew a crevasse and two figures, plainly Rhodes and myself, going down into it. That was clear as the day. Then she put those figures that were Rhodes and I into the tunnel, and presto, with a wave of the hand, she brought them down to that very spot where we were standing. Clear again, lovely Sibyl. What next? More figures, and more and more; and were they too coming down the tunnel? Yes, at last it all was plain, at last we wise numskulls understood her.

Were we alone?

Rhodes made it clear to her that we were. But he did not stop there; he proceeded to make it clear to her that *we only* knew the secret. She was some time in understanding this; but when she did understand it, what a look was that which passed across her lovely Sibylline features!

"Great heaven," said I to myself, "he's gone and done it now!"

The look was one of joy, the look of a soul triumphant. In a moment, however, it was gone; her features were only lovely, impassive.

But the thoughts and the feelings which that strange look of hers had aroused were not gone. I felt a shudder pass to my heart. Of a truth, this woman was dreadful.

I glanced at Rhodes; I thought that even he looked grave and troubled. Well, so I thought, might he be!

I said nothing, however, until the angel had rejoined her companions. Then: "There can be not the slightest doubt that they look with great fear upon the coming of people from that world above, a world as mysterious, I suppose, to them, as this subterranean world of theirs is to us. And, now that they know that they have the great secret also when they have you and me—well, Milton, old *tillicum*, I think it will indeed be strange if either of us ever again casts a shadow in the sun."

"It may be so, Bill," he said soberly. "I did not think of that when I told her. Still, who knows? Certainly not I. It is possible, indeed probable, it seems to me, that we may do them, *her*, Bill, a harsh injustice."

"I sincerely hope so."

That grave look left his face, and he smiled at me.

"And, besides, Billy me lad, maybe we won't ever want to return to that world we have left—that world so full of ignorance, and yet so full of knowledge and science too; that world so cruel, and yet sometimes so strangely kind; that world so full of hate and mad passion, and yet with ideals and aspirations so very noble and lofty. Yes, who knows, Bill? It is possible that we may not want to return."

Was it significant, or was it purely casual? I could not decide. But Rhodes' gaze was now on the angel. And, whilst I stood pondering, she turned and signed to us that they stood in readiness to proceed.

She raised a hand and pointed down the cavern, in some subtle manner making it clear that she was pointing to something far, very far away.

"Drome!" she said.

"Drome," nodded Milton Rhodes.

He turned to me.

"Ready, Bill?"

"Ready," I told him.

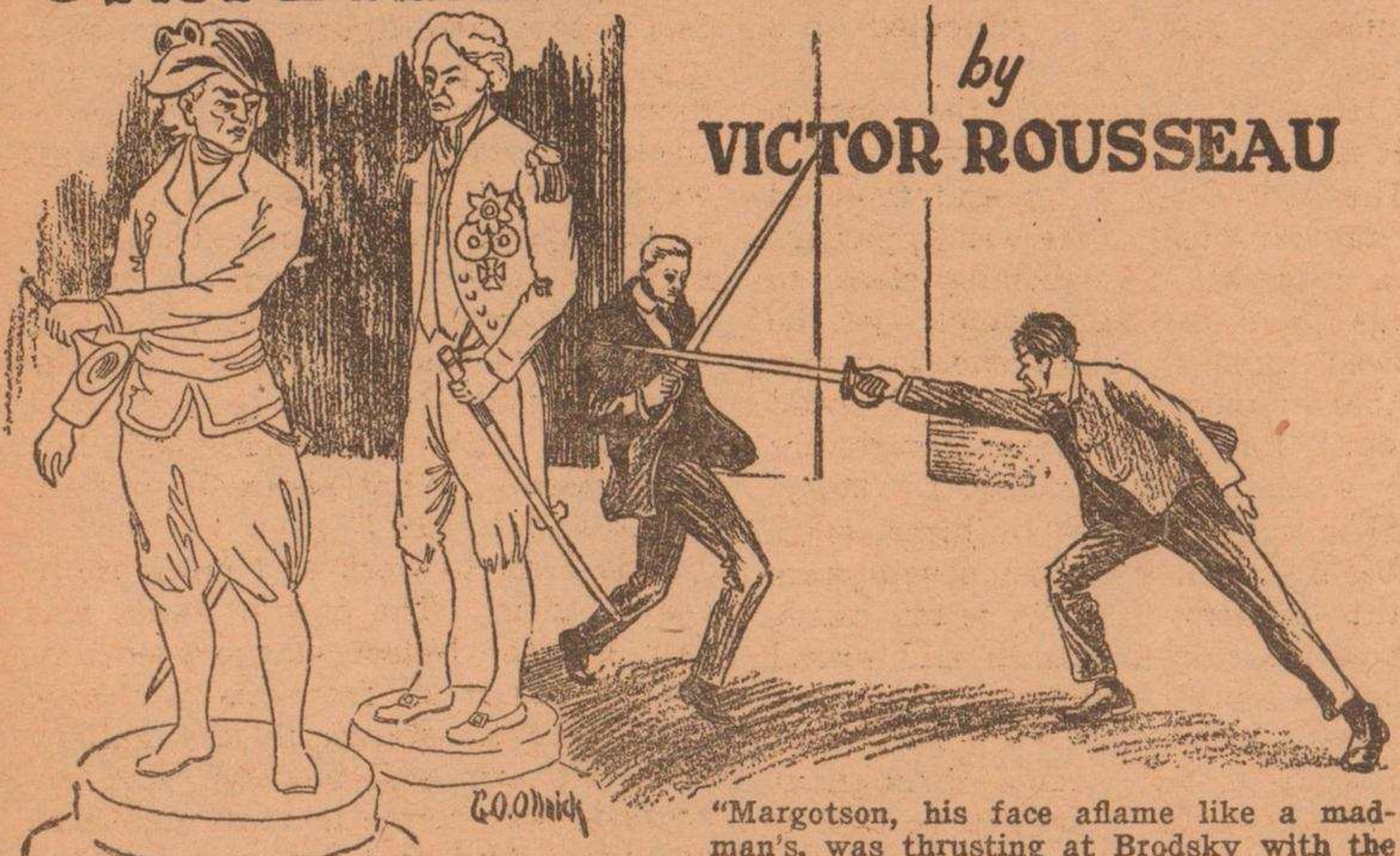
And so we started.

Next month's chapters describe a veritable Dante's Inferno, as the Dromans and Rhodes and Carter penetrate through weirdly flickering phosphorescent lights into a region of strange and terrible monsters, which attack them.

The FETISH OF THE WAXWORKS

by

VICTOR ROUSSEAU



"Margotson, his face aflame like a madman's, was thrusting at Brodsky with the admiral's sword."

PAUL DUPUY, Frenchman and patriot, more Yankee than the native-born, since he took out naturalization papers, wears the British flag in his buttonhole on Independence Day.

A story hangs upon this, the story of a dead hero to whom the presence of Paul became an outrage and abomination. And it was Brodsky who saved Paul from his post-mortem vengeance.

The psychical investigations of Dr. Ivan Brodsky, and the marvelous results which he had obtained in his warfare against the hosts of evil, some of which I have previously recounted, had by this time made him known to a large circle of those to whom such things as spiritual possession are facts rather than theories. In hospitals, in prisons, wherever we find pain and sin congregated, occult manifestations are a commonplace of existence, though fear of ridicule debars the inmates from making any mention of them. It was in such institutions that Brodsky's reputation spread broadcast. But there are prisons for the dead as well as the living, as I shall show.

Neither Brodsky nor I was greatly surprized when a visitor entered his study one evening and implored his aid in the unraveling of a mystery which had, he was convinced, a supernatural explanation. "At least, I can't help thinking so myself, sir," said the man, speaking fluently, but with a slight foreign accent. "Although I am not a believer in such things myself."

Brodsky's brows clouded; that was the stock phrase that he detested.

"If you do not believe in such things, how dare you make the suggestion that they exist?" he cried. "Be honest with yourself and with me, man, or go elsewhere. Do you believe in them or do you not?"

NOTE.—This is the sixth of a series of stories, each complete in itself, dealing with Dr. Ivan Brodsky, "The Surgeon of Souls."

"Yes, sir, I do," replied our visitor. "But when one makes such an admission one is ridiculed—it's hard——"

"Humph!" grunted the doctor. "Go ahead with your story."

The visitor sat down and fingered his hat nervously. He was apparently a man of the laboring class, to judge from his appearance; yet he showed signs of intelligence superior to that of most of his kind. I could account for his mental disturbance only when he had finished his story.

"I'm a Frenchman by birth, sir," he began, "and I've been seven years in this country. Dupuy is my name. I'm a naturalized citizen and proud of my adopted country. I learned my trade in Paris; it's a queer trade, and there's not many throughout the whole world follows it, so that it pays well, especially as it requires a certain amount of artistic ability, though less than you would suppose. I am a maker of wax figures for the waxworks theater on Fifth Street. You may not know the place, gentlemen, for people seem somehow to have lost interest in that form of entertainment, though it used to be the craze in years gone by. My task is to model life-size wax figures of all people of prominence. We've got the famous murderers, of course, and the presidents, and the heroes of the revolution, and all the famous kings and queens of England, the great soldiers and sailors—Wellington, Napoleon, Nelson——"

"Faugh!" said the doctor. "Let the dead rest in their graves. Don't you know that every time you set up an image of the dead you form a focus in which all that remains of his personality on earth concentrates? That commandment against making replicas of life in stone—which would have included wax, my friend, had wax figures been known—was the wisest and most spiritual of all. Go on."

"Well, sir," said our visitor, "as I told you, I'm constantly at work fashioning these figures for Mr. Margotson, the proprietor. We didn't have any of naval officers up to a few weeks ago. But Mr. Margotson is always looking out for something new, so he says to me, 'Dupuy, let's have a few statues of naval officers of history. Do you remember any?'

"'Sure!' said I. 'There's Villeneuve and St. Page and——'

"'Quit talking French,' said Mr. Margotson. 'What about John Paul Jones and Nelson?'

"So I set to work and made replicas of them. The one of Jones was fair, but the Nelson statue was first-rate, I did it all from his portraits, and there he stands in the gallery with one arm and one eye, and everybody who comes in recognizes him at once. And that brings me to the point."

"Ah, you've had trouble with Nelson?" cried Brodsky.

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Dupuy, lapsing into his native tongue as he wiped his forehead; "he's trying to murder me."

The man broke off and eyed us furtively. I had long learned to keep guard over my face, but incredulity was in my heart. As for the doctor, he said nothing, and the man continued:

"It must have been a week ago that the first thing happened. I was adjusting the scabbard of his sword—we use real swords in our scabbards—and the point flew through and went right into my wrist—just missed a large artery. Look!"

He held his hand up for our inspection. There was a ragged cut, half healed, along the base of the hand.

"And I'll swear that the figure pushed the sword through the scabbard—pushed it violently, for it cut clear through the leather. But I didn't catch on just then. Then, four

days afterward, as I was passing it, the thing flew from its pedestal and keeled me over. My head just missed the iron radiator by two inches. And I tell you it didn't fall, it fairly threw itself at me."

"What does Mr. Margotson say to that?" asked Brodsky.

"He laughs at me. I don't know what to do. I've half a mind to melt it and let Margotson discharge me; and yet I have my wife to think of, and there's no demand for such men as me, the business having fallen off so. And if I stay there, one day the thing will kill me."

"Enough," said Brodsky. "We'll go there at once. Can we get in?"

"I have the key," answered the Frenchman, putting on his hat.

WE THREE left the house together. We caught a car on the main road, which ran past us one block away, and, half an hour later, stepped out at the entrance to the waxworks theater, which stood in what was now the heart of the business section of the city, and was, in consequence, almost completely deserted at this hour of the evening. Our companion pulled out a key and opened a side door. We went up to a great hall, round which were ranged statues of celebrities, life-size figures of strikingly human aspect.

"And yet," mused Brodsky, stopping to regard a group of cleverly arranged heroes of our civil war, "the men who erect these think they have nothing more than the external shells. How ignorant they are of the psychic qualities of their actions! Indeed, what do they dream of anything beyond the material? Yet this gallery is almost a breeding ground of souls. Who can measure what influences such beings draw down to them? Well, at least no evil spirit would be attracted hither among these men who offered up their lives for their country!"

Dupuy led the way toward an end of the great hall. Here I saw a group of figures attired in Georgian dress; evidently Nelson would be found among these. One of them, however, seemed singularly incongruous and out of place. It was a short, thick-set man in the costume of a mechanic of today. It seemed to move; I started; then I discovered that it was a living man.

"Mr. Margotson!" cried Dupuy in confusion.

But the proprietor seemed still more confused than his assistant. He came forward sheepishly, and a mask seemed to have descended upon his blank face and blotted out some curious emotions which I had thought that I read there.

"Mr. Margotson—these are two gentlemen who are interested in what I told you about the statue," Dupuy stammered.

Margotson's face grew black with rage.

"Newspaper writers, eh?" he shouted. "Come to write up my museum, I suppose! I don't want your advertising; I've got all the customers I want and you can't do me no good. Damn your curiosity; this fool's been telling you some of his silly yarns about the Nelson statue, I suppose!"

This rage appeared so abnormal that my medical training induced me to examine Margotson from the pathological standpoint. But Brodsky looked into his face steadily and land his hand upon his shoulder. Margotson's anger seemed suddenly to evaporate.

"They're only interested in the statue's turning into flesh and blood, sir," said the Frenchman.

Unluckily these words brought about a return of Margotson's frenzy.

"Flesh and blood? Rubbish!" he shouted. "Arrant nonsense, that's what you're talking, Dupuy. What's the matter with the statue? It's a

very good statue, one of the best you've made. It's new wax—green wax, we call it in the trade—and it ought to have had time to mature, only the public were so crazed over the naval officers that I didn't have time to let it lie. That's why it's hardening—because of the fumes from the leather factory across the street. They drift in here something terrible. That's all that's the matter with it. Look!"

He switched on an electric light upon the wall behind him, and for the first time I saw clearly the face of the great English hero. There were the irregular, thin, homely features, lit by a flame of patriotic enthusiasm. Yet, admirably as the artist had caught the inspiration of the painting from which he modeled it, there seemed something more, some hardly defined vein of cruelty, of caprice, that actually gave the face the property of seeming to reflect a certain change of emotions, an instability of mind as though the thing possessed some conscious life. And the skin—surely that was the skin of a man, with the blood mantling in the flesh beneath. Dupuy started back with a wild cry.

"Look at him! Look! I swear I never put that smile upon his face," he screamed. "He's changing. He's changing, I tell you. Lord preserve us all! Get rid of it, Mr. Margotson."

"If you hand me out any more of that nonsense I'll fire you on the spot," shouted the enraged proprietor. "You're going daffy, Dupuy, that's what's the matter with you. He's always had that smile. Examine the wax, gentlemen; it's hardened, that's all."

With horror and repulsion I laid my finger on the smooth surface of the cheek. So lifelike did it appear that I could have sworn the blood faded out of the arterioles beneath the pressure, blanching the surface of the skin. And yet it was of wax. It was not flesh and blood. But flesh and blood differed less from it than it differed from the unreal and waxen figures around it. It stooped half forward, it seemed instinct with slowly dawning vitality. And surely its expression had changed; it had not smiled thus, with the cold malevolence of a conqueror, when first I had seen it.

Then suddenly Margotson seemed transformed. As though he adapted his mood to suit his mind, he burst into a wild peal of laughter.

"Good old Nelson!" he shouted; and the sounds echoed from the roof and rang through the hall, while for one dreadful moment I could have sworn that an answering emotion flitted across that waxen face. "Good boy, Nelson! A miracle of art, Dupuy. I can't tear myself away from watching him. I'll raise your salary. He makes me feel so good. He wants me to do something for him and I'll find out what it is and do it."

"You've given him a body and he's getting your reason, my friend," said Brodsky, somewhat shaken by this unexpected outburst.

"Come away, come away, gentlemen," cried the Frenchman, pulling us by the arms. "He's mad, God help him. I should have told you he'd been acting queer, but last night, when he laughed at me so much, I thought that it was only overwork. He's as mad as a loon."

We did not need to be urged, nor was there necessity of excuses. Margotson had already forgotten us and was standing before the statue alternately capering and grimacing.

"Now, I'll give you my advice and shortly; you can follow it or not at your peril," said Brodsky. "Get your employer home in safety and then slip back and chop the thing to pieces before a tragedy supervenes. No, that's all I've got to say

to you except just this: give up your trade and learn something that won't bring you into conflict with all these vital forces that hang round such places."

And with these words he fairly hurled himself out of the place, leaving me to follow him as best I could.

I THINK I mentioned once how sensitive the doctor always was to the morbid things of life. Perhaps it was a certain sensibility to those invisible influences which accompany moods and invest those places where any violent emotions have been at play. At any rate, having seen so much of the darker side of life, Brodsky was strenuously insistent upon cleanliness and wholesomeness.

"We've got to leave such things alone and work in the sun," he used to say. "This is our working day; when the night comes at last, may our good deeds be our protective armor against all the host of devils on the night shores that we shall pass through."

"You believe we have to pass through some place of purgation?" I asked.

"We'll have to clean up somehow, in this life or the next," he answered. "We can't get into heaven with dirty fingernails."

So, on this occasion, I forebore to question him when we got home. Brodsky went to a closet where he kept many relics of his earlier life, and came out with a small Union Jack upon a moldering staff.

"The flag of the vessel that bore me from Poland, where the Czar's emissaries were seeking my life," he said sadly. "To what better use can it be put?"

Then he explained the mystery.

"It is a fetish," he said, filling his pipe and puffing at it slowly. "It is exactly similar, in every particular, to the idols of the West Africans —or, for that matter, to any idol. The savage makes some dreadful idol to worship, sacrifices to it until the thing becomes instinct with life and filled with all the passions of the worshipers; then a devil has been called into existence whose evil influence is incalculable. I tell you, it was no mythical devil that the early Christian missionaries had to face, nor those of today.

"After death the pure spirit flies to its appointed resting place, leaving its two bodies moldering behind it. One is that earthly body that we all know; the other is the soul body, the body of desires, a semi-conscious force that survives for months or years, according to the condition of the dead being.

"Do not mistake me; this is not Nelson. That great admiral is unconscious of this replica of him there in the waxworks theater. It is a group of emotions such as possessed Nelson, a man of strong feelings, yet not necessarily his. The warm enthusiasm of the crowds that have visited that place have focused these emotions, much as the burning glass focuses the rays of the sun. Remember, as yet this creature is only half conscious. It vaguely, as in a dream, feels this life within itself; it is rising toward a conscious existence. And that fool Margotson is the tool by which it means to wreak its enmity upon Dupuy."

"But why does it hate the Frenchman so much?" I asked.

"Do you not recollect Nelson's motto?" the doctor asked: "'Hate a Frenchman as you would the devil?' This elemental being that has attracted these emotions that made up the great admiral's soul-body has necessarily the identical feeling. What does it know of the time that has elapsed, or the changes of history? There is the Frenchman, and it will have his life—by itself, if possible. If it can not kill him, as it tried, it will certainly do so through Margot-

son. Well, it's none of my business," he added. "I've warned Dupuy."

And he went to bed, while I forgot to ask the purpose of the Union Jack, which I saw him stuff into his pocket. But I knew that Brodsky could not dismiss his own responsibility so easily. He did not undress, for from my room, which adjoined his own, I heard him pacing the floor with short, quick footsteps, the greater portion of the night.

I fell asleep at last, and had hardly closed my eyes two minutes, as it seemed, before I heard the front door-bell jangled violently. I started up in bed, filled with horrible presentiments of evil, and began to dress myself hurriedly. A few moments later Brodsky tapped loudly upon my door.

"Dress yourself as quickly as you can," he called. "There's work on foot for both of us before the morning."

As I hurried on my clothes I heard an agitated voice in the sitting room outside, which I had little difficulty in recognizing as that of the assistant at the waxworks theater. My judgment was correct; when I emerged I found him seated in a chair in a condition of collapse, and Brodsky standing over him, holding a glass of some stimulant to his lips. The doctor was fully dressed, even to his hat, and from his pocket there protruded a small corner of the British flag. We went out together without any explanations. Luckily the cars ran at intervals, and we reached the corner of the main street. We clambered in; it was empty, and, during the ride, I learned in broken ejaculations from the man the cause of his visit.

He had halted irresolutely at the entrance to the waxworks theater after we left him. Then he retraced his steps, determined to carry out the doctor's instructions as soon as he could get Margotson away. He saw his employer standing before the statue, regarding it silently, as though in a trance. Dupuy crept up to him, passing the statue of necessity upon the opposite side. And then he realized that Margotson had drawn the sword from the scabbard of the admiral and stood in such an attitude that Dupuy could neither advance nor retreat.

At the same time he experienced a return of that deathly faintness that had possessed him on a previous occasion, as he described to us. As in a trance he saw Margotson advance stealthily toward him, while he remained incapable of resistance; then he recovered his senses and leaned aside as Margotson thrust. Running like the wind, he gained the street outside, and had presence of mind enough to lock the door behind him.

"But I don't come in," he insisted, as we gained the side door. "No, sir, I've seen enough for tonight. I don't go in."

It took all Brodsky's resolution to persuade Dupuy to come. Without his presence, the doctor said, he would be powerless. With him, he might still break this spell and bring back Margotson to sanity. And at last, very timidly, Dupuy crept in behind the doctor. As Brodsky unlocked the door the key fell from his fingers.

"The key! You must find it," he cried to me. "Under no circumstances may you follow us without it. To do so may be fatal. Remember!" And before I had time to answer I saw him spring lightly up the stairway, dragging the unwilling Frenchman with him. My immediate impulse was to dash after him; then discipline came to my aid and—I stooped for the key. The night was dark, and it was two minutes before I found it. Then suddenly, from within, I heard wild shouts and a stampede.

I sprang up the stairs and along the hall, running with sobbing breath and clenched fists till I gained the end, where I saw shadows hovering. Frantically I switched on an electric light. Then I perceived Margotson, his face aflame like a madman's, thrusting at Brodsky with the admiral's sword while the doctor parried him with admirable grace and ease. Dupuy came running up to me.

"He rushed at me," he cried, "with his sword drawn, and Dr. Brodsky snatched a sword from Paul Jones' replica and met him. Look! The doctor wins!"

Like every Polish gentleman, Brodsky was an adept with the foils. Certainly a clumsy mechanic such as Margotson could not have expected to overcome him. Yet, as I watched the tense interchange of sword-play, I was amazed at the skill shown by Margotson. It seemed as though the courage and prowess of the great admiral had descended upon him. Twice he lunged so fiercely that the point grazed Brodsky's arm; then, with a sudden twist, he sent the weapon flying from the doctor's hand, and rushed—not at him, but straight toward Dupuy. So swift was the impetus, he was upon us before we could stir. And then, just as the blade seemed about to pierce the Frenchman's heart, something came fluttering downward over his head and the sword fell from Margotson's hand and he stood still, his eyes fixed upon vacancy, his body immobile, while Dupuy released himself from the folds of the union jack that Brodsky had so admirably thrown over him.

"AND—you think I can go back to my job?" asked Dupuy the next morning.

"By all means," answered the doctor. "Margotson will remember nothing whatever of his insanity. So you'd better hurry up, or he will want to know why you are late. You need not fear the statue. It will have resumed its natural aspect, and, in case any remnants of its power remain, keep a small British flag in your buttonhole, especially on holidays such as Independence Day. Yes, that's your penalty, Dupuy, patriot as you say you are; the only alternative being the destruction of the statue, which Margotson won't allow. And, when you can, try to get another occupation.

"It was a desperate chance," confided Brodsky to me afterward. "Still, one can deal with these elemental forces much as the lunatics; the mad impulse of national hatred was shattered instantly when it perceived the flag of its country. When Margotson wakes up upon the floor of the gallery he will think that he got drunk the night before."

"But tell me," I cried suddenly, "why did you make me wait till I found the key?" Then the solution came to me. "You knew our lives were in danger and wished to save me from the possibility of injury," I cried.

"Pshaw!" muttered the doctor. "Just accept facts and don't put sentimental interpretations upon them."

NOTE.—"The Seventh Symphony," the next story in this series, will be published in WEIRD TALES next month.

The CHURCH STOVE at RAEBRUDAFISK

by

G. APPLEBY TERRILL



"We pressed Sturl against the pipe and bound him tightly to it."

I THREW a piece of string into the grate, where presently it began to smolder.

Kobyssu stopped talking and sniffed. Although in appearance he is ferocious, with his little simian forehead, his black bushes of eyebrows, and his big, bristling mustache, he is in reality a fellow of most pleasant, even temperament. But it was plain that the string had disturbed him greatly. His cheek had paled, and I got a glimpse of his eyes as he bent forward swiftly in his chair and leveled them at the hearth. The expression in them was twofold. There was deep anger; there was equally deep horror.

He saw the string, snatched at it, and cast it into the heart of the fire, so that it flamed instantly.

"Pouf!" he said, waving his hands in front of his nose, and now exceedingly white.

I was amazed, but all I said was: "Sorry, I didn't think the smell would worry you."

Kobyssu looked round his café, deserted at this hour of the afternoon. He looked at the neat tables, at the walls, at his desk, rather with the air of a man who wished to assure himself that he was indeed in Wardour Street, London, and nowhere else. Then he faced the fire again, his eyes more normal but very somber.

"That smell of slow-burning hemp —it reminded me of something in Czergona."

"But," said I, "you often tell me that every memory of your native country is dear to you. Only yesterday you quoted some absurd proverb——"

"'To a Czerg the howl of a wolf in his homeland is more comforting than the lowing of his cattle in a foreign land.' It is a true proverb. My

country may be merely what your newspapers say, 'a barren mountain range in mid-Europe,' but I love every memory of it—except one. That is a memory of dreadful things."

There was a table with coffee between our chairs. He filled my cup.

"From any country, however great and refined, one may get a memory of dreadful things," he said, defending Czergona.

I nodded.

"Yet these were strangely dreadful." He drew in his breath with a long hiss, staring broodingly at the sugar-bowl. "The odor of that string recalled to me the church stove at Raebrudafisk—so suddenly, so without warning, that I believed I was back in the past, and I felt the feelings of twelve years ago. Ah-h, I had a shock."

"What about this stove? But pardon, Kobyssu; perhaps it would pain you to tell me? Perhaps the matter is personal?"

He shook his head.

"I was not directly concerned, I am thankful to say. But the story is too fearful a thing to relate idly over coffee. And you would be sorry if I put it in your mind. You would strive to forget it, and never forget it—no, no, I do not want to tell it."

But my curiosity had risen high. I urged Kobyssu and he yielded.

I am punished. I wish I had not heard a word of the tale of the church stove at Raebrudafisk, which Kobyssu narrated in the fluent English that he has acquired so praiseworthily during recent years.

"RAEBRUDAFISK," he said, "is the village I was born in. It is on a hillside, in a fir wood. The church, which is of stone, is a quarter of a mile from it, up the hill. When, as a little boy, I was taken to church by my parents, the stove used to interest me very much. It was not far from where we sat, near the north wall. It was an upright iron cylinder, about three feet high and two feet in diameter, having a flat top, with a flap at the edge of this, which opened so that coal and wood could be poured in. A stout pipe went from the stove right up to the roof and through it.

"In summer, of course, the stove was not lit. In winter it was attended to by old Uflio Vaang. He would start the fire some two hours before the morning service—and why the stove interested me was this: by the time I entered the church the flat top would be a glowing red, with dazzling sparks appearing suddenly on it when specks of stuff fell there from the ceiling; and the pipe would be red, half-way to the roof, brilliant red at the base, duller the higher you looked—yet hot, you can imagine.

"I was extremely fond of that stove, especially at evening service, when snow and darkness and wolves were outside the church. I yearned to spend the night by it, and thought pastor and people would be much more sensible to do so instead of faring down the hill, all in a bunch for fear of the wolves.

"And I was a young rascal! I got into the habit of flicking bits of string on to the stove, to see them smoke and burst into flame. But a thrashing from my father and another from the pastor cured me of that.

"There was a good draft to that stove—it had some bars low down in front. And old Uflio, though everybody warned him not to, drenched the fuel with oil before lighting it. Stove and pipe were red long before church-time."

Kobyssu drank some coffee, and made a considerable pause. I knew he was hoping that some customer would arrive and give him a pretext for breaking off altogether. None came, however, so he shrugged his shoulders and proceeded.

"Old Uflio Vaang was wonderful. He was completely blind. He had

been blind since early manhood. With no difficulty he would find his own way to the church, place his hand on anything he required, and set the stove going. Dangerous work for a blind man, you will think, eh? Yet he was known to be so careful that, despite the matter of oil, people did not fear an accident. Uflio's perception was uncanny. I have noticed the stove fail a trifle toward the end of morning service, the top go from yellow-scarlet to crimson; and Uflio, sensing the change, has risen from his chair and tiptoed down the church, and picked up a small tongs and opened the flap, gripping it at the first attempt; and, lump by lump, not to make a loud noise, he has dropped coal into the red-hot thing, running no more peril of burning himself than would a man with two healthy eyes.

"Well, twelve years ago, when I was a swineherd of twenty, and had not commenced to think of London or even of Warsaw, old Uflio was still tending the stove. Naturally, I had lost my boyish interest in it. I never supposed that I should be interested in it again."

Kobyssu paused once more. When he resumed, such a note of sadness was in his voice that I experienced a chill—a dread, and the first of my regrets at having importuned him for the story. I had not reckoned on a tragedy to a young girl, which I perceived looming.

"Uflio Vaang had a daughter," said he; "Djira. She was sixteen, pretty, bright-natured—oh, delightful. She was the old man's only child, and, as his wife was dead, all in the world he had to care for. I was not in love with Djira. I was thinking of a girl in the next village. But the other young men of Raebrudafisk were in love with her, as, unhappily, was a man not young. That was Olk Sturl, whose age was forty, and who was often in prison for stealing or violence. He was a sullen blackguard ordinarily; when enraged he was the evilest of brutes.

"Of course, his chance to win Djira, the sweet, fresh bud, was hopeless. But I suppose he did not believe this until he waylaid her one afternoon far from our village. Then she must have convinced him. Would she had not, poor child! poor little innocent! The truth infuriated him. He cut her throat—there and then."

"Kobyssu!"

"He did—there and then," said Kobyssu, the deep anger in his eyes again, and his teeth glinting under his mustache. He clenched his fist, and shook it at the floor. "He did," he repeated, "and he did more. That the scent of much blood might bring the wolves, who would hide his crime, he stabbed, he hacked her little pure body—ah-h!" Kobyssu blew out his breath and drummed his fingers agitatedly on his knees.

So this was what the stove, that Djira's father tended, reminded Kobyssu of. As it was fact, not fiction, I did not want to hear anything further. And yet I felt I must know what happened to the villain Sturl. I said so, and added in dismay: "Kobyssu! you don't have capital punishment in Czergona, do you!"

"No," he answered, with a peculiar inflection of his voice. "The wolves did not get Djira," he went on. "We young men of Raebrudafisk reached her first. For a boy saw what Sturl did and ran to tell us. He ran for his life, since Sturl had caught sight of him and was chasing him. Sturl could not overtake him, and turned in another direction when he perceived the lad would gain the village.

"Yes, we went to Djira; and then we and the men of the whole countryside sought Sturl. Many among us vowed to slay him when we came upon him, but the pastor and Schoolmaster Wiec, who was the magistrate

of the district, sternly forbade this.

"For over two weeks, in wild weather of sleet and bitter winds, we hunted vainly, scouring woods, climbing to the niches in the mountain-tops, and even searching our coal mine, to which we thought the piercing cold might have driven Sturl. We wondered how he obtained food, and at every step we took amid the trees or up the rocks we expected to discover him dead from exposure.

"You can conceive and pity Uflio this while. I consider that his lot was worse than Djira's. She, the one earthly gladness of his blind life; she, the bright, the gentle, whose lips and hands caressed him so lovingly, whose greeting woke him in the morning, whose voice told him the hues of the sky and the promise of the garden; she—held by a foul hand, and slaughtered! That is what he had to think of. Small wonder that for days the torment made him almost insane, and that our womenfolk could give him no consolation.

"The Sunday after the murder he did not go to the church, being too ill and weak. On the following Thursday, however, when there was an evening service, he took up his routine, and the stove was glowing when we entered the church. It was sad indeed to look at Uflio, in his usual seat, but bent and tremulous, with his cheeks so sunken and ghastly that he was scarcely to be recognized. Perhaps it was saddest to notice the coal smears and a tiny gleam of oil on his hands when he raised them. Little Djira had always been most careful to wipe them for him ere service began.

"As I said, for over two weeks we searched for Sturl; and we found not a trace of him. Then, at dawn one morning, our village was roused by a new alarm. The village of Phyamu, four miles away, where they find and store oil, was on fire. Schoolmaster Wiec wanted every man of us to hurry across and aid the Phyamu people. I had broken my arm two days previously—seeking Sturl. To witness the blaze, however, I set out with the rest. My chum, Vavik Rista, I, and a dozen others, took a path which went by the church. Although it rose steeply we began to cover it at a trot. We had gone a hundred yards past the church when a man, his clothes fluttering in rags, sprang out into the way in front of us, sprang as if from his sleep; and, trying to run before either of his feet was well back on the ground, he seemed to wrench one, and fell.

"He was Sturl. Vavik and several more, darting forward instantly, reached him as he came to his knees, and held him.

"'Lend me a knife,' said Vavik, whom Djira had shown many indications of loving.

"But two or three cried, 'No, no; what will the pastor and Schoolmaster Wiec say?'

"Yet there were others who agreed with Vavik, and it was a long time before we could quiet them.

"'And all this while Phyamu is burning, and we are needed!' cried someone. He pointed to the thin, strong ropes many were carrying to the scene of the fire. 'Tie the beast to a tree until we come back.'

"'Wolves,' objected someone else.

"'So much the better!' shouted Vavik.

"But a voice suggested leaving Sturl in the church, and thither we dragged him.

"We bound him, meaning to let him lie on the floor. Seeing him gnash with his teeth at the ropes about him, and knowing him to be so supple that he might stretch to, and gnaw through, some, we gagged him very firmly; so that, though he was raging at us, the sounds he made were but as the hiss of the wind

about the church. Then he began to roll and to knock his head against the floor.

"'We must make him fast to something,' said one of us.

"We stared around the church. There were no pillars, there seemed nothing to lash Sturl to. And then Hrok Nalti, the chairmaker, pointed to the stove.

" 'Stand him on that. Tie him to the pipe.'

"We did so, fetching a ladder and a high bench from the vestry. We pressed Sturl against the pipe and bound him tightly to it; and, in a hard spirit, for which we might be forgiven, we bound him more than was necessary. We swathed and swathed him with rope until nearly all was used. With the last length, since he made an attempt to beat his head against the pipe, we bound that also, passing the rope thrice across his brow and round the pipe, thus forcing the back of his skull immovably against the iron.

"Then we hastened to Phyamu.

"You will have observed that I have said 'we' in all this. It is right that I should, as I was of the party. But the work was not the sort for a man with a fractured arm, so that throughout I was an onlooker. Justifiably or not, I find relief in the knowledge of this.

"We hastened, I said, to Phyamu.

"Keeping together, for no particular reason except that we arrived together late, and telling none that we had captured Sturl, because we were jeered at for our tardiness, we started to roll casks of oil into safety. I helped with one hand, and time was passing, when suddenly Hrok straightened his back and flung out his arms stiffly, uttering a queer, gurgling groan.

" 'It is Sunday morning!' he said.

"It took us not a second to realize his meaning. We saw Sturl, a figure of rope, stiff and upright like some strange soldier, on the stove in the church at Raebrudafisk—Sturl incapable of movement, incapable of sound save such as the wind was making. We saw the church door slowly open and Uflio, stone-blind Uflio, appear. We saw him go to the vestry, and emerge with fagots, paper, and coal. We saw him arrange the fuel in the stove, utterly unconscious of Sturl, although his fingers would approach to within a few inches of the wretch's feet whenever he manipulated the flap at the top. We saw him bring a bottle of oil from his pocket, soak the fuel, and light it.

"And then we felt the sensations of Sturl, the terror which seized him as soon as he perceived what was to come, the leap of hope which his heart would give when Uflio's hand came near him, the frenzy of awful despair which beset him as he strained and strained to loosen a limb or to shift the gag with his tongue. We felt the first slight warmth to the soles of the feet. We felt the pipe against the back of the head, and the slow, sure heating of the pipe. . . We saw and felt all these things instantaneously, as it were; and, far faster than we had run to Phyamu, we ran from it toward our church, all except Vavik, who continued his work."

"No more!" I said, standing up. But Kobyssu really was in the past now. He did not hear me; and, instead of walking out of earshot, I remained, dazed.

"I was speedy of leg," said Kobyssu, "and, though I could swing only one arm, I led the way with Hrok. We were not certain what time it was; we believed there was no chance of saving Sturl; yet, in case there might be, we tore along. Our earliest glimpse of the church showed us smoke blowing from the chimney. As to Sturl having been discovered—well, presently we made out Uflio

sitting quietly by Djira's grave, and the pastor and some of the women-folk coming up through the firs from the village with no sign of excitement. Still we ran, ran through the churchyard, ran to the church door. Hrok opened it, and the hot air from inside met me. There was a reek of smoldering hemp, just like that of the string you allowed to smolder, only much more powerful; and following it was another reek——"

"Stop!" I yelled; and I shook Kobyssu roughly by the shoulder. Then I sat down, feeling indubitably faint. "You'd better give me a drink, Kobyssu," I said. "I might have stood it in print, but to hear you tell it, you who were a witness——

"And yet," I said, when I was recovering, "I can't help referring to the matter once—once only, though. Something strikes me as curious. You said that Uflio's perception was uncanny. In that case I consider it strange that a palpitating human being should have been within six inches and he have no inkling of the fact."

Kobyssu, who had gone white again toward the finish of the tale, had brought a measure of brandy for himself, and this he drained before replying.

"I will tell you," he said, "a detail that was seen only by Hrok and another, who cut down the—the remains, and by me; for Hrok wiped the face very quickly. . . . For a number of years Sturl had borne on his left cheek a scar, a large, puckered scar that stood out from the rest of the flesh. Sturl's face, when Hrok lowered him, was wrought on by the heat, yet some peculiar marks were still visible on the left cheek. They were little stripes, apparently a mingling of oil and coal dust, such as might have been made by the fingers of, let us say, a blind person who sought, by feeling for the scar, to satisfy himself as to the identity of the man he had discovered on the stove."

THE DEATH CELL

By **SAMUEL M. SARGENT, JR.**

It's lonesome here in the dawning,
Sitting behind the bars,
Watching a gray moon, and gray sky,
And gray, galactic stars.

It's lonesome waiting for footsteps
Coming along the row,
Lonesomer than it ever was
The morning I'm to go.

The scaffold's standing and ready,
The hammer quit last noon.
And here I am with the gray stars,
And gray, sky, and gray moon.

I can not express my feelings
Here in this cursed room,
Listening to catch the footstep
That sounds my coming doom.

I can not express my feelings—
Words couldn't tell them all!—
In this gray room, in this gray dawn,
Shadowed by this gray wall.

It's lonesome here in the dawning,
Sitting behind the bars,
Watching a gray moon, and gray sky,
And the Galaxy's gray stars.

The HEAD

by

BASSETT MORGAN



"Her scream changed to a moan of agony."

ABOUT the stilt legs of the nipa-thatched hut, Paul Dakens looked down into a lagoon so clear that he could see the little painted fish scattering like sparks. Behind him in the hut the little brown wife of Phillips mourned her husband, whose funeral orgies were already in progress with a prodigality of feasting and ceremony accorded a white man by the Papuan blacks who had murdered him. Dakens glanced at the woman huddled on the mats. At the head of the couch, Phillips' pet monkey blinked solemnly as if he understood that his master would never return, and felt the fear which Dakens shared of those drums already tearing the forest gloom to tatters.

The untimely death of Phillips had left unfinished that work he had planned with Dakens' help of giving to the world their understanding of the natives, unless Dakens went on, and he was afraid. The blacks who feared the magic tricks of Phillips more than the sorcery of their own magician had none of that respect for Dakens. In his heart he knew that he would in all probability be taken and tortured. Phillips' little brown wife had warned him, had even offered to guide him through the tortuous lanes of jungle trees bedded in black water, rank with the smell of walk-about grounds of crocodiles; yet in her eyes, limpid and dark as dew in the heart of a black orchid, he had read hate and a desire for vengeance toward Gwanoo, the chieftain whom Phillips had outwitted of a bride when he took the girl to his own hut.

A week before, Phillips had gone with Gwanoo on a pig-sticking expedition. Three days, or rather nights later, Dakens had been wakened by the brown girl's Song of Mourning, nor could he laugh aside her fears. On the following morning Gwanoo returned, seated himself on the edge of this lagoon and beheaded Phillips' body, preparing the head as a decora-

tive addition to his already fine collection.

Powerless to prevent, Dakens had been ill over it, enduring three days of racking fear while the brown woman kept guard, and he slept to dream of the head of his friend, the red hair and bushy red beard. He wakened frenzied and hysteric each time, and the brown woman plied him with palm wine, a mistaken kindness, as he knew.

Drink had the effect on Dakens of leaving his body and flesh cold, his brain alert and afire, and the skill of the surgeon he had once been always turned him to his case of knives. Behind his eyelids for three days and nights the head of Phillips seemed urging him to vengeance, not to glut cruelty—Phillips was too fine a man for that—but that the fear of the white man might once more make it safe for Dakens to stay on the lagoon and finish the notes for which both men had already sacrificed years.

Palm wine, fermenting daily, had not quieted his fear, but it dulled his power to fight that mad dream of curing the head of Gwanoo as he had mummied the head of Phillips. The brown woman, little dreaming the peril she loosed, wakened and carried the jar of wine to Dakens. He tilted back his head and drank thirstily. The monkey swung across the hut and crouched at his knees, one small black paw on his wrist. Dakens patted its head, then pouring wine in his palm, he let it drink. He heard the soft cry of protest from the woman, and in sheer perversity gave the little beast a second drink of wine.

In a few minutes it was swinging all over the hut, then back to his lap, where he caught and held it, staring into its beady little eyes, and strangely enough his gaze held the creature, and between their eyes shone the dancing head of Phillips.

"If I had your agility," said Dakens whimsically, "I'd get it."

The brown woman called the monkey in vain, and she scolded Dakens in quick angry native words. He had forgotten that she was jealous of the friendship between him and Phillips, forgotten that she was a comely little primitive whose lovely brown body shaped to feet with great prehensile toes not unlike those of the monkey. She was grief-stricken as only a primitive can be, and he realized a moment later that in her resentment at his giving wine to the beast, she had suddenly cast off any feeling of allegiance for him.

A moment later she snatched the monkey and plunged into the lagoon, and was swimming through the clear water toward shore. Dakens smiled. Watching her brown body, sleek and smooth as satin in the sun-green water, he was conscious only of its symmetry, the pleasing unity of muscular strength, and the fact that she was running true to type, a daughter of the jungle, going back.

She would, he supposed, return to Gwanoo, but he thought his own chances of escape were better than her chance for life if the sorcerer took her. For her own sake, Dakens wished she had not gone, but the palm wine had cured him of the clutch and bite and twist of fear. He felt aloof, primed for contemplative interest in forthcoming events, knowing that if the black men stormed the hut he had his own gun and need not endure torture.

The girl had reached shore. There she stood on a strip of dazzling white coral beach, shining in brown loveliness against a mass of creamy hibiscus, the heart-searching perfume of which came to his nostrils with the sea-tang. The monkey was in her arms, and she whispered with red lips against its cheek, caressing it with brown hands. And at that moment the jungle drums pulsed, a quick staccato probed his brain with hot fingers of sound.

THE heat and wine had made Dakens drowsy, and again he wished the girl had not gone. He dared not sleep without her keeping guard. He was afraid of this somnolence caressing his flesh, stroking with languorous touch the strength from his body. The repeated drafts were "hitting" violently, and presently he rose, found his case of surgical knives and began polishing them, forcing his mind to memories of operations he had accomplished in days gone by. Then as he turned his gaze toward the shore whence came the palpitant drumming quivering louder and faster as the funeral orgies got under way, he saw a patch of sunlight piercing tree branches and falling in a circle of gold on the lagoon. In it, little fish swarmed to snap at insects, and Dakens seemed to see again the head of Phillips, only now the eyes were open, imploring, urging him to action. He tried to fathom the meaning, conscious that it was madness, a spot of sunlit water alive with gaudy fish, but the fantasy persisted.

He went to the door, still staring, brushing his hand across his eyes, and as wind stirred the palms, the spot of light shifted toward shore; and following it, he saw a shining topaz gleam in the jungle, the fire where hate and superstition danced in black ghoul shapes about the bier of the dead white man. He heard the song, a savage sound of broken irritating rhythm, a song so old that not even the singers understood its full significance, a song that went with shoreless rivers and jungle trees rooted in black water stirred by scaled horrors with gaping jaws.

The brown girl was gone. Dakens shuddered to think what might be happening, unless her comeliness earned a merciful death. He turned again to the spot on the lagoon, but the sun had moved and the water was in shadow, the little fish fluttering like scattered stars in a cool green sky.

Then the drum-beating was abruptly broken and a wild outcry ended the song. Two Paradise birds dancing in the tops of tall trees flew away from some disturbance. Dakens forgot his fear. He was staring at the head of Phillips hanging from a small black paw in a clump of dark foliage, its luxurious beard stirred by the wind, its lips tight-sewn but seemingly puckered in a grim smile as if their owner enjoyed the joke he had found beyond the shore of life.

Dakens wanted to laugh with the head. The monkey which had loved Phillips had stolen his head from the funeral wreaths of the village and swung through the trees. It leaped down from the branches, and the brown girl sprang up from her hiding place to catch it in her arms. There was the sharp z-z-z-z of an arrow and a cluster of falling flowers. The girl swayed a moment, then caught the monkey and raced to the lagoon and was swimming. She was almost to the hut when the jungle belched black men. Dakens snatched his gun and fired. A savage whirled and fell, his lips at the lagoon ripples.

The girl was swimming under water, a brown undulating power which Dakens longed to watch and dared not. A second and third shot cracked, and the black men halted, reluctant to change so soon their feast of flesh to an outflow of souls. The brown girl reached the hut and swarmed with incredible swiftness to its door, while the blacks chattered in consultation on shore.

Dakens felt a wild elation at the crisis hurled upon him. This was better than brooding in the hut, waiting for death. The girl was crooning over the monkey, which whined in a small squeaky voice, and caressing the head of Phillips, but Dakens saw blood on her lips and knew she was

wounded, and presently the head rolled from her grasp to the mats and lay grinning at Dakens through tight-sewn lips, as if it assured him that he was doing well.

He would have given a year of life, if he had the hope of so much, to fathom the smile of those dead lips and guess what they would have advised. He was conscious of urging Phillips to tell him what to do. He could not withstand a siege of the hut. Sooner or later they would rush him, and he needed time and bullets for the woman and himself. A grim respect for her courage thrilled him, a part of his elation over the stand he made. She deserved a heroic end, a shot that would send her soul to seek Phillips who was waiting. Dakens felt the presence of his friend. The head was no longer horrid; it was as if Phillips had come back.

Then on shore the mass of blacks parted and Gwanoo stood on the coral, a magnificent black giant, strong white teeth flashing, his head-dress surmounted with swaying plumes of Paradise, scarlet flowers encircling his oiled body. And Gwanoo boomed his parley. He demanded the head. If that were returned he would take his men away to the feast. If it were not——

The murmur of the brown girl's voice translated the promise of horror, the death by ants, by palm fiber, by slicing slowly, by being taken on the crocodile walk-about grounds.

Dakens licked his dry lips. His mind called, demanded of Phillips how he should act, if he must send on the girl Phillips had loved and follow her and leave the notes garnered at such a cost to molder in the hut.

"It's your job, Phillips," he heard himself whispering; "you would trust Gwanoo and he killed you. You trusted me and I don't know what to do, Phillips!"

He was scarcely conscious that he spoke, until the brown girl crept to his feet and murmured, "Kill Gwanoo, Marster, kill Gwanoo as he killed my white man."

She had seized his gun, and there was a sharp volley of shots, a dozen leaping black men and three inert bodies across the twisting splendor that had been Gwanoo, then the others fled.

Dakens turned and seized the gourd, and throwing back his head emptied the wine in great gasping gurgles down his own throat. He needed it. The respite would be brief. Under cover of darkness they would return. But the moment the black men were in the jungle, the girl was in the lagoon. Dakens saw her swimming back slowly, weighted by the body of the sorcerer, which she hauled up the steps and dragged in the door, then she touched Dakens' arm and pointed. Gwanoo still lived.

In the girl's eyes was a gleam of triumph. Hating Gwanoo as she did for the murder of her white man, she showed the lust and greed of the primitive she was, at this chance of inflicting on an enemy the torture she had seen him visit on others. Dakens saw her dart to the case of knives, and seizing the largest, sit on the floor and whet its blade on the sole of her foot, then leaning toward the inert Gwanoo she lifted the knife.

Dakens leaped and caught her wrist. She was like a tiger in his grasp, and only that she had been hurt he could not have kept her from murder. She twisted with unbelievable strength, and in the end turned her ferocity on him. He never knew how it happened, but as she writhed and bit at him with her teeth, there came a cry and she went limp, the knife-blade thrust deep in her abdomen. Her scream changed to a moan of agony. Blood spurted on his hands, and he staggered with her to the heaped mats where the little monkey huddled, nursing the head of Phillips.

From that moment Dakens lost track of events. The wine, the strain of the last three days and nights, the frenzied elation of killing and the sight of the life-blood of the brown girl spilled on the couch, combined to wrest reason from its throne. He went temporarily mad, with a cool deadly insanity that turned from the stunned Gwanoo to the dying woman. Between them lay his case of knives. A little beyond were other precious things, among them the highly prized jars of ether and chloroform.

He worked with mad frenzy and dextrous surety of skill. The monkey fled to the farthest corner of the hut and hid. The whimpering of the little beast was the only audible sound through the afternoon. Then the fumes of palm wine left him and the ether cleared in the wind that comes at sunset, and Dakens saw and realized the work of his hands, and he wanted to imitate the monkey, crouch in utter darkness and hide.

Yet with night would come the horde of death from the jungle, and having endured so much he wanted to make a last stand, sell as dearly as he could the life of the man now roused from the mists of drink that had turned him madman.

Why he did not then turn the gun on Gwanoo, he never knew. It might have been that the monkey crept presently from the shadow and came close to Gwanoo's body, reaching a small black paw to touch the face of the black sorcerer. The little brown girl was dead, her body wrapped in the mats, but the stalwart Gwanoo showed signs of life. One black hand with its heavy wristlets was lifted to the bandage about the brows. Hearing a moan, the monkey crept close and the fumbling hand found and fondled the little beast which snuggled in the curve of Gwanoo's arm.

Dakens sat at the door of the hut, more alert than at any time since Phillips' death, and he tried to remember what he had done. The actions of the monkey puzzled him. It had been fond of the brown girl and Phillips, never very friendly with Dakens, yet it clung to the body of the savage sorcerer. Dakens marveled at himself, wondering why he had extracted the bullet from Gwanoo's brain. It lay on the table beside a welter of something that he would not look at now that he was sober. For he had been very drunk. His hands, his body and brain had been controlled by the demon which drink roused, a demon this time that was that red-haired, red-bearded head on the mats. Dakens reached out and took it on his knees.

"What was it that you made me do, Phillips?" he demanded of it. "Why did you return from that bourne you've reached and take the girl with you?"

He realized that he talked like a maniac, but he could not stop.

"Was it for love of her, the faithful little brown beauty, or jealousy of me? You need not have feared that. There's a white girl in a white man's land, waiting for me, and now I can't go back." His voice broke. "I can't go back with blood-guilty hands. Phillips, I didn't deserve this treachery. I came with you, stayed with you. . . If only you had not gone hunting with Gwanoo we'd have come out of this and gained honor. We had accomplished much, we had sacrificed these years and our own honorable careers to catalogue these devils, and now you've spoiled the chance of ever giving the results of that research to the world . . . as I said you would do when you took the girl first."

The sun, dropping behind the dark line of palms, cast shadow over the lagoon. The thunderous sunset of Papua seemed to growl about its soft panther-hide of forest. In the jungle the drums were beating up the tempo

of that old song and Dakens was swept on that rhythm to an interlude in which the years of their lives in the jungle unfolded before his eyes, and standing out from those hot steaming months was the affection of Phillips for the brown girl. He saw it now as the one fatal mistake which would eventually destroy all they had done. Phillips had been mad about her. Dying, he would not rest until she was winging her way to his side. Dakens came to believe it in that hour. The will of the dead man had taken a tortuous way to manifest its power, but it was tangible, audible, as real to Dakens as the breath on his lips.

Reason had no power to refute the thing. He no longer fought the thought. His whole body, his mentality, felt the will of Phillips urging him to some task yet unfinished. Then, as if answering the question twisting Daken's mind, the voice of Gwanoo murmured, "Water, Marster, water."

Dakens leaped to his feet. This was no booming sound from the great throat of the sorcerer, but a woman's murmur, the crooning words of the brown girl. He reached for the gourd of boiled and cooled water, and held it to the thick lips. The eyes beneath the head bandage opened, and it seemed to Dakens they had the same soft sheen as the girl's eyes, the look of dew in the heart of a black orchid.

"Take me . . . my people . . . my jungle——" it murmured again and again.

Dakens shook himself, brushed his hand over his face, pinched the flesh of his arms. Stumbling from the restless movements of the reviving Gwanoo, his foot touched the head of Phillips, and snatching it up he would have placed it on the table, but the hands of Gwanoo reached and drew it beside him. The monkey roused and caught its claws in the red beard. Dakens threw up a hand to his lips to throttle the scream in his throat.

The shadows deepened. The black Papuan hills smoked against the furious crimson and amber of the sky. In another few minutes the light would die and night descend; night, and the bat-winged fear that had held him prisoner for days, a worse fear than before, because the hut held unbelievable horror, the body of the brown girl in the mats and the great Gwanoo now reviving rapidly, calling incessantly for water, hugging the monkey and the head to its breast.

That voice had power to bring Dakens with the gourd, and the last of his precious brandy mixed with water. It was as if he fed magic to one of those flowers which Hindoo fakirs raise from a seed to bud and bloom in the space of a few minutes. It was like Gwanoo's own magic that plucked an orchid from the air and had it turn to a snake. The sorcerer grew strong beyond belief. With staring eyes Dakens saw him lean on one arm, then sit upright, still caressing the monkey and the head, and the affection of the little animal was the most curious thing of all. Dakens felt as if he were caught in a nightmare.

Then he was aware of the acceleration of the jungle song and drums. They were coming through the jungle, coming through the night, coming to the lagoon—and they came for him. His scalp prickled. He stood at the hut doorway dreading the darkness that held Gwanoo and the head, clutching mentally at the luminence of starlight on the lagoon water. He saw the blacks emerge, thicker shadow in the gloom, saw torches bloom and fire flash on knives and wreaths of white hibiscus splotched by scarlet flowers that looked like dried blood. The torch

flare showed their betel-stained teeth, the bracelets of bone and metal, the quivering head-plumes.

It was of no use to shoot at that mass, better to reserve his bullets and strength for their rush. He kept his revolver so that he might thrust it at any moment in his mouth, and fire. Too late, he wished he had dickered with Gwanoo to have the notes that he and Phillips had made sent out to a port. Now, they would be as much wasted as his life. The savages were in the lagoon water. On shore they had heaped their torches and the blaze lighted the clear depths where little fish flashed in scaled gold. Dakens turned to the darkness of the hut and lifted the revolver. It touched his chin, and crept toward his lips . . .

His scream startled the swimmers. From behind him, the great arms of Gwanoo caught and pinioned his wrists to his sides. He saw the torch flare from shore shining on the black face under the startling white gauze bandages, saw the soft dark eyes shining, heard the voice gentle as that of a woman; "Not kill, Marster . . . live an' go out. . "

Frantic, frenzied, Dakens twisted in that grasp. Then the hut was filled with savages; and the voice of Gwanoo, booming with its old strength, commanded his warriors. Dakens was held in the grip of savages while Gwanoo, leaning heavily on the shoulder of two black men, looked down at an uncovered dead girl on the mats. Dakens saw. His heart pounded in his throat as he appraised the work of his hands, the neat surgery, the delicate line of stitches under her hair. What, what in heaven's name, had he done that day?

Far, far away, memory throbbed, tapped, rustled a sheaf of pictures, experiments at college, transplanting the brains of one dog to the head of another . . . he had shown skill at that . . .

His eyes turned to the table where Gwanoo was lifting and dropping his surgical instruments into the black case, closing it and gesturing to one of his men to carry it. Something else lay there. Dakens saw with a surgeon's interest paramount, the brain of Gwanoo. He knew, at least he felt the knowledge of what he had done, for his mind was dragged over a trail without his own volition.

He was scarcely aware that they swung him to their shoulders and swam with him through the lagoon. He saw on shore the giant Gwanoo still leaning on the shoulders of his men, but with the head of Phillips clutched in one arm and the monkey perched on a shoulder beside the bandaged head of the sorcerer. Then, for Dakens, the lights went out.

HE WAKENED in a hut. Dawn poured its soft light through the doorway. A soft murmur of women's voices droned through his dreams. The jungle song was stilled, the drums silent. He heard the tinkle of shells fringing the hut of a chieftain, stirred by the wind. The perfume of *ylang-ylang* wafted to his nostrils. Rousing himself, Dakens saw women weaving flower garlands in the soft green shade of a jungle clearing, and among them sat Gwanoo; but a Gwanoo subtly changed from the savage sorcerer whose look had power to waken fear. Gwanoo played with flowers. The little monkey sat on his knee. He leaned against a tree bole, and above his flower- and Paradise-plumed hair, in a wreath of fresh garlands hung Phillips' head.

Dakens looked about the hut, saw his case of surgical instruments, and the black metal box wrapped in oilskin which held his notes. Then he tried to recall the nights in the hut, the horror of the last day, and looked again at Gwanoo. The gauze bandage was gone. There was a scar across the broad forehead disappear-

ing into the hair. The eyes were not those piercing beadlike jets. The voice held the soft woman-tone.

Dakens sat up, and his movement brought a woman into the hut. A moment later she had summoned Gwanoo, who entered and sat cross-legged beside Dakens, and handed him the box of notes.

"Marster, you sleep long time. One, two, t'ree moons you sleep. Now you go out."

Go out! Light leaped in Dakens' eyes, warmth flooded his heart. Gwanoo had given him a lease of life, of mercy, of hope.

They fed him. The women massaged his body with lemon-scented oil as they had done for many days. They imparted the strength of their hands to his flesh and healed him. Gwanoo kept guard, a Gwanoo changed, a Gwanoo woman-gentle. The village of nipa-thatched huts was strangely devoid of men. He learned from their talk that the warriors were hunting the contraband Paradise plumes and would be gone many days, and that he was to be sent out before their return. Dakens had lain for three months bereft of reason, nursed by the commands of Gwanoo, and at last he understood.

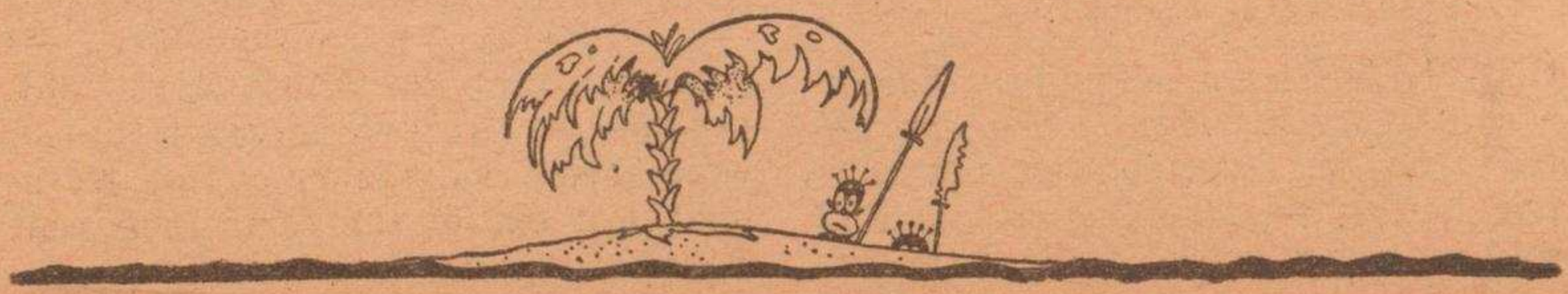
Gwanoo's brain was left in the lagoon hut. The brain of the brown girl inhabited the head of the sorcerer. Yet before he left, Dakens carried the case of knives that were the instruments of this magic, to where a long war canoe nosed the black-shadowed lianas looped above the jungle stream, and dropped it into the depths. Never again would he use his surgeon's skill, for very fear of its cunning.

Returning, he stood before the head of Phillips and saluted. He spoke not a word. The tight-sewn lips still grinned at the joke of it all.

Dakens had one regret as he stepped into the canoe and looked for the last time on the magnificent Gwanoo with the soft eyes of the bride of Phillips, that he would never know how the thing would end; whether the warrior body of the sorcerer would in time absorb the woman-brain, or the woman weaken the warrior. It seemed a pity he could not watch that phase, but in a white man's land a white girl waited, and there were the notes to work on and give to the world, the most interesting of which could not be included in a precise and scholarly treatise such as he and Phillips had planned.

The paddles dipped. The throats of black men took up the jungle song, and floating under the dark trees, Dakens looked his last at the grinning tight-sewn lips of his friend, of Phillips who had engineered so curiously the release of Dakens. Ahead, the dark water stirred and a crocodile rose and opened wide jaws and showed its curved wicked fangs, but Dakens only smiled.

Nothing had power to startle him now. He had come through surer deaths, guarded and protected by greater power than his own, with keener cunning and more subtle wit. It was like the Phillips he had known. Phillips would have loved to tell such a tale. In the memory of Dakens, he would always be grinning, tight-lipped, a flower-wreathed, greatly prized head.



A Short Tale About an Egyptian Magician

The Unearthly

By DON ROBERT CATLIN

JIM HOWARD was astonished at what his friend had proposed to do, and attempted to put him right.

"See here, Jerry; I can tell you that you'll only be making a fool of yourself! I happened to be present at that affair at the Crawfords', and I saw the thing with my own eyes. It may, as you say, be unearthly—but I saw it!"

Jerry Newman laughed at his friend's fears.

"You *think* you saw it," he said ironically.

Howard shrugged expressively. "Then, if I can't dissuade you, I suppose I may as well accede to your request. Thursday night, you said?"

Jerry nodded shortly. "Yes. I've heard so blooming much about that Egyptian's prowess that I am determined to put an end to his fame once and for all. I met him the other day, and, as I have already told you, I told him to his face that he was a faker of the worst kind; and that, without his preparations made, he couldn't duplicate his feat. In other words, that in a room selected by myself and at a time named by me, he could not do what he did at the Crawfords'. And I wagered an even five thousand dollars that he would fail under the conditions I have named."

Howard's face showed his concern. "That's going a bit strong, Jerry. Laugh if you wish, but I tell you that I saw the thing with my own eyes—and I was looking for flaws at the time. The Egyptian, Mohamet Ali, will most certainly win your five thousand."

Jerry Newman waved his friend's objections aside. "Your arguments are beside the matter at hand," he said. "You've given me permission to use your studio next Thursday night; and I shall inform Mohamet Ali only at the last minute of the scene of his performance; which will make it virtually impossible for him to arrange any properties or stage effects. It is my contention that without any prearrangements, the Egyptian will fail."

The other shrugged again as though to wash his hands of the matter. He had seen Mohamet Ali——

THURSDAY evening came, and with the darkening of the skies a group of Jerry Newman's closest friends gathered in Howard's studio. Some of them had, like Jim Howard, been present at the demonstration at the Crawfords' and all of them were certain that their friend was to lose his wager. One's eyes do not lie, you know; what one had seen one had seen!

A few minutes after the last of the group had arrived, the door opened to admit Newman; closely following him came the Egyptian, a lean, swarthy, yet rather handsome-looking fellow for all his swarthiness. At the Egyptian's heels trotted an urchin who was quite evidently either an Egyptian, as was Mohamet Ali, or an Arab.

"I think that you have met most of these gentlemen," said Jerry, indicating the small gathering. "I've asked them to be present, as witnesses."

"Quite naturally, one would wish witnesses," murmured Mohamet Ali politely, a smile touching his mouth.

Jerry Newman bowed. "Billy Weaver is the stakeholder, as you know, and the wager is to be paid immediately upon a satisfactory or—pardon me—unsatisfactory conclusion of your feat. And now, we may as well———"

The Egyptian bowed. "At your convenience, sirs," he said. "If you will arrange yourselves——?"

The group gathered in a semicircle. And then, as the Egyptian drew the urchin close to him and advanced to the center of the improvised stage, an almost blindingly intense blue-white light illuminated the room. From overhead came a soft fluttering, a faint hissing, as the huge Cooper-Hewitt photographic lights settled down to a steady glare.

"Pardon me for not informing you that the lights were to be turned on, Mohamet Ali," Jerry Newman spoke up. "I'd almost forgotten them. You see," he went on disarmingly, "the room is quite gloomy, and—well, you are quite aware of the fact that I am looking for trickery on your part. This studio, you see, belongs to friend Howard, who is a photographic illustrator for several magazines; and the Cooper-Hewitts are used to light his sets. As you may see for yourself, they illuminate every nook and corner of the studio, and—well, tonight your every move will be clearly visible!"

"As you will," the Egyptian acceded smilingly. From somewhere about his person he drew a short, ugly-looking sword, and a small ball of twine. The sword he laid upon the floor. "Now, gentlemen, if you will follow me closely——"

With the words he grasped the end of the twine and tossed the ball upward, quickly. A gasp went up from the little audience as they saw the twine seemingly vanish through one of the great skylights . . . indeed, the skylight seemed to have vanished, for they could see out into the heavens. Overhead the rolling evening clouds passed in stately array, and into them the twine disappeared.

At a word from the Egyptian the small boy clutched the twine in his hands and began climbing upward. The astonished Jerry gazed open-mouthed as the urchin wriggled and squirmed his way up that twine, continuing on until he, too, was swept from sight by the low-hanging clouds.

Mohamet Ali stood at the base of that slender ladder to the heavens. After a moment he called out: "Come down!"

The twine wiggled a bit, as though the urchin had commenced his downward flight; then all movement ceased.

Mohamet Ali was incensed. "Come down!" he shouted. "Come down!"

He listened intently as if for an answer. None came. Frowning ferociously, quite obviously enraged at the boy's refusal to obey him, the Egyptian stooped and seized the sword.

"Spawn of Shaitan!" he snarled, grasping the twine in his brown hands. And then he, too, climbed upward.

Chin sagging, Jerry Newman watched the Egyptian follow the urchin into the clouds. Then the twine began to sway to and fro, violently. From above came weird shrieks, shrill implorings for mercy; then they were drowned out by the lower tones of the Egyptian's voice, snarling, vicious.

An unearthly scream split asunder the silence in the room below; a scream that set on edge each nerve in the bodies of the watchers.

Drops of blood spattered on the carpet; and a moment later an arm fell thudding to the floor. It was small, slender, dark-skinned. It was the urchin's arm!

Followed another cry, and the other arm struck sickeningly beside the first. Then, before the horrified eyes of the beholders, in quick succession they saw the urchin's feet—his dismembered legs—his *head*—and then the bloody torso striking before them!

Then, from above, Mohamet Ali came slipping down the twine. He landed lightly on his feet beside the horrible disarray.

"He would not obey me," he said simply as he glanced about him upon the gathering.

As if that ended the matter he extended his foot and kicked the dismembered body into a pile. The twine he grasped and, giving it a jerk so that it fell into his hands, rolled it up compactly. Then, glancing about, he seized a large rug from the floor and quickly threw the severed pieces of the body into it. Gathering the four corners, he lifted the horrible burden—and threw it at the feet of the men who were watching him.

The rug thudded on the floor—unfolded—and the urchin, miraculously made whole again, leaped lightly to his feet and salaamed deeply.

"That is all, I think," Mohamet Ali said easily.

A CHORUS of "I told you so's" dinned into Jerry Newman's ears. "You wouldn't believe, Jerry—and it's cost you exactly five thousand dollars!"

A sly grin touched Jerry's lips. "I haven't lost—as yet," he said slowly.

The Egyptian's brows lifted. "Did you not see with your own eyes, sir?"

Newman nodded. "Quite right, Mohamet Ali. I did see with my own eyes—but my eyes are not infallible, you know—and so I brought along an eye with me that doesn't lie." He smiled into the astounded faces of the little group. "All right, Harrison!" he called loudly.

A door at the farther end of the room opened and a wiry, cigarette-smoking individual stalked into the room. In his hands he held a square, black wooden box, perhaps six inches across.

"I've seen some wild things, Mr. Newman, in my line of work, but this thing tonight surely had me going for a while," he grinned.

Turning to the scowling Mohamet Ali, Jerry Newman explained: "This gentleman is Mr. Harrison, one of the World-Wide News-reel motion-picture cameramen. I obtained his services for the evening with an idea in view to photograph your every action. Perhaps now you'll comprehend my reason for choosing Howard's studio—with its Cooper-Hewitt photographic lights. Mr. Harrison has been 'shooting' your feat through a small hole in the wall from the adjoining room. And if, as I believe, your demonstration has been a fake, the truth-telling camera-eye will prove it! I'll have this roll of film developed tonight, and printed; and in the morning we'll run the picture in some projection room. Perhaps, Mohamet Ali, you will think that I have taken advantage of you—but I warned you that I was a thorough skeptic, and you should have been on guard. And now, I think there is nothing more until we gather tomorrow morning to witness what Mr. Harrison has filmed."

The Egyptian smiled charmingly. "No apologies necessary, I assure you, Mr. Newman. One doesn't relinquish five thousand dollars without having, as you Westerners say, a run for his money." He beamed upon the motion-picture cameraman. "And you, Mr. Harrison; in that little

black box you hold an absolute proof of exactly every move my assistant and myself have made? Quite remarkable!"

The Egyptian took the little black box into his hands. Idly curious in manner, he carried it to the nearest light as if to survey it more closely. And, somehow, his foot caught in a rug and he stumbled.

The black box fell with a crash to the floor, and a creamy-white roll of film cascaded profusely from its confines.

"Really," Mohamet Ali gasped, "I must apologize for my clumsiness!" He stooped as though to gather up the film.

"That stuff's no good now!" shouted the cameraman. "The light has ruined it!"

"How terribly awkward of me!" murmured the Egyptian.

Billy Weaver left the group and, facing Mohamet Ali and Jerry Newman, waved two certified checks. "What'll I do with these, now?" he queried.

Jerry Newman's face was a mask as he bowed to the Egyptian.

"Give them to Mohamet Ali," he said evenly; and presently he was watching a magician, an assistant, one sword—and two certified checks for five thousand dollars each vanishing through the doorway.

MEG MERRILIES

By JOHN KEATS

(Reprint)

Old Meg she was a gipsy
And lived upon the moors:
Her bed it was the brown heath turf,
And her house was out of doors.
Her apples were swart blackberries,
Her currants pods o' broom;
Her wine was dew of the wild white rose,
Her book a churchyard tomb.

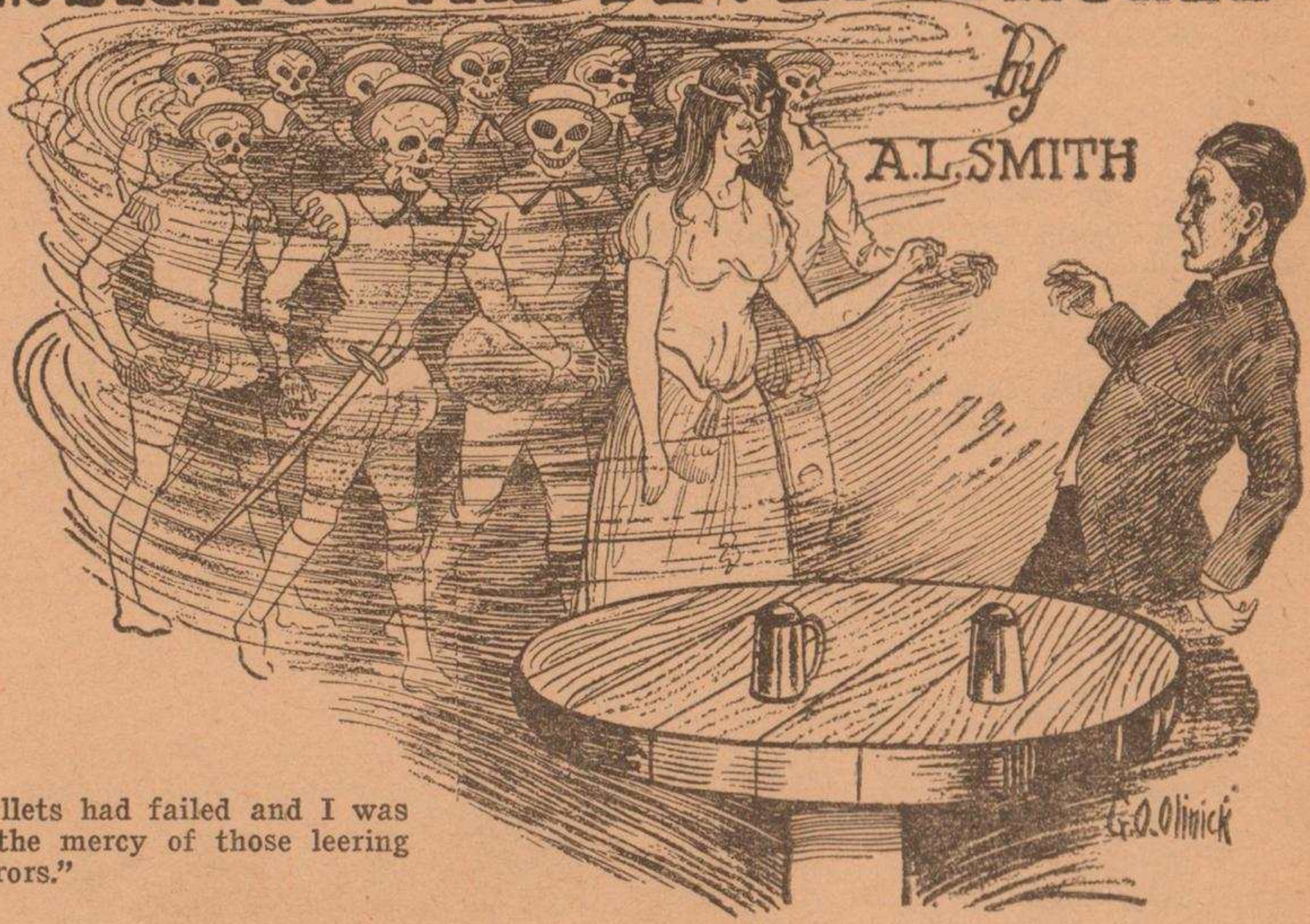
Her brothers were the craggy hills,
Her sisters larchen trees—
Alone with her great family
She lived as she did please.
No breakfast had she many a morn,
No dinner many a noon,
And 'stead of supper she would stare
Full hard against the moon.

But every morn, of woodbine fresh
She made her garlanding,
And every night the dark glen yew
She wove, and she would sing.
And with her fingers old and brown
She plaited mats o' rushes,
And gave them to the cottagers
She met among the bushes.

Old Meg was brave as Margaret Queen
And tall as Amazon:
An old red blanket cloak she wore;
A chip hat had she on.
God rest her aged bones somewhere—
She died full long agone!

The SIGN OF THE SEVEN SKULLS

by A. L. SMITH



"Bullets had failed and I was at the mercy of those leering horrors."

I STOOD looking back at the little village of Kraanstaadt. From the height it looked more than ever like a fairy-tale village, with its high peaked roofs and winding streets of stones. Even for that picturesque land of the Hartz Mountains it was delightful, a very masterpiece, and the grim old castle that brooded in silence over it might well have housed an ogre or some sleeping princess.

Strange little land of fairy-tale! The very place that gave rise to so many stories of the "little people," living in its same tenor of ways and filled with ancient customs that made one instinctively gaze into the sky for winged dragons, flying carpets, or even witches on broomsticks.

The people were as superstitious as ever was mortal race. They had begged me not to tramp the road to Kraanstaadt and had held up their hands in horror over my insisting on taking the trail through the woods.

"No, no," mine host of the tavern had cried, "be not so foolish, for the woods are filled with awful things." And his wife, dear old soul, had clung to my arm with tears.

But I was not to be turned from my course of action. The walk would take the better part of a day in the deep woods and give me even a better appetite than I already possessed. Besides, this was the land of romance, and I, for one, was not to be cheated of that. To their arguments, therefore, I turned a deaf ear and prepared to go. The good wife finally pressed upon me a crucifix, and in order not to hurt her feelings I put its cord about my neck and the cross I buttoned under my shirt. I could feel it there now, and what was more to my liking, could also feel the heavy .45 under my armpit. I was curious as to whether a werewolf might bow to the cross, but not a bit doubtful as to whether his animal brother would respect the leaden pellets from

the heavy gun. So, protected both physically and spiritually I stood and looked down upon the little village, and then turning, I plunged into the wooded trail.

I tramped until midday and then, at a crossroads—perhaps I should say crosstrails—I sat down and ate the lunch I had brought with me. The crosstrails marked the half of my journey, and a few more hours would find me looking down on my destination. I lit my pipe and finally, with regret, I left the delightful spot and took the trail to the left as I had been directed. The other was overgrown with weeds, and I made a promise in my heart that some day it would be explored.

Tramping along, I let myself be lulled by the soft forest air, and in my mind I pictured these strange woods, dark and forbidding as they were, with the actors of childish stories half-remembered. Surely along the tiny trail ahead of me were walking the children, the lost babies, and the old witch's cabin would soon come in sight; eagerly I looked for the gnomes and dwarfs, and once a crackling in the brush brought me about to scan the forest for the sign of the wolf of Red Riding Hood fame. Soon I left the trail and sat down by a tree. Soothed by the hum of insect life and the day's heat, I soon fell asleep.

It was late afternoon when I sprang up and gazed at my surroundings. Angered at myself, I at once made for the path and turned down it, for I knew now that my sluggish sleep had made me late, and I was in no eager mood to be left wandering in woods I did not know through the evening and darker night. Hurriedly I paced the path with no more thought of the elfin folk with which my fancy had peopled the woods earlier in the day. It was cold now, a biting wind had sprung up, and dusk had begun to fall silently about me, a fact that accelerated my speed in an endeavor to keep warm.

The path ran and wound among the trees, and in the growing darkness these lost their charm, and instead of hidden princes changed by the wave of a witch's wand into towering forest giants they seemed more like the hideous monsters of some forgotten era waiting to pounce on the unwary traveler who strayed from the path. It seemed, too, that behind me another presence paced, and glancing behind me in the growing dusk I saw a white object melt into the trees on my right. Slowly I picked my way, glancing about me as I went, and was soon rewarded by seeing it again, for a moment, as it slipped between some tree trunks. Then I stepped across a little glade and, drawing my revolver, slipped behind a tree trunk and waited. A few seconds passed, and there stepped into view a monstrous white wolf that stalked across the tiny space. I fired, the deepening dusk being lit by an orange flame as my revolver spat lead, and the beast raced into the trees with a snarl that told me of a hit scored. But it hung grimly on, for several times I saw it glide through the trees, although owing to its caution I was unable to get another chance to shoot.

Then suddenly the path was crossed by another. I swore in my anger, for mine host had told me there was only one place where the trail was bisected by anything. Still here was another path well worn by the passing feet of a multitude for many years, bigger and broader than the one I followed. Suddenly the question arose in my mind: had I in my first few seconds of wakefulness retraced my steps? With this in view I examined the broad path before me and then turned to look at the one down which I had come. The darkness, however, had so covered the ground that it had van-

ished, and look as I might about me, I could not discover it.

A moaning creak drew my attention from the ground to the air above my head and I started back with an exclamation. There, only a few feet from me, was erected a gibbet, and upon it swung a dead man. The wind, which was rising rapidly, swung him to and fro like a pendulum, and the rope moaned and complained. So intent had I been upon the path that I had not noticed it until that moment. Poor fellow, I reflected, had he perchance left loving arms and eyes that wept behind him, or had he faced the world alone? Guilty or innocent, had he faced death bravely or gone whimpering to the Great Beyond? Or had he cursed those who hung him? A rustle from his shoulder, and two little red eyes glaring at me turned me away shuddering. Crows, birds of evil omen, followers of executions! An old poem I had heard in my boyhood days came back to me out of the annals of years:

"We shall sit on his breast,
On his broad manly breast,
And pick his eyes out, one by one."

I shuddered and turned down the broader path. Surely the old customs of ancient days survived here if nowhere else. Hanging a man at the crossroads! My thoughts were brought back to earth by the cracking of brush to my right. Evidently the wolf was still there.

THE moon rose over the forest, and the clouds raced across the face of it in the rising gale. They took odd shapes; one was shaped like a coffin, another took the form of some belated specter hurrying to keep some dark tryst on a ruined castle's battlements, and one (I remember that very well) changed its shape into a skull with the moon's pale rays glaring through the empty sockets. The shadows flung on the ground by the passage of these clouds also had dire and forebidding outlines. The entire scene was in keeping with the tales of the Hartz Mountains, of ghosts and hobgoblins, sheeted specters and hooded horrors and all the evil spawn of hell that ran through the tales of ancient Germany.

I hurried onward, hoping at every curve or at the top of every hill to catch the lights of the little town shining upon me, but instead the dark forest continued on and on and hemmed in my path. Several hours must have passed this way, and it was very close to midnight when I saw, shining through the trees, a light to the right of the path. Here was shelter from the coming storm, crude and homely shelter no doubt, but shelter for all of its crudeness, and with a lightened heart I hurried toward it. As I approached, a broader beam of light showed that someone had entered or left, and as I met no one along the pathway as I hurried up, I concluded the person had entered.

To my wonder, on approaching I found the unmistakable outlines of an inn. How very good it looked! I pictured the warmth and coziness of the great room within, for I was cold and chilled by the night air. I paused with my hand on the doorknob and looked at the crazy little signboard overhead. The moon came out from behind the clouds and sent a broad ray across it; and there, arranged in two rows of three each with a larger one in the center, were *seven skulls!*

After the events of the night I was somewhat shaken by the sight of those seven little emblems of mortality that grinned down upon me in their deathly mirth, but as the rain was beginning to come down in torrents, I shrugged my shoulders and went in. Mine host might have his gruesome little joke, but his fire was what I craved now, and if it was

good, why, the sign would be perhaps the center of a tale about the roaring fireplace.

Slamming the door against the wind that pushed with a thousand tiny hands as though demanding admittance, I stood inside and blinked the rain and darkness out of my eyes. The great fire roared up the fireplace, lighting the room with a vivid fitful glow and showing me the contours of the several guests that were gathered near it. Ordinary peasants and foresters they all seemed to be, and mine host, in white apron and cap, came smiling toward me.

"Welcome, mine friend," he said, in a throaty whisper, "the storm is indeed a bad one and you are very fortunate to have made my door."

While thanking him for his offers of assistance and hospitality I looked at him carefully. His throat, I noticed, was wrapped with a heavy white cloth, sure sign of a bad cold, and this explained his queer way of speaking. His eyes protruded fearfully from his face, a sign of inward goiter, so I had heard; but altogether he was such a kindly-appearing person that I followed him, with thankful heart, to the fire's warmth, the others making room for me.

Food there was none, so I must perforce content myself with the remains of my lunch, to mine host's utter sorrow. However, as he brought me some really good Rhine wine, I could not object. His explanation was that this time of year his guests were scarce, yet for several days he had had such an influx that he was "eaten out of house and home." As I had plenty of food left over, I did not object, and I was telling him not to worry himself when a scratching began at the door.

The tavern-keeper crossed to it hurriedly and swung it wide, admitting, as he did so, the great white wolf that had stalked me through the woods.

"My dear little girl," he cried, "thou art overly late. Surely I have been very lonesome without thee.

"My dog, *mein Herr,*" he continued in explanation. "Savage to some, yes, but to me very gentle."

He stroked the great white head lifted to him.

"But what is this?" he cried. "*Ach,* my little darling has been wounded in the shoulder! See, *mein Herr,* see how the blood has run. Ah, those charcoal-burners with their guns! Nothing is safe, nothing."

And he ran for warm water and towels to bathe the wound.

I believed it better to keep silent as to my share in the episode, and sat watching him. The beast whimpered and cried, and then, when her master's back was turned she swung upon me her red eyes filled with hate and anger. I loosened the pistol in its holster, for dog or no dog, the great creature would die did it rush me. However, it went to the fire's opposite side, as soon as the wound was dressed, and there stretched out at full length in the heat.

My frugal repast being now finished, I fell to studying the different travelers at the inn. There seemed something odd about them that I was at first unable to place. Then it dawned upon me: the costumes—even in this very old world they seemed out of date. The costumes of a century or two ago. I was delighted. This *was* romance! I could not see their feet on account of the shadows, but I pictured them as being incased in long hose running to trunks, and surely those capes in the corner were of a pattern——

"Ah, you sleep!" came the innkeeper's voice. "You are tired then. Come, let me show you to your room, mine guest."

It was true indeed that, soothed by the soft gutturals and the fire's glow, I must have slept, so I allowed him to light a candle and show me up

the narrow stairs in the back of the great room to my bedroom.

THE rain had ceased, but the clouds still ran across the moon, drawing weird and fantastic shadows across the ground. Underneath me I could hear the voices and an occasional creak from the crazy sign. I bolted my door and sat by the window watching their queer designs. Sleep seemed to have left me, and the room was bitterly cold, yet I did not mind either of these things, so engrossed had I become in the wild night scene without.

Suddenly a scratch came at the bedroom door, bringing my thoughts back with a snap to the present. The great white wolf or dog had followed me! I sprang up and made sure of the door-fastening, and at the sound of my footsteps it padded away limpingly. Poor beast! I was sorry I had shot it now, but I had no inclination to explain matters, especially in that narrow room.

I went back to the windows and stood looking out. Suddenly the candle behind me started to go out. With an impatient oath I turned about. The keeper had evidently given me a very short one, as he thought I would soon be asleep, I thought. But no, the candle was still quite long, and yet it was dying slowly as if for want of oxygen. Lower and lower went the light, and then suddenly flickered and went out. Quickly I struck a match and went toward the candle, but dropped the match when *something* seized my arm. At almost the same instant *something else* seized my leg, and then I was grasped by numberless little hands in the dark.

How can I describe that fight in the narrow room? I was filled with disgust and loathing as well as horror. Little creatures they appeared to be, that tried to bear me down by weight of numbers. I sent my fist into faces and felt teeth loosen under the driving blows, hurled some from me and heard them strike with crashing force against the sides of the room, and I cracked skulls with the butt end of my revolver. Still I was forced back and back, for their number seemed legion; and then, weak and worn out, I was forced to the bed and bent back and back until I was flung upon it. My shirt was torn open in the struggle, and I bled from a number of tiny wounds, yet still I fought grimly on with horror in my mind, horror of these unseen foemen.

As my back touched the bed, the moon sprang out from behind a cloud and lay in a broad beam across me. The tiny silver cross caught and reflected the rays—and suddenly, as it had commenced, the attack was withdrawn, my foemen vanished, if you can call people who were never, not even in the moonlight, visible, "vanished;" and slowly, as I lay spent and panting on the bed, the candle began to glow and finally sprang into life.

Slowly I staggered to my feet and stumbled toward the door, seeking the companionship of those below. Under my feet I *felt* bodies—bodies perfectly invisible to me even in the lamplight. It never occurred to me until later that those below should have *heard* the row going on over their heads, or that even the dullest ears should have detected the uproar, to which the smashed and broken furniture gave testimony in that narrow room.

With weakened steps I made my way down the dim hall and narrow stairs, and at the last turn I saw, with a glad heart, the great room leap into sight.

"Mine host!" I cried; "mine host!"

But then, after I descended the few remaining steps with a rush, my words choked in my throat and I

staggered to the wall, where I stood in horror.

The room was lit by a red glow that seemed to have no source. The fire—or for that matter any fire ever built my man—could not have made the awful glaring red that filled the entire room. It seared and burned into the brain, bringing out every detail with startling distinctness, and the travelers who now swung slowly around to face me were not human. The faces were the faces of those long dead—dead that lived—the undead of a century long past. Those clothes *were* the doublets and hosen of long ago! Long wicked swords hung at sides, the faces (ah, the faces!) were skulls—skulls picked clean and white by the grave-worm in moldering tombs. Only the sockets were filled with that reddish glare of hell that pervaded the entire room. The innkeeper's eyes still protruded from his sockets, but the bandage of a few hours earlier was gone and his neck was twisted and broken; the face was that of a newly hung man with the horror of death still upon it. Under my horror-stricken scrutiny the lineaments changed and it became a skull, a horrid grinning skull like the others, only the twisted neck remaining awry and the vertebræ showing jagged beneath the leering death-mask.

A growl brought my terror-filled eyes to the white wolf that sat by the fire. Slowly it stood up on its hind legs like a trained animal and then, hellish and terrible, a transformation took place. The body grew to a greater height, the long cruel snout vanished, the beastlike properties were slowly banished one by one and human lines took their places until a girl stood glaring at me. A girl, a demon from hell's darkest pits, with eyes of reddish hate—a werewolf, one of the truly undead.

I crouched in my corner as the awful faces turned toward me, and drew my weapon. The werewolf moved toward me, its right arm dangling, and then I sent shot after shot into the throng, to no avail. Bullets had failed and I was at the mercy of these leering horrors. In fear and horror I ran my hand up my bosom toward my throat and felt, beneath my trembling fingers, the tiny cross. Swiftly I tore my shirt open and held the emblem toward them as I cried, "Back, back, you fiends! Evil I fear not!"

The wolf recoiled, and the faces of the others turned toward each other as though in whispered consultation. So Death took council while a madman waving a silver cross faced his ranks. Slowly they arose and came toward me and formed a hideous circle in front of me. The *things* had decided, I suppose, to frighten me into dropping the little cross, and then——

I felt my senses going, my hand was trembling and dark little motes began dancing before my eyes, the walls reeled about me, and the only solid substance in the universe was that leering crowd of death-masks with the white, hate-filled face of the fiend in girlish form that ringed me in. The red light seemed to glow and then to fade as I fought for the mastery of my mind; a white glow flooded the scene, somewhere I seemed to hear a cock crow, and then as I fell I heard a shriek as of some baffled fiend who hears the fall of a curtain of safety between it and the victim upon which its claws have been so nearly laid.

LATE afternoon had come when I opened my eyes and found myself on a rude cot in entirely different surroundings. An old man, whose face was kindly, rose from the fire and came toward me with some gruel in his hands.

"Drink this and sleep," he said; "you are in safe hands at last, my friend."

For several days I tarried with the charcoal-burner and his stalwart son in the rude little shelter they called home and drew from them the tale of the inn and its occupants that I now set down.

For years the inn had lain on a well-traveled thoroughfare in the Hartz Mountains, and well along in the Sixteenth Century had been the stopping place for many a noble and knight. Then Karl the Terrible had bought it and gathered about him a crew of murderers and slayers. He was credited with having traffic with the devil, and his only sister had surpassed him in all evil, finally becoming, so the story ran, a werewolf.

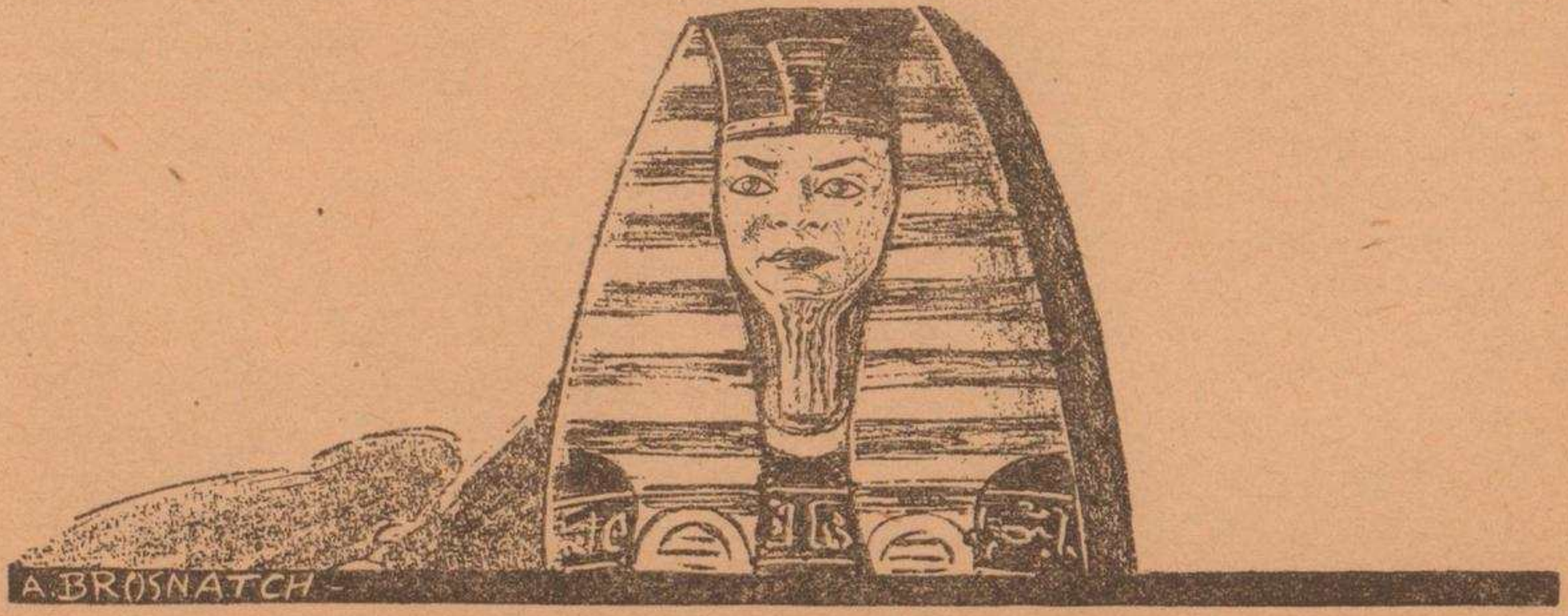
Travelers were murdered by his creatures and their bodies hidden in the cellar. Tales of screams and cries were circulated until it came at length to the baron of the district, one Hoerlarin of Kraanstaadt. He at length, with a goodly gathering of men-at-arms and knights, had one day suddenly appeared at the inn and captured Karl and his men. The sister had escaped.

The trial had been swift and sure, for very little digging brought the bones in the cellar to light. Punishment had followed as swiftly. The many followers had been tied to the beds of the inn and burned alive in its conflagration; Karl was taken to the crossroads and hung so that all might see and fear; but the sister was never found.

The road fell into disuse even as the great castle at Kraanstaadt had crumbled and become dark. Yet the ruins of the inn, blackened and seared by the purging fire, still contained evil qualities; and there, night after night, had gathered the evil crew for ghastly carousals. Karl's body swung at the old crossroads until moonrise, when he descended and joined his old companions; and often the white form of a werewolf was seen as it slipped between the tree trunks toward the den of hell.

In the blackened ruins I had been found, for the shots of the night before had been heard and investigated by the two charcoal-burners.

Perhaps I dreamed the horror; perhaps the people of the Hartz Mountains are merely superstitious yokels who frighten themselves with needless tales of horror; perhaps you, the reader of this tale, will smile; but I wonder what made my hair turn white and why the little marks of claws upon my body have never left. I, for one, have never gone back to that haunted area, and I place my faith upon the beliefs of the strange peasants of the Hartz Mountains.



A Tale of the Volga Boatmen

THE RIVER

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

Paviloff, Russia,
7 May, 1926.

Algernon E. Downes, Esq.,
21 St. James Row,
London, England;

MY DEAR Mr. Downes:—

I am writing to let you know that I am resigning my position as foreman of the men working on the dam here at Paviloff. My reason for so doing is a most unusual one indeed, and no doubt you will feel obliged to discredit it—nor can I blame you for doing so, for even I am tempted to disregard the indubitable evidence of my own senses—so bizarre are the events that have led up to this culmination of my efforts here. Let me assure you, had I known of what I was facing at the outset of this project, I should never have entered upon any contract with you.

On the twenty-fourth of February last your representative, Mr. Solar Hamilton of Oxford, arrived to confer with Mr. Randeur and myself on the building of the dam across the Volga at this point. Present at this meeting was a Professor Sergei Boursky-Maminoff, late of the University of Moscow, and a former pupil of Metchnikoff. He was here to represent the peasants of Paviloff and the surrounding country. Professor Boursky-Maminoff related the story of peculiar superstitions strongly believed by the peasants, and he admitted that he also believed in them, owing, he said, to certain curious happenings bordering directly on these superstitions. Mr. Randeur scoffed at him, Mr. Hamilton enjoyed himself immensely throughout the professor's entire relation, but these tales of his had an odd effect upon me from the beginning.

It seems that the peasants believe the Volga River is guarded by spirits, who will rise up against us if we attempt to stay the course of the river in any manner. You will say, as did Randeur, that the idea is utterly preposterous. I admit that it does sound preposterous. Professor Boursky-Maminoff warned us repeatedly to go and leave the river, but Randeur could not consider the idea. Finally the professor departed in anger. I endeavored to argue with Randeur and Hamilton, but both of them ridiculed me. At length Mr. Hamilton left, saying as he went that if I did not wish to stay he would see that another man would be sent to fill the vacancy. Please notify Mr. Hamilton to supply that other man.

God knows what prompted Randeur to do so rash a thing, but he built his cottage on a little knoll almost directly in the course of the river. Everyone feared that if the dam should suddenly go out, Randeur's cottage would go out with it.

One day not long ago, the twenty-seventh of April to be exact, as Professor Boursky-Maminoff stood on this knoll rebuking Randeur for his rash act, and again warning him to watch for the river spirits, a most repulsive hunchback approached the two men, screaming at the top of his voice, "The boatmen sing tonight.

The boatmen sing tonight." This in itself was an odd occurrence, but it developed that the hunchback was quite mad, and so Randeur again scoffed at what the professor said. The boatmen that the hunchback referred to are the *ghosts* of those slavish men, or rather, half-men, half-beasts, who were treated as animals by the nobility of Russia; the men forced to pull the heavily laden boats of the nobility up the Volga. There are no such boatmen now, although they still existed in 1917. Randeur questioned Professor Boursky-Maminoff and he learned that the peasants believed that whenever the boatmen sing it is a sign of death. The professor told Randeur that their singing had never failed to bring death. Of course, you can well imagine what an effect this had on Randeur—none at all. He waved it away, but——!

On the following day Randolph Smith, our best patrolman, apparently accidentally fell from the framework at the extreme outer edge of the dam into the swirling current below, and was whisked away in the space of a moment. I say *apparently*, because we do not know. Randeur was stunned for a moment, but he blamed it upon coincidence. However, he endeavored to keep it from Professor Boursky-Maminoff, but the professor heard of it and came directly to Randeur, and again implored him to cease his task. But Randeur would hear none of it.

Last night while the professor was speaking to our manager, the hunchback came again, shrieking his unearthly warning. And even as he spoke, the professor paled, and muttered that he, too, heard them chanting in the distance; and we looked at the river, but there was nothing there.

And today, Mr. Downes, the entire left end of the dam has gone out, the stronger side, wiped out completely! And the men have all quit, but Randeur is still there; he is going to build that dam, he says!

Hoping that you will soon find a man to fill the unfortunate vacancy left by me, I remain,

Very cordially and sincerely yours,

NEMO H. LAWLOR.

RANDEUR saw the last of his men leave him, and he moved angrily toward the cottage. He sat there some time, mumbling over his charts and plans. After a while he came out and looked about him: up at the remainder of the dam, and at the river flowing by as peacefully as ever, and at the sky to see if there were any signs of storm; but the sky was clear, and away in the distance in the purple haze about the mountains the full moon was rising. And he looked toward the town, and there he saw what he dreaded to see: the dark figure of the mad hunchback moving toward him over the sand. He stood very quietly until the figure came up to him. His eyes were wide with excitement, and his straggly hair framed a pockmarked face; his huge distended nose squatted above his thin, bloodless lips, like a vulture over some half-devoured corpse; his lips opened and closed as he came, and his three remaining teeth were displayed in their rotting gums; his clothes were dirty, ragged, and he wore neither shoes nor stockings. The ungainly hump on his back stuck out prominently. He spoke in a nervous frenzy of fury.

"The boatmen chant again tonight. Do you hear them? Death is in the air. Death! And the river seethes in anger, and it will rise against you tonight. And you are alone in the path of the river! Death!"

Randeur cursed him, and raised his hand in a threatening gesture. The hunchback sped away, and as he ran, he shouted, and Randeur heard the ominous cry echo far in the distance.

"Death! Death! Death!" And a harsh laugh sounded after it, and Randeur shuddered.

It was fifteen minutes past 10 by Randeur's watch when it started. Randeur did not notice the splashing of the waves until after some time had passed. Then suddenly a shutter banged against the side of the cottage, and he started up from his blueprints and peered anxiously out into the night. The full moon rode high in the sky, and there was not even a fleece in the blue as far as he could see. But the shutter had banged; he had heard it. And even as he looked wonderingly out, the shutter banged against the house-wall for the second time, and immediately after another shutter banged, and another and another, until Randeur rushed madly for the door, but before he reached it, it was flung violently open. He halted for a moment; then ran out, and, turning, looked fearfully back at the accursed cottage. But now all was silent; the shutters sagged listlessly on their ill-fastened hinges, and the door stood half open. There was no hint of a breeze; the night was oppressively hot.

He stared at the cottage until some inner sense beating upon his mind turned his head slowly toward the river. And there he saw a multitude of white shapes, indistinguishable, fantastic, ominous. And as he looked at them moving slowly up the river toward the dam, he became conscious of a loud sound as of the beating of the waves, and he saw the river rise and swell, and a thousand white, foamy waves lashed the air in fury. And from some far point in the distance came the low sound of a hymn.

Randeur listened, terror-stricken. And as he stared at the white shapes almost at the dam, his ears seemed to open, and he heard in mighty chorus:

"Upward, onward, we are one!"

Randeur clapped his hands over his ears so that he might not hear that presentiment of death, the song of the Volga boatmen; but the toilers mocked his efforts, and raised their voices, and sang louder, louder, louder. And the waves rose higher and higher, and the song increased in volume, and Randeur stood rooted to the ground upon the knoll on which he had foolishly supposed himself to be safe.

Suddenly that same inner sense turned his head upward so that he could see the right side of the dam, and he saw it crumble and vanish in the upheaval of water that followed. And it seemed as if his eyes were suddenly opened, for he saw the spirits of the river pushing the water toward him; and he saw, too, the moon shining tranquilly down upon the seething waters before he closed his eyes in a vain effort to shut out the scenes before him. And he heard the song of the boatmen, rising and falling, ominous, terrible:

"Upward, onward, we are one!"

"No sound did I hear during the night, but the river has avenged itself for the wrong that has been done to it." The professor pointed to the jagged spar that was caught in the crotch of a giant willow that stood upon the knoll where a cottage had once been. "It is all that is left of everything that has been here. Death has come and gone."

And from somewhere in back of the crowd of peasants that gazed in silent awe upon the calm river came the voice of the mad hunchback in wild echo to the professor:

"Death! Death! Death."

It was the mad hunchback who found Randeur two days later far down the river among the reeds and rushes that grew thickly there. Randeur's bloated face told of the ghastly things he had seen; his bloodless lips were parted and tightly drawn; his hair was torn as if in a frenzy of despair; and his widely opened eyes stared upward in mute, nameless horror.

Strange Power Had This Belt of Human Skin

The Girdle

By JOSEPH McCORD

THE pool of mottled light on the table-top had drifted over to where Sir John's clawlike fingers, emerging from the silk sleeve of his dressing robe, drummed slowly on the black oak.

Carson, erect on the hearth rug, had ignored the chair indicated by the fingers and was filled with a sudden resentment as he sensed the indifferent weariness of their tapping. And this old man was Pelham's father! It was all so different than he had pictured. There was no fathoming the expression of that masklike face with its impenetrable stare, settled in the cushioned depths of the wheel chair.

The heels of Carson's boots came together with a suggestion of military stiffness, and he spoke curtly: "I confess I don't understand."

And his host replied, in a curiously dry voice: "Perhaps it is not altogether necessary that you should."

The words carried a studied courtesy, but their veiled irony was not lost on the officer.

"Granted. But Pelham was my friend—if he was your son—and I am here only because he asked——"

"Of course," interrupted Sir John. "Spare me the formula, if you will. He's dead. It was arranged you should come and tell me how well he died. He was to perform the same service for you, no doubt, had the circumstances been reversed. The Pelhams always die well. It's in the breed. If you insist, however——"

Carson choked back his resentment.

"There were circumstances that make it seem necessary — and yet——"

"Pray get on."

"Then I'll make it short." Carson advanced a little nearer the table. "It was in a little hut I last saw him—alive. Enemy ground, newly occupied it was, and here was this hut in a small clearing. It might have been a woodcutter's and it was empty, save for some heavier furniture.

"Several of us were poking about its one room, then Pel started up a crazy ladder at one end leading to a small loft. I heard him moving around and scratching matches, then he was quiet. I walked over near the ladder and hailed him.

"'Nothing up here but an old chest,' he came back, 'and empty at that.' Then I heard him laugh. 'Somebody left me a Dutch Sam Browne—thought the cursed thing was a snake—felt cold!'

"I heard the lid of the chest fall, then Pel started down into the room. Part-way, he turned and faced me. He had the end of a belt in each hand, holding it behind him as if he were going to wear it. I didn't notice that, though. All I saw was his face—the way he looked."

"The way he looked," prompted Sir John, as the younger man stared at him soberly. "And, pray how did he look?"

Carson seemed to pull himself together with an effort. "That's exactly what I have to tell you. I'll try to." He seated himself on the edge of the table, one booted foot swinging nervously. "Why, it was his eyes, I think—yes, that's what it was. There was something in them that shouldn't ever be in a man's eyes. You've seen a dog that was vicious and a coward—all at the same time. He wants to go at your throat and something holds him for the moment." He drew a long breath. "It was like that," he decided.

Sir John was watching one of his visitor's hands; it had gripped the edge of the table and the knuckles were white. The boot was motionless, tense.

"As you say, like a dog. Well?"

At the quiet words, the younger man relaxed. "Yes, sir," he agreed gratefully. Then: "I spoke to him, and he never answered. He came on down the ladder, slowly—still facing us. The others were drawing up behind me—I could feel them. We all watched Pel. It wasn't that he just moved slowly either—it was something different. Slinking! I think that's the way to say it. And he watched us—never blinked. No one said a word.

"When Pel's feet hit the floor, he began moving toward the door—it had come shut. He backed to it and began feeling for the latch with one hand, holding the belt all the time. He kicked the door open with his heel.

"Then I knew we were losing him—if you can understand what I mean—knew he'd got to be saved—from something!"

Carson's voice was curiously strained.

"I wanted to stop him—I tell you I did want to! I tried. I started for him."

"And the belt?" interposed Sir John quietly.

"The belt," echoed the other man dully. "Oh, yes. He held it all the while—I just told you that."

"But he escaped."

"He did. I had scarcely moved. He gave a dreadful sort of cry and leaped out of the doorway—backward. We rushed it then. But he had made the trees and we could hear him crashing through the undergrowth, as though there hadn't been a boche within a hundred miles of us. That's how he went."

THE heavy silence that followed was broken only by a coal falling in the grate. With a long sigh, Carson raised his head. He fumbled a pack of cigarettes, thrust one between his lips, but made no move to light it.

"I am waiting," came the voice from the chair.

"Waiting?"

"Come, come! You tell me my son is dead. If I recollect, you mentioned gallantry. So far, you have suggested desertion. The details."

"Oh, yes. The details. But you won't believe them. One would have to have seen."

"Have the kindness." Sir John leaned back wearily among his cushions and closed his eyes.

"Well. It was the third evening after that—I think it was the third. There had been an advance, a lot of machine-gun work. It was growing dark, I remember. Harvey, my sergeant, came up and asked if he could speak to me. 'I've seen Lieutenant Pelham,' he whispered queerly.

"'He's dead?' I said. I knew he was dead.

"'Yes, he's dead, sir,' says Harvey, 'but there's something queer about him. Will you have a look?'

"He led the way and I followed."

Carson's voice was becoming strained again. Sir John leaned forward and stared steadily into his eyes.

"We came to a little open place. There was some light there—enough to see the dreadfullest group God ever bunched in one place!

"First of all, I saw Pel—sitting with his back against a little tree, chin on his knees. He was staring straight to the front—dead. But around him! Five German infantrymen—dead too. Dragged into a sort of semicircle. And they weren't shot and they weren't gassed—nothing like that. Everyone had his throat torn! Torn!"

Carson leaned close to the old man; his voice shrilled as he demanded, almost piteously, "You hear me, can't you?"

"They would be—torn," said Sir John Pelham very quietly. "Finish your story."

The officer pulled himself together with an effort. "It makes it easier, having you understand. I've seen men——"

He thrust the fingers of one hand into the collar of his tunic, as though it choked him. "I've seen men, sir, meet death in a thousand ways—but not, not that way! And Pel wasn't marked at all—I looked."

The father leaned forward in his chair, but the gesture of interest was not reflected in his impassive face.

"What of the belt?"

"He wasn't wearing it, but the thing was there—lying at his feet. And it was coiled!"

"Show it to me."

"Why I—yes, I took it. I don't know why. I dropped it in my kit bag—next day I got mine. I'm just out of the hospital by a month. Otherwise I'd have been here sooner."

With an unexpected clutch at the wheels of his chair, Sir John was close to the table, one white hand extended.

"Give it me."

An instant's hesitation, then Carson slowly pulled a paper-wrapped object from his pocket, laid it easily on the table.

"It's in there," he muttered. "I don't like the damned thing."

With deft fingers, the baronet loosened the paper, shook the contents on the table.

There lay the leathern belt, coiled compactly. In the waning light it was of a pale brown color, thin and very flexible. On the other end was a metal clasp, its surface cut with marks that might or might not have been characters. There was a reading lens lying near and Sir John used it to study the coiled strap. He examined it grimly, from many angles, without once touching it. Finished, he leaned back in his chair and thoughtfully tapped the palm of his hand with the lens.

"Captain Carson."

"Sir."

"Attend most carefully to what I say—follow my instructions exactly. Take that belt in one hand only. Carry it to the hearth—lay it directly on the coals. When it is burned, quite burned, you may tell me."

Carson got slowly to his feet. With a hand that hesitated and was none too steady, he reached for the coiled belt, lifted it a few inches from the table. At his touch, seemingly, the coil loosened; it started to unroll. He caught at it with both hands.

For a fraction of a second his body seemed caught in a strained tension. Then he began backing away from the table, noiselessly, furtively. With an end of the belt in each hand, he shifted his eyes to Sir John and they glowed with a strange, sinister light. From his sagging jaw came his tongue, licking.

Screaming an oath, Sir John Pelham flung the reading lens with all his frail strength full into that distorted face.

"Drop it!" he bawled savagely. "Jarvis!"

At the call an elderly man-servant came hurrying. He saw his master supporting himself on the arms of the chair, trembling with the exertion, and staring curiously at the uniformed visitor. Carson was swaying unsteadily, one hand pressed against his face, blood trickling from between his fingers. At his feet lay the belt and the shattered lens. Jarvis saw all this and took his post near Sir John, waiting his orders.

"Jarvis."

"Yes, sir," said the man-servant evenly.

Sir John sank back wearily.

"The tongs, Jarvis. Fetch the tongs. Pick up that strap. Only the tongs, mind you—don't touch it with your hands. So. Now lay it on the coals—hold it down hard."

The three watched the burning in deep silence, watched the belt writhe and twist in the heat, scorch with flame, fall in charred fragments.

"Jarvis."

"Yes, sir."

"Lights, then brandy for our guest. You may bring things and patch that cut for him." To Carson: "Sit down, man, and pull yourself together. I regret I was obliged to strike you, but, under the circumstances, you will agree it was quite necessary, I think."

"I don't understand," muttered Carson dully. He slumped weakly into a near-by chair. "I'm—I felt—I don't know." His voice trailed off; his chin sagged on his breast.

"You don't wish to eat, by any chance?"

"What made you ask that? God, no! I couldn't eat—I only——"

But Jarvis was offering him the brandy.

"None for me," said Sir John shortly. "But you may help me over to the far case—I am looking for a book."

In a few moments, Jarvis had wheeled him back to the table and he was leafing the pages of a small book he had found. It was bound in parchment and bore evidence of great age. Carson shiveringly helped himself to another drink, as his host turned the crackling pages until he found what he sought. Tracing the lines with a lean forefinger, he read silently for a moment, then looked shrewdly at his guest.

"This may interest you, Captain. Read here," and he indicated the place.

Carson slowly deciphered the strange script of the hand-printed page:

Another means wherethrough men have become werewolves is that they in som mannere getten a belt or girdel maked of human skin. By an autentyke cronicle a yoman hadde such a girdel which he kept locken in a cheste secrely. It so felle on a day that he let the cheste unlocken and his litel sone getteth the girdel and girteth his midel with it. In a minute the childe was transmewed into a mervilously wilde beste but the yoman fortuned to enter the house and with spede he remewed the girdel and so cured his sone who sayde he remembered naught save a ravissing apepetyt.

The book slipped from Carson's nerveless fingers. Wide-eyed he stared into Sir John's impassive face.

When he could find the words: "God! You never mean — you couldn't mean——"

"I was in hopes," mused the old man, "you know I was quite in hopes you would feel hungry."

Here Are the Final Chapters of

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 in the Forest of the Great Red Weed, they are rescued from the midst of the Barbarian hordes that are trying to overrun Jupiter, and taken by civilized men of Jupiter in a Jovian air-ship toward Nadir, which is besieged by Barbarian hordes armed with the Green Fire.

CHAPTER 25

THE BATTLE OF THE ISTHMUS

"THE battle?" said I. "That means, Delius, that your people have taken our advice and intend to fight for their lives in real earnest. Glad to hear it."

"But we are not glad, Solitarians. The slaughter will be great—a necessity, it is true, but a most painful and sorrowful one. Yet the queen has decided upon instant and unstinted action, and those Elders who attended her council have approved her decision. Within an hour of her landing in Nadir the order was given and our forces set in motion, but not until we were despatched to your aid. We wirelessed you, but received no response.

"Things are moving rapidly to the great crisis of our history. Though the Barbarians will have to go without Megalof, they are led by skilled generals, and are in overpowering numbers, and they intend to force the passage of the Isthmus of Cardiac, even at the cost of countless lives. Once they are masters of that strip of land between our two greatest continents, our civilized cities and plains, right up to the defenses of the Ridged Hills, are at their mercy. Ostrong, who would have us retire to the Hills at once, has been asked to resign from the council."

"Resign! Only that and nothing more?" I cried. "The old scoundrel ought at least to be given penal servitude."

Delius shook his head calmly.

"I don't know exactly what penal servitude is, but it is doubtless something dreadful. We do not share your ideas of revenge, remember. We have virtually dismissed Ostrong from authority, but more than that we can not do. He acted according to his own judgment, and we think he was wrong, and that's the end of it. A man of his proud spirit will suffer greatly from his sense of failure."

"You Jovians are the limit," said I. "All the same, I shall be very much surprized, from what I saw of Mr. Ostrong, if this is the end of it. I think there is quite a lot of natural, earthly malice about the old bird."

"About the isthmus," put in Mark. "You people, by virtue of the Heat Ray, are supreme on the water, though you don't use it much. Can't you sweep the isthmus from both sides, with rays from sea vessels?"

"The shores we can keep that way, but the effective range of the Blue Ray is too short to reach half-way across the neck of land. And the Barbarians have lately used some great engines for throwing stones and baskets of flowing Green Fire," re-

plied Oberon. "Machines on the lever and spring principle. By these things they have sunk some of our sea fleet, and even destroyed one of our airships."

"Sounds interesting," said Mark, yawning. "But me for a good sleep. Wake me when we get there."

Dandy and I were just as sleepy, and while the airship sped on over forest and sea and plain, flying straight as an arrow to its mark, we went off into deep slumber. After our rough-and-tumble experiences in Malador, after a spell of short days and nights, it was quite easy. We were becoming used to the unusual, hardened to anything.

They woke us when Nadir was in sight and the two vessels were swooping down to the landing area in the City of Spires. We had crossed the isthmus and the belt of smoking conflict. As our speed slackened we threw open the doors and the busy sounds of life came up to us—the purr of traffic, the songs of fearless birds. And with the sounds, when we landed, came the faint, sweet perfume of flowers and blossoming fruit.

"If they don't fight for this, they deserve all they are likely to get!" was my unspoken comment.

Delius smiled.

"It is very easy to read some kinds of thought," he observed. "Have no fear for us, now that the queen has assumed command. Your advice, too, will be readily welcomed, more especially since you risked your lives in saving her. You will find our Elders and scientists eager to work with you. It may be, as our wisest teachers are saying, that you strangers from another planet have been sent by the Great Power of the universe to preserve our race in its hour of peril."

"Steady with the bouquets!" I protested. "We have only handed you common sense. And here we are."

We stepped out of the ship to meet a quiet, well-behaved, but nevertheless very eager crowd of Jovian dignitaries and officers, among whom was the queen. Every few minutes swift motor vehicles, laden with recharged ray-projectors, dashed out of the city to the battle line, fifty miles away.

"Already, Solitarians," said Queen Briseis, looking rather tenderly at Mark, I fancied, "we have acted upon some of your ideas and hints. Our war cars are holding back the Barbarians, and our warships of the water and air are attacking them. Within the last hour some of our chemists have manufactured an explosive mixture that acts upon concussion. A hundred of what you call 'bombs' are now ready, and thousands of our skilled workers are producing more. You shall see the fight for yourselves, for your presence will encourage our forces against the reckless bravery of the enemy."

So, after much-needed refreshment and a bath in aromatic water from the municipal supply, we boarded an aerial warship for the isthmus. Our vessel carried a couple of Heat Ray projectors and fifty of the new shells.

"It like old times is," said Prince Danda. "We might almost be back on Earth—setting out in airships to upon the foe drop bombs. It very homelike is!"

In a few minutes we were hovering above the Isthmus of Cardiac, hanging high in air, surveying the scene through the transparent metal walls of our vessel. We were looking down upon the greatest battle in all the history of Jupiter.

It was a strange sight. The isthmus was a narrow neck of land between two great continents and two great oceans. To east and west stretched land; to north and south, as far as the eye could see, a glittering expanse of water. Across this narrow, all-im-

portant strip, the fight raged. From eastward poured the Barbarians, a surging flood of rough, sinewy, primitively armed humanity. The westward end of the isthmus was held by the civilized Jovians, equipped with weapons far superior, but in numbers far less.

It wasn't a bit like France or Flanders or the Dardanelles. There were no lines of trenches, no dugouts, no shell-holes, no wire entanglements, no bursting shells, no humming airplanes.

There were rows of isolated forts—rows of low, white domes—from each of which flashed the deadly Blue Rays. Against and between these domed forts the flood of Barbarians pressed. They were reckless to the verge of frenzy, flung themselves forward as though perfectly careless of life. Already, behind their front, lay three rows of the forts, captured or destroyed, and only two rows remained. Green Fire smoked all across the isthmus, was carried forward by thousands of men in little braziers, was hurled at the forts by huge catapults. In and out of the line of forts, assisting their effect, dashed the warcars, opposing the Blue Ray to the Green Fire. From each side of the isthmus, sea vessels kept the shores clear, and airships, armed like our own, save for the bombs, swooped low, plowing lanes of death across the savage hordes with their burning rays. But though the advancing Barbarians fell by thousands, tens of thousands pushed the front ranks on.

"Never have they fought like this before," said Delius, who had come with us. "They are enraged that we are withstanding them so stubbornly after their many victories. If we can not hold them back till the frenzy passes, I fear we are lost."

"Your race is paying for its past weakness," said Mark. "You have given way before them so often that they have come to think themselves invincible."

"Anyhow, we will try the effect of our sort of fighting now," I said. "Put us across the isthmus slowly, Delius."

Just as I spoke, a whirling mass of fire, shot from a gigantic throwing-machine, caught one of the low-swooping airships. The shock caused the vessel to turn turtle, and she fell to the ground, green flames curling round her.

"We are too high for that danger, but not too high to avenge the loss," cried Dandy, hurling out the first bomb. "Ah, that most surprizing is!"

We had not yet witnessed the effect of the new explosive, nor were we prepared for the result of the Jovian chemists' first venture, though we knew its action would have to be strong to overcome the greater gravitation of the big planet.

It was strong. There was first a blinding flash of light that seemed to scorch our eyes, then a huge upheaval of the ground, a volcanic burst of smoke, and then a quiver of the air, a roar of noise that shook the airship in every bolt and plate, and made our ear-drums throb with intense agony.

And when the smoke cloud blew away in the gale, there was a shell-hole big enough to bury a dozen houses. Hundreds of dead Barbarians lay around the edge of the jagged pit, and three of the catapults were smashed to fragments.

"It knocks T. N. T. into a cocked hat!" I shouted. "This stuff will win the war."

"But it is terrible, awful, nerve-racking," said Delius, shuddering and closing his eyes. "The butchery—the slaughter!"

"It is now or never—their lives or yours—civilization or barbarism," said Mark. "Ready, Harry? Then

overboard with the steel pills—dose, one every ten minutes. Let go!"

And across the isthmus we sailed, dropping down our rain of death.

CHAPTER 26

OSTRONG'S VENGEANCE

TWICE we crossed the Isthmus of Cardiac, dropping our bombs into the smoking battle line, and before the last shell had torn up the tortured ground the battle was won. Civilization had triumphed on Jupiter at last.

After the sudden seare of the first explosion, the Barbarians rallied gamely, rushing forward more frantically than before, shooting flights of arrows into the sky in vain rage, but they could not stand the repeated shocks. Their lines broken, their catapults destroyed, hundreds of them blown to bits with every shell-burst, and the swooping airships sweeping the fierce Blue Rays over them ceaselessly, they gave way at last, lost their nerve, and throwing down their weapons as they went, trampling underfoot the officers who would have stayed them, ran away in headlong panic. The civilized Jovians roused for once to energetic action, pursued the struggling hordes by air and land, and we dropped our last bomb in the thickest part of the beaten mob.

Then we went back for another supply, and dropped fifty more shells amongst the routed savages. At least, it ought to have been fifty: counting them, I only made it forty-nine.

When the pursuit ceased, the Barbarians had been driven wholly clear of the disputed neck of land. The Isthmus of Cardiac was safe in civilized keeping, and the city Nadir, the lovely city of sweet gardens and tapering spires, was once more secure.

My story of the next few days must be rather short and scrappy. It isn't so easy to live all the time in the limelight, so to speak, and it's rather embarrassing to sing one's own praises, even at second hand. As I said, one evening, when we three were alone for a few minutes: "Snakes and tigers, Mark! We are now and forever the Big Noise here. If we weren't extremely modest, and the Jovians weren't really civilized, our heads would be bulging like balloons!"

"And if we weren't kept so busy as well, Harry. I know you two are about sick of it all, and ready for home, but you will have to grin and bear with your Jovian V. C.'s and O. B. E.'s a little longer. For one thing, as Jupiter and the Earth have moved in their orbits since we arrived, they are not in a good position for the return journey. If we start at a wrong time, or in too great a hurry, we might not be able to stop, or to reach the Earth—we might drop into the sun and be frizzled up. And there is Norden to consider. He is a problem. He says he won't return, and we can hardly compel him. Nor can we leave him here. Then there is our work—the completion of the isthmus defenses, the casting of the big guns, the starting of the small-arms factory. Besides all this, I'm simply reveling in interesting discoveries, soaking up science from our learned friends. And you must admit that they are making us very comfortable."

"Especially the queen," I grinned. "Well, if you want to stay here, we certainly can't go without you. All the same, the novelty is wearing off, and we are feeling a bit homesick for the Earth. These folks are all right in their way—they can't do too much for us because we happened to come along and give them a helping hand—but, after all, we are out of our element here. We have not tasted meat for a week, nor had a smoke, nor seen a policeman, nor read a

newspaper, nor played any sort of game. When you blow the engine whistle, Markie boy, we shall have our tickets ready!''

''Norden is indeed a problem,'' remarked Prince Danda. ''It me annoys that he is at liberty, as well as old Ostrong. They much together are, and often with the Barbarian prisoners are confabbing. They plan mischief, I much fear.''

''It's plain the old chap has never forgiven us for bucking up his race to fight and win,'' said I. ''He would rather stick to the old tradition that it is more civilized to die in innocence than to live in forcible triumph. We must watch him.''

''But what can he do, or Norden either?'' asked Mark.

We didn't know, we couldn't imagine. We were destined to find out later to what depths of evil a perverted virtue may descend.

In the meantime we had a feast of enjoyable experiences, even while we cast longing thoughts across the black void to the distant little planet of our birth—the twinkling little star we saw but now and then in the evening twilight, through brief rifts in the heavy clouds that enwrapped giant Jupiter.

Though the Jovians were so extremely scientific and civilized, their home lives were simple. They had very little personal luxury, and during the whole of our stay on the planet we never saw any signs of poverty amongst our hosts. Everyone worked at something, everyone seemed to have enough to eat, drink and wear, and the public services of lighting, heating, water supply, transport, sanitation and amusement were wonderfully efficient. Strikes were unknown.

I have told you of their natural-color pictures. We were shown marvelous glimpses of scenery on the scene, and later, in their express airships, we were shown the scenery itself.

I could write pages and pages of description of the lovely river valleys, the sandy shores and rocky coasts, the ranges of forest-clad hills, the vast deserts, the regions of bubbling geysers and fiery volcanos, that diversified the surface of Jupiter, but you might not be as interested in the reading of them as we were in seeing them. Even we grew tired of travel, of sight-seeing, and presently we had something else to think about.

Delius took Mark aside one evening, very mysteriously, and after they had had a long conversation, my chum came over to Dandy and me, looking rather red in the face. We didn't need to put our question into words.

''I shall have to tell you two what Delius has been saying,'' poor old Mark jerked out, ''so I may as well get it over. It's about the queen and Ostrong—and me. It seems old Ostrong had his eyes on the queen—thought he was going to marry her, in fact. She turned him down, of course, being a sensible woman. The mischief is——''

''That she has taken a fancy to you instead, and you don't altogether dislike the idea,'' I finished for him.

''I'm afraid that's the size of it,'' admitted Mark. ''At least, as to the first item. You can leave me out of this, if you please. It puts us in an awkward position. Ostrong has his knife into us now for more reasons than one. We ought to be off home before the mischief goes any farther, for even I—well, even if I wanted to marry Briseis, the thing's impossible. She is much older than I am, the difference between our races is enormous, and the council would not allow it. They have actually had meetings and discussed the whole business in all its bearings. Ugh!''

''Cheer up, old pal,'' I said. ''It isn't everybody who jumps several

hundred million miles to find his queen! It is hard lines not to be allowed to become a king, but I agree with our friends that the idea is preposterous. Fact is, we had better leave."

"That also do I think," added Prince Danda. "My people in India will for me be looking soon."

"I have told Delius we shall go," said Mark, with a sigh. "The *Star Shell* is quite repaired, ready fitted and fully provisioned. As I told you a few days ago, it is the positions of the Earth and Jupiter that do not make the journey suitable or safe at present. I am going into the details with their astronomical experts tomorrow. It may be necessary to wait a couple of months for the chance of starting the trip with any degree of certainty."

We had to let it go at that, but the thought was disturbing, and not one of us slept well that night.

THE guest house that had been placed at our disposal was a nice little bungalow sort of building in the suburbs of Nadir, where, after darkness fell, there was scarcely a sound to break the restful peace of the night. In the long sleeping apartment we each had hammocks in curtained recesses. I had dozed off for the third time when a sudden tapping at the metal window roused me with a jerk. I pressed the switch that made the metal sheets transparent, and another that flooded the big room with light.

Professor Norden was at the window, beckoning, apparently in a state of considerable excitement. I threw on a few rags, roused the others and let him in.

"No time to lose if you want to help!" he cried, anxiously. "He's going to destroy it!"

"Destroy what, Norden? Who?" asked Mark, roughly.

The fellow had kept out of our way persistently since our return from Malador and the Red Forest.

"The *Shell!* The *Star Shell!*" the professor shouted, in a sort of frenzy. "Ostrong. Wanted me to assist him. Afterward he was going to give you another space-ship, one that would come to grief when on the way back to Earth. He has some of the prisoners helping him. I couldn't do it, so I came to warn you. Quick! I have a car waiting."

"Better telephone the authorities first," I suggested.

"I have already done so," cried the professor. "Come, there is no time to waste."

Half asleep yet, and taken off our guard by his manner, we rushed out of the house and followed Norden into the auto. A swift run through dark and silent avenues brought us to the aerial landing ground, the professor talking fast and furiously all the way. He was a clever scoundrel.

As we stepped out of the auto, at the base of the *Star Shell,* we thought we were ready for any emergency. We expected to find a fight going on between the aero guards and Barbarian prisoners.

All was quiet, black and still and eery as night, but as our feet touched the ground a swarm of dark figures rose up and materialized out of every dense shadow. In a few minutes, in spite of our struggles, we were all helpless in the grasp of sinewy Barbarians. An increasing crowd of the menacing prisoners gathered round. From another car, which had followed ours, Ostrong stepped alone. The glare of the solitary electric lamp that lit the open space gleamed oddly on his mop of silver-gray hair. He smiled grimly, and lost no time getting to the point.

"You are indeed wonderful beings, Solitarians, but the end of your interference has come at last. You have misled my people. You have

demoralized their moral nature in order to gain for them a material advantage. If you remain alive we may indeed conquer the whole of our planet, but our race would lose its soul, would cease to be truly civilized. You must die, and perhaps my influence may yet prevail. Prisoners, do your work.''

Our captors pushed us toward the *Star Shell*, Norden with us, in spite of his protests and struggles. They crowded upon us, each man carrying a block of some dark substance. Whilst some held us rigidly, others built up these blocks into a roughly circular wall around both us and the *Shell*. The wall grew as if by magic, built by hundreds of willing hands. Soon it was up to our waists, and then those who were holding us freed themselves and vaulted over. We could not follow, for everywhere we met the points of swords and spears. And still, in silence and semi-darkness, the wall grew. Norden shouted angry questions, but no one answered him.

''What's the idea, Ostrong?'' asked Mark, quietly.

''It is quite simple, Solitarian,'' was the old man's reply. ''This wall is built of blocks of the green metal, collected from the battlefield by the prisoners, at my suggestion. Presently we shall set it blazing, and soon after sunrise nothing will remain of you and your space-ship but a heap of smoldering embers. There is no escape; you can receive no help.''

CHAPTER 27

THE STAR SHELL STARTS FOR HOME

''But why am I here?'' screamed the professor, in terrified rage. ''I am no friend of these others. I have not helped them; I have helped you in all your plans. But for me, you would not have lured them here so easily. Let me come out!—let me out!''

''Shut up, you miserable bounder,'' said I. ''You have been a tool for the old villain, and now he has no further use for you. That's all.''

''You speak truly, Solitarian,'' observed Ostrong, smiling. ''One uses dangerous tools at times, but one throws them away afterward. I have quite done with Mr. Norden. Jupiter will be well rid of you all.''

''And of me, especially, Elder,'' added Mark, ''though I doubt whether the queen will tolerate your existence after this night.''

''At any rate, stranger, she will never look at *you* again,'' was the vindictive reply of the old man. ''Light the fires, Barbarians! You will be revenged on the worst enemies of your race, and I shall see the end of those who would corrupt the soul of my people. Light the fires! In a few minutes they will be beyond all help, even if the whole city be roused to try and save them. *Light the fires!*''

Those were the last words we heard spoken by an inhabitant of Jupiter. The crowd of Barbarians had gone about their work eagerly, but grimly silent, and in the same grim silence they kindled sparks and set the green metal blazing in a score of places. With lightning rapidity the flames spread, curling in bright green waves over the encircling wall, pouring in green cascades between the loosely piled blocks. Volumes of green smoke rose lazily to the dark sky.

We were cut off from everything by a ring of smoke and flame. Pale green tongues of fire came reaching inward, licking up the dry herbage, greedily stretching out toward us and the *Shell*. The affair was well planned, well carried out. Before long, we knew, from what we had seen of the radio-flaming of the Green Metal, everything within that terrible circle would be utterly consumed.

"We had better jump through it and die fighting," said I, in desperation.

"That I think also," said Dandy. "I am ready."

Norden, in a frenzy of sheer terror, groveled on the ground at the base of the *Shell*, moaning and groaning. We took no notice of him.

"There is a better way out, though it is a risky one," said Mark. "Ostrong did not calculate everything. Into the *Shell* with you all!"

It was now getting so uncomfortably hot, and the smoke so pungent, that we lost no time hopping up the stairs. Mark was the last. On the threshold of the doorway he stopped.

"We can't leave Norden down there, you chaps, can we? He will have to come along and take his chance with us."

So back we went for the professor, all of us coughing with the smoke, and smarting from the rain of sparks that swirled around us. Norden was not grateful; he was too scared to move. When we insisted, he yelled, screamed, cried that the *Star Shell* was a death-trap, struggled like a madman. Finally, I gave him a tap on the head to keep him quiet, and we carried him bodily up the steps.

Just at the top he recovered, had another fit, and fought us with the ferocity of a wild beast. As fast as he got an arm or a leg at liberty, he clung to the doorway like a limpet. And all the time we wrestled with him, the ring of Green Fire grew hotter, the flames higher.

At last we forced him in, and whilst Dandy and I held him down, Mark closed the air-tight double doors. It was like shutting ourselves in an oven.

"We can't delay our start very long," said Mark, mopping his brow, "or we shall be cooked alive. All the same, we can't start just yet."

"Why not?" we asked.

"Because we must wait for sunrise. Supposing we started in the dark—we should be going right away from home, flying out into the awful void of outer space beyond the orbit of Jupiter. No; we must wait till the sun comes up."

"If our glass windows can stand the heat without cracking," said I. "Whew! If *we* can stand it."

Dandy, his brown skin glistening with perspiration, kept a tight lip. Professor Norden, still in the grip of fear, went on groaning. Mark studied his registers. He announced that we had enough air in the cylinders for the long trip—no more, no margin for much delay.

The *Shell* grew hotter, more stifling. The windows were squares of leaping and flickering green radiance. The padding of the inner walls was uncomfortably warm to the touch. I began to feel dizzy, sickly, limp as a boiled rag.

"It won't be dawn for twenty minutes," said Mark, consulting his watch. "The metal of the *Shell* must be nearly red-hot now. It will be a race against time—a race between the rising temperature and the rising sun. Before the *Shell* reaches white heat, we must go, at any risk. Be ready."

The horror of that next twenty minutes will remain in my memory as long as I live. Often, on hot summer nights, I wake up, bathed in perspiration, crying out to Mark to "let her go!"

To the subdued murmur of the encircling fire was now suddenly added a few faint, fresh sounds, and now and then, mingling with the leaping green glare, came stray flashes of blue light.

We knew what that meant. The fire had been seen in the city, and the queen had sent to our assistance. Our attackers were themselves being attacked.

"But I am afraid it is too late," said Mark. "We shall not be able to

stay much longer. If the thermometer rises ten more degrees, I shall cut off the gravitation of Jupiter, and then it may be good-bye to the giant planet forever!"

"Ten degrees!" groaned Dandy. "Already I cooked am!"

I was too far gone to utter a word.

We waited, lying about in helpless misery. Only Mark, upheld by his clear brain and strong will, kept on his feet. His hands rested on the fateful little levers that would hurl the *Star Shell* into the black abyss between the worlds; he had eyes only for the thermometer and the watch on the table before him.

"The sun is rising!" he cried at last. "You can't see it for the heavy clouds, but I know it's there. A little longer, so that it may get higher in the sky, and then we are off. Seven degrees."

I had no sensations save for a fierce craving for a breath of cool, fresh air.

"Nine degrees!" said Mark, warningly.

At that moment, with a wild yell, Professor Norden sprang to his feet and rushed to the door, throwing his weight on the opening lever.

"Air! Air!" he shouted. "Let me have air!"

"Hold him, you two," cried Mark. "Keep him fast. We are off!"

It is wonderful how you can find strength and activity in a crisis. We collared Norden and hung on to him like leeches. He fought with the ferocity of a wildcat, but after a terrible two minutes we pulled him away from the door and got him down. Then we tied him, hands and feet. And as we got up, panting, exhausted, Mark pushed over the starting lever. Once more, owing to Professor Norden, the *Star Shell* was shot into space at an unchosen moment.

An extra blast of heat grilled up, a roar of sound engulfed us, we seemed pressed into the floor by tons of weight, and then, in a deathly silence, a silence as sudden as the outbreak of the tempest of sound, we all fainted clean away.

The *Star Shell* had left Jupiter, had passed through that heavy atmosphere, was out in the vacancy of space, was shooting, with a velocity unthinkable, sunward and Earthward. But would our journey's end be the fiery cauldron of the glowing sun, or the dear, familiar planet of our birth?

CHAPTER 28

NORDEN'S FINAL TREACHERY

When, thoroughly bruised, shaken and trembling, stiff and sore all over, we came to our senses one by one, the *Star Shell* was millions of miles away from Jupiter. The vast globe of the sky was deep-black, crusted with the many-colored stars and circled with the shining band of the Milky Way. Below us shone Jupiter, already dwindling in size, and above us glowed the sun, glaring unshadedly across the terrible void.

Mark, consulting his indicators, shook his head.

"When I cut off the gravitation of Jupiter," he said, "the etheric pull drove us away from the planet. Now we are going in his direction, the attraction of the sun himself is increasing our velocity. The pointer on the dial is again invisible. How many million miles an hour we are going I can not even guess."

"Seems to me you will have to slip in the reverse clutch, then," I ventured. "Put on Jupiter's pull again and try to slow down before we overshoot our mark. I don't want to explore the sun. I have seen quite enough of the solar system to satisfy my curiosity for a long time."

"I have already done that, Harry, and yet we got such a flying start

that the speed doesn't seem to be checked at all. We must be half-way across the zone of the asteroids already—and you had better pray we don't hit one. And there's Mars—to westward—and there's the Earth and its moon. One thing I am pleased with—we are heading more nearly straight for home than I dared to expect."

"Then nothing is there that we can do but wait?" asked Prince Danda Singh.

"Nothing. Later, I shall be able to tell you more definitely what our chances are. Better let Norden loose now; he won't be likely to do any more harm."

We untied the treacherous professor and helped him to his feet. He was white with fear, and the first symptoms of space-sickness were gripping him. He smiled weakly.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen," he said. "I've been a very poor sort of friend, but I beg you to believe that I am sorry. I must have been mad. Let bygones be bygones."

"We shall trust you as far as we can see you, and not an inch farther, Norden," said I. "When we get back—if ever we get back—there must be a reckoning with you."

And then the pangs and nausea of space-sickness claimed us all for awhile, and we forgot everything else in the deadly agony of that indescribable malady. When, hours later, it passed, and we began to recover, we had reached the orbit of Mars. The needle was showing as a quivering blur on the indicator dial. Another nine or ten hours, at gradually lessening speed, should see us somewhere near the Earth, and our fate would be decided.

Now that we were nearing home, my thoughts went back, rather longingly, rather regretfully, to the giant planet we had been obliged to leave so suddenly. In spite of our hair-raising experiences there, I felt a sense of loss, a twinge of sorrow, at departure.

I should have liked to see more of that wonderful world of vast continents and silvery seas, of dense clouds and terrific storms. I found, now that I had left them, that I had grown to like its civilized people, their gentleness, their good nature, their marvelous science. I wanted to know how the long fight between them and the Barbarians would go on in the years to come. Above all, I wanted to see the city Nadir again—to look on its forest of tapering spires, its smooth roads busy with traffic, its gay gardens gorgeous with flowers and bloom, sweet with scent and musical with the songs of fearless birds.

It was some slight satisfaction, indeed, to remember that we had been helpful in the war, that we had rescued Queen Briseis from the hands of Megalof, and that the Battle of the Isthmus had been fought and won.

If we reached the Earth safely, I said to myself, it would almost be worth while trying to make the great journey again. Almost!

At last came the critical moment. We gathered round Mark, who had his hands on the controlling levers. He had to check our speed by cutting off and putting on, in turns, the attractions of the Earth and moon and sun, and so endeavor to bring the *Shell* into the atmosphere at the right angle.

"I think we shall do it, but it will be touch and go with us," said Mark. "I have her down to a few thousand miles an hour, and I hope to dive into the air in the same direction as the rotation of the Earth. That will lessen the jar for us—as a fielder, you know, in catching a fast one, lets his hands travel the same way as the ball."

"Where shall we land?" asked Norden, strangely meek.

"Impossible to say," replied Mark. "We are approaching the night side of the Earth. "Hold on, all of you. A few more minutes will settle everything for us. We are dropping fast. No—yes! The speed is falling. Hurrah! We are home!"

The *Star Shell* plunged into the Earth's atmosphere as he spoke. The scream of its passage nearly deafened us, the heat caused by the swift friction gave us another Turkish bath. But the resistance of the air quickly reduced our speed, and it was quite gently that we dropped into the sea.

We knew we had fallen into the sea, for our progress was suddenly stopped, and a froth of boiling water, heated by the glowing metal walls of the *Shell*, hissed all around us. Then we went up again on the rebound, and after a few more plunges the great projectile lay rolling on the surface aimlessly as a floating cork.

Seized in the grip of some strong force, it was carried forward, turning over and over, grounded raspingly, was lifted again, and left, motionless at last, above low water mark. A constant noise, like the regular booming of heavy guns, filled our ears.

The door happened to be uppermost. We flung it open eagerly and crawled out upon the top of the *Shell*. One glance told us where we had hit the homeward trail.

The *Shell* lay on the coral shore of a tiny atoll. The sound we heard was the roar of the surf on the bar.

"We have fallen on a Pacific island," said Mark. "Uninhabited, apparently. I shall have to take our bearings and see if we are anywhere near a regular steamer route."

The island was in shape like a broken hoop. It was a ring of coral rock, interrupted in one place only, a curve of coral and yellow sand fringed with palms. Here and there, thickening out, it bore clusters of tropical trees. On the bar, where the ring was broken, the surf boiled and roared, and all along the outer edge of the reef the heavy Pacific swell boomed and crashed incessantly. Within the reef lay the lagoon, a blue lake of still water, calm as a pond. It was a picture, an artist's dream.

"Might have been a worse place for landing," said I. "You have done fine, Mark. You might have dropped us in the middle of Africa, or at the North Pole! It will do us good to have a lazy holiday here."

Mark didn't seem very enthusiastic.

"It looks pretty enough, Harry, but it may be hundreds of miles out of the beaten track. We may not see a ship for months—years. And we have to see if there is a spring on the island, or whether the vegetation depends on the rain."

We made the circuit of the atoll, from the gap in the reef to the other side of it and back again. We found coconut palms and a few stunted breadfruit trees, but not a trace of water. Not even a drop of moisture lay in the hollows of the coral rocks above high tide.

Taking our position as well as he could with the instruments in his possession, Mark announced that he feared we were at least a hundred miles from any regular steamer route.

"Snakes and tigers!" said I. "The middle of Africa would have been better after all. This is about as bad a fix as we have been in yet. Marooned on a solitary atoll, without a boat, and with nothing to drink when we have finished our supply of water from Jupiter!"

"I wish I had never seen you, nor your accursed invention!" cried Norden.

"Nobody asked you to join us, professor," said Mark, in a chilly tone. "Go away and grouch by yourself, if you want to keep out of trouble."

Although the outlook was black enough, we three, after what we had

gone through, were not easily depressed. It was, indeed, rather difficult, standing on that tree-fringed curve of rock and sand between the thunder of the surf and the calm of the lagoon, bathed in sunshine under a sky of flawless blue, to give way to complete despair.

But when three days passed without a drop of rain, without a sail breaking the monotony of the great circle of the sea, and our water supply was nearly gone, the charm of the lovely isle began to fade.

To keep our minds busy, we talked over our plans in case we were rescued. We knew it would be extremely difficult to convince the world of the truth of our story, but we thought that if we could get the *Star Shell* safely home, and Mark could produce his calculations and formulas before competent scientific men, we might be believed in time. Much depended upon those precious documents, and on the Jovian photographs and curios that were snugly stored in the *Shell*.

IT WAS shortly after daybreak on the fourth day, as we three were standing on the highest point of the reef—Norden had wandered away by himself—that the end came.

"A ship!" cried Dandy, huskily. "A small ship, full of sail! Here coming!"

Following the direction of his pointing finger, we saw a schooner bearing down upon the island, her sails silhouetted upon the rosy glow of the dawn.

We shook each other's hands, danced, croaked—our throats were too dry to shout—and waved our hats in the abandon of relief. We were saved.

"Our good luck holds out right to the end," said Mark. "We shall evidently have to die in our beds, of old age, no matter what happens. Hullo! What's Norden doing?"

The professor had evidently seen the ship before we had, for he was already on the shore, running, and nearly at the *Shell*. We did not move, for we were too far away to stop him, whatever mischief he might be planning. Long before we could reach him, he would be safely inside our precious vehicle.

"The treacherous hound means to leave us—to steal the *Shell*—to make a journey on his own account," said I. "It will be suicide, for he can not work the vessel himself, nor is it provisioned now."

Utterly helpless, we stood and watched the last act in the life-drama of the wonderful *Star Shell*.

Norden reached it, climbed up, and stood in the open doorway for a moment, holding out a round, black object at arm's length for us to see. The faint sound of his husky voice, his cackling laughter, came to us on the sea breeze, mingled with the thunder of the surf.

The climax was sudden, unexpected. Norden appeared to stumble, tried to recover his footing, lurched backward, and disappeared into the *Shell*. Instantly a blaze of light burst out, vivid even in the sunshine, a cloud of smoke arose, and a bang of fierce explosive sound shook the air. Then the gale blew the cloud away, and where the *Shell* had lain was merely a great hole in the sand.

"That was a Jovian bomb," said I. "You remember that one was missing in the great battle. Norden must have stolen it. What he intended to do we shall never know now. Perhaps he was going to blow us all up with it later. Anyhow he has only done himself in, praise be."

"Only?" asked Mark.

"Oh, the *Star Shell!* You can build another one, old fellow."

"With all my papers and formulas, the results of years of work,

blown to fragments? With all the proofs of our voyage destroyed? I'm afraid, Harry, that our first trip to the stars is also our last."

A boat was now putting off from the schooner.

"And what shall we say to these people? How shall we explain the explosion—and our presence here?"

"Just tell them the truth, Harry," said Mark, wearily. "They will want to know what ship we have been wrecked in, they will be firmly convinced that what they saw was the detonation of a floating mine. But tell them the truth—they won't believe it."

And they didn't: nor does the world.

But we three *know*.

Mark is working hard again, and some day, perhaps . . . Perhaps! . . .

[THE END]

WEIRD STORY REPRINT

No. 20

The Lady of the Velvet Collar

By WASHINGTON IRVING

ON A stormy night, in the tempestuous times of the French revolution, a young German was returning to his lodgings, at a late hour, across the old part of Paris. The lightning gleamed, and the loud claps of thunder rattled through the lofty narrow streets—but I should first tell you something about this young German.

Gottfried Wolfgang was a young man of good family. He had studied for some time at Gottingen, but being of a visionary and enthusiastic character, he had wandered into those wild and speculative doctrines which have so often bewildered German students. His secluded life, his intense application, and the singular nature of his studies, had an effect on both mind and body. His health was impaired; his imagination diseased. He had been indulging in fanciful speculations on spiritual essences, until, like Swedenborg, he had an ideal world of his own around him. He took up a notion, I do not know from what cause, that there was an evil influence hanging over him; an evil genius or spirit seeking to ensnare him and insure his perdition. Such an idea working on his melancholy temperament produced the most gloomy effects. He became haggard and desponding. His friends discovered the mental malady preying upon him, and determined that the best cure was a change of scene; he was sent, therefore, to finish his studies amidst the splendors and gayeties of Paris.

Wolfgang arrived at Paris at the breaking out of the Revolution. The popular delirium at first caught his

enthusiastic mind, and he was captivated by the political and philosophical theories of the day, but the scenes of blood which followed shocked his sensitive nature, disgusted him with society and the world, and made him more than ever a recluse. He shut himself up in a solitary apartment in the Pays Latin, the quarter of students. There, in a gloomy street not far from the monastic walls of the Sorbonne, he pursued his favorite speculations. Sometimes he spent hours together in the great libraries of Paris, those catacombs of departed authors, rummaging among their hoards of dusty and obsolete works in quest of food for his unhealthy appetite. He was, in a manner, a literary ghoul, feeding in the charnel-house of decayed literature.

Wolfgang, though solitary and recluse, was of an ardent temperament, but for a time it operated merely upon his imagination. He was too shy and ignorant of the world to make any advances to the fair, but he was a passionate admirer of female beauty, and in his lonely chamber would often lose himself in reveries on forms and faces which he had seen, and his fancy would deck out images of loveliness far surpassing the reality.

While his mind was in this excited and sublimated state, a dream produced an extraordinary effect upon him. It was of a female face of transcendent beauty. So strong was the impression made, that he dreamed of it again and again. It haunted his thoughts by day, his slumbers by night; in fine, he became passionately enamored of this shadow of a dream. This lasted so long that it became one of those fixed ideas which haunt the minds of melancholy men, and are at times mistaken for madness.

Such was Gottfried Wolfgang, and such his situation at the time I mentioned. He was returning home late one stormy night, through some of the old and gloomy streets of the Marais, the ancient part of Paris. The loud claps of thunder rattled among the high houses of the narrow streets. He came to the Place de la Grève, the square where public executions are performed. The lightning quivered about the pinnacles of the ancient Hôtel de Ville, and shed flickering gleams over the open space in front. As Wolfgang was crossing the square, he shrank back with horror at finding himself close by the guillotine. It was the height of the Reign of Terror, when this dreadful instrument of death stood ever ready, and its scaffold was continually running with the blood of the virtuous and the brave. It had that very day been actively employed in the work of carnage, and there it stood in grim array, amidst a silent and sleeping city, waiting for fresh victims.

Wolfgang's heart sickened within him, and he was turning shuddering from the horrible engine, when he beheld a shadowy form, cowering as it were at the foot of the steps which led up to the scaffold. A succession of vivid flashes of lightning revealed it more distinctly. It was a female figure, dressed in black. She was seated on one of the lower steps of the scaffold, leaning forward, her face hid in her lap; and her long dishevelled tresses hanging to the ground, streaming with the rain which fell in torrents. Wolfgang paused. There was something awful in this solitary monument of wo. The female had the appearance of being above the common order. He knew the times to be full of vicissitude, and that many a fair head, which had once been pillowed on down, now wandered houseless. Perhaps this was some poor mourner whom the dreadful ax had rendered desolate, and who sat here heartbroken on the strand of existence, from which all that was dear

to her had been launched into eternity.

He approached, and addressed her in the accents of sympathy. She raised her head and gazed wildly at him. What was his astonishment at beholding, by the bright glare of the lightning, the very face which had haunted him in his dreams. It was pale and disconsolate, but ravishingly beautiful.

Trembling with violent and conflicting emotions, Wolfgang again accosted her. He spoke something of her being exposed at such an hour of the night, and to the fury of such a storm, and offered to conduct her to her friends. She pointed to the guillotine with a gesture of dreadful signification.

"I have no friend on earth!" said she.

"But you have a home," said Wolfgang.

"Yes—in the grave!"

The heart of the student melted at the words.

"If a stranger dare make an offer," said he, "without danger of being misunderstood, I would offer my humble dwelling as a shelter; myself as a devoted friend. I am friendless myself in Paris, and a stranger in the land; but if my life could be of service, it is at your disposal, and should be sacrificed before harm or indignity should come to you."

There was an honest earnestness in the young man's manner that had its effect. His foreign accent, too, was in his favor; it showed him not to be a hackneyed inhabitant of Paris. Indeed, there is an eloquence in true enthusiasm that is not to be doubted. The homeless stranger confided herself implicity to the protection of the student.

He supported her faltering steps across the Pont Neuf, and by the place where the statue of Henry the Fourth had been overthrown by the populace. The storm had abated, and the thunder rumbled at a distance. All Paris was quiet; that great volcano of human passion slumbered for awhile, to gather fresh strength for the next day's eruption. The student conducted his charge through the ancient streets of the Pays Latin, and by the dusky walls of the Sorbonne, to the great dingy hotel which he inhabited. The old portress who admitted them stared with surprize at the unusual sight of the melancholy Wolfgang with a female companion.

On entering his apartment, the student, for the first time, blushed at the scantiness and indifference of his dwelling. He had but one chamber—an old-fashioned salon — heavily carved, and fantastically furnished with the remains of former magnificence, for it was of those hotels in the quarter of the Luxembourg Palace which had once belonged to nobility. It was lumbered with books and papers, and all the usual apparatus of a student, and his bed stood in a recess at one end.

When lights were brought, and Wolfgang had a better opportunity of contemplating the stranger, he was more than ever intoxicated by her beauty. Her face was pale, but of a dazzling fairness, set off by a profusion of raven hair that hung clustering about it. Her eyes were large and brilliant, with a singular expression approaching almost to wildness. As far as her black dress permitted her shape to be seen, it was of perfect symmetry. Her whole appearance was highly striking, though she was dressed in the simplest style. The only thing approaching to an ornament which she wore, was a broad black band round her neck, clasped by diamonds.

The perplexity now commenced with the student how to dispose of the helpless being thus thrown upon his protection. He thought of abandoning his chamber to her, and seeking shelter for himself elsewhere. Still

he was so fascinated by her charms, there seemed to be such a spell upon his thoughts and senses, that he could not tear himself from her presence. Her manner, too, was singular and unaccountable. She spoke no more of the guillotine. Her grief had abated. The attentions of the student had first won her confidence, and then, apparently, her heart. She was evidently an enthusiast like himself, and enthusiasts soon understand each other.

In the infatuation of the moment, Wolfgang avowed his passion for her. He told her the story of his mysterious dream, and how she had possessed his heart before he had even seen her. She was strangely affected by his recital, and acknowledged to have felt an impulse toward him equally unaccountable. It was the time for wild theory and wild actions. Old prejudices and superstitions were done away; everything was under the sway of the "Goddess of Reason." Among other rubbish of the old times, the forms and ceremonies of marriage began to be considered superfluous bonds for honorable minds. Social compacts were the vogue. Wolfgang was too much of a theorist not to be tainted by the liberal doctrines of the day.

"Why should we separate?" said he. "Our hearts are united; in the eye of reason and honor we are as one. What need is there of sordid forms to bind high souls together?"

The stranger listened with emotion; she had evidently received illumination at the same school.

"You have no home nor family," continued he; "let me be everything to you, or rather let us be everything to one another. If form is necessary, form shall be observed—there is my hand. I pledge myself to you forever."

"Forever?" said the stranger, solemnly.

"Forever!" repeated Wolfgang.

The stranger clasped the hand extended to her: "Then I am yours," murmured she, and sank upon his bosom.

THE next morning the student left his bride sleeping, and sallied forth at an early hour to seek more spacious apartments, suitable to the change in his situation. When he returned, he found the stranger lying with her head hanging over the bed, and one arm thrown over it. He spoke to her, but received no reply. He advanced to awaken her from her uneasy posture. On taking her hand, it was cold—there was no pulsation—her face was pallid and ghastly—in a word, she was a corpse.

Horrified and frantic, he alarmed the house. A scene of confusion ensued. The police was summoned.

As the officer of police entered the room, he started back on beholding the corpse.

"Great heaven!" cried he; "how did this woman come here?"

"Do you know anything about her?" said Wolfgang, eagerly.

"Do I?" exclaimed the police officer; "she was guillotined yesterday."

He stepped forward, undid the black collar round the neck of the corpse, and the head rolled on the floor!

The student burst into a frenzy. "The fiend! the fiend has gained possession of me!" shrieked he; "I am lost forever."

They tried to soothe him, but in vain. He was possessed with the frightful belief that an evil spirit had reanimated the dead body to ensnare him. He went distracted, and died in a madhouse.

THE EYRIE



FROM time to time, in letters to The Eyrie, readers have affirmed that it is impossible for hair to turn white overnight from a sudden dreadful shock; that there are no nerves in the hair-follicles, and therefore a sudden fright can turn hair white only at the roots. The nerves touching the hair-roots (say these readers) can cause the hair to turn white at the base, and *grow out white,* but the hair that is already grown out can't possibly turn white.

However, the belief that hair can turn white from a sudden shock is so universal that we asked Dr. W. A. Evans, well-known writer on medical subjects and former Chicago health commissioner, to settle the question for our readers, bearing in mind Byron's lines in *The Prisoner of Chillon:*

"My hair is gray, but not with years;
Nor turned it white
In a single night,
As men's have grown from sudden fears."

Dr. Evans quotes from Pusey's *The Care of the Skin and Hair* (page 169): "Grayness is often influenced by emotional and other mental trials, particularly those that are prolonged, and it is not an uncommon occurrence to see it develop rapidly from grief, severe business anxiety or other conditions of intense mental strain. That grayness sometimes occurs suddenly is a general impression which I believe is correct. It is difficult to understand the mechanism of its sudden production: but some of the most unromantic and reliable scientific observers have recorded cases of it."

That seems to settle the case in favor of those writers of weird stories who let their story-people's hair turn white overnight, "as men's have grown from sudden fears." Pusey, says Dr. Evans, is an authority.

Writes Jack Conroy, of Hannibal, Missouri: "Three months ago, while waiting for a train in an isolated railroad station, I picked up a copy of the August WEIRD TALES and was thunderstruck by the transformation. All of the tales possessed a distinct literary quality and three of them are good enough to be chosen by O'Brien for his Best Short Stories. I refer to *The Woman of the Wood* by A. Merritt, *The Whistling Monsters* by B. Wallis, and *The Monster-God of Mamurth* by Edmond Hamilton. The two succeeding numbers have not been entirely as good, but good enough to surpass any other magazine in the field. *The Bird of Space* and its sequel were excellent, and *Across Space* captivates the interest. Your poetry is chosen with

discrimination, and all in all you may say to the other publishers in the words of Shelley's *Ozymandias:* 'Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!' There is one discordant note, however: the drawings to illustrate the text are bad."

William Bradford, of Cleveland, Ohio, writes to The Eyrie: "The first story I ever read in WEIRD TALES was *Out of the Long Ago,* by Seabury Quinn. Since then I have bought every issue. Jules de Grandin is one of your most interesting and entertaining characters. Sometimes the plots are a little far-fetched, but the story is always told in such style, with occasional humor and scientific theories mixed into the mystery, which carry the interest to the last word. In fact, I have not yet found a story in WEIRD TALES that did not have its good points, and this fact reflects much credit upon your judgment in weeding out the uninteresting stories. I appreciate WEIRD TALES because I can begin a story, confident that it has something in it, and that I won't lose interest and throw it away before finishing it."

Mrs. F. C. Harris, of Lakewood, Ohio, writes: "The quality of your magazine is improving steadily. *The Metal Giants, The Star Shell* and *The Grinning Mummy* are my choice for the three best stories in the December issue."

Writes Alice M. Huffman, of Indianapolis: "I am a constant reader of WEIRD TALES and enjoy the stories immensely as I consider them a relief from the monotony of the humdrum stories featured by most other magazines. I really can't say which type of stories I like best in your magazine, but I think the scientific stories are great. I certainly enjoy all the stories of Jules de Grandin and the tales of strange beasts."

Harry Levin, of Cleveland, Ohio, writes to The Eyrie: "While waiting for the car this morning I bought the latest WEIRD TALES. It contains a story which I think is the best that has been published for the last two years. It is a knockout. *The Metal Giants* by Edmond Hamilton is the story I mean. Give us more stories by Hamilton."

"Your last two numbers are just about the best I have ever read," writes R. K. Barnes, of Vassar, Michigan. "*The Metal Giants* was immense. I am especially fond of scientific and astronomical stories, but as a whole I enjoy WEIRD TALES all the way through. Without doubt I find it the most interesting magazine on the news stands today. But why publish 'Weird Story Reprints' when your own modern writers have the older ones outclassed?"

Writes Jack Snow, of Dayton, Ohio: "There is no mistaking the finest story in the December WEIRD TALES. It is *The Metal Giants,* by Edmond Hamilton. The author has a gift accorded to few writers—that of relating an imaginative scientific tale with sincerity and not with the usual hackneyed artificiality to be found in character and action of such stories."

Carl Ballard, of Danville, Virginia, writes to The Eyrie: "The stories I like are pseudo-scientific stories, devil-worship, black magic, tales of reincarnation and stories of the gods of old, Osiris, Isis, Pan, Jupiter, etc. I do not care much for ghost stories. When is Munn going to give us that sequel to *The Werewolf of Ponkert* in which he promised us the Black Master would come back?"

J. R. Walsh, of East Orange, New Jersey, asks: "Have any of your authors ever been in that hot-bed of witchcraft, Abyssinia? Do they know of the wailing spirit called Bouda? Metamorphosis happens to be a capital crime in Abyssinia, and also in Italian Somaliland. One sees strange things

in those lands. Mr. H. Warner Munn might find real food for horror-tales in this locality."

Sophie Wenzel Ellis, of Little Rock, Arkansas, writes to The Eyrie: "The happiest days of the month for me are those immediately following the first, when I am reading WEIRD TALES. In my clipping file of short stories there are more distinctive stories from your magazine than any other. Why do you not select a group of your best stories and issue them in book form? I should like to see you publish more stories of the sort which is exquisitely fanciful, such as *The Woman of the Wood*, by Merritt; *The Moon Bog* and *The Outsider*, by Lovecraft; and *The Dreamer of Atlanaat*, by Price."

Scott G. Williamson, of Los Angeles, expresses his ideas in verse:

"There was a time when life grew humdrum and I found
A little magazine where thrilling tales abound.
When reading in this book it seems that we are whirled
Through endless space into another unknown world.
A book that helps us when our lagging spirit fails,
And re-awakes the joy of living, is WEIRD TALES."

To the writer of the most helpful and constructive letter sent to The Eyrie discussing the stories in this issue, WEIRD TALES will send Seabury Quinn's original typescript of *The Man Who Cast No Shadow*, which is the cover-story for this issue. The typescript will be autographed by the author.

Readers, your favorite story in the December issue was *The Metal Giants*, by Edmond Hamilton. This story has three times as many votes as its nearest competitors, *The Grinning Mummy*, by Seabury Quinn, and part two of *The Star Shell*, by George C. Wallis and B. Wallis. What is your favorite story in the present issue?

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE FEBRUARY WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1) _____	_____
(2) _____	_____
(3) _____	_____

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The Man Who Cast No Shadow

(Continued from page 162)

young lady, Dr. de Grandin, sor?'' Detective Sergeant Costello asked respectfully, leaning forward from the rear seat of the car.

''Wait, wait, my friend,'' de Grandin replied with a smile. ''When our duties are all performed I shall tell you such a tale as shall make your two eyes to pop outward like a snail's. First, however, you must go with us to restore this *pauvre enfant* to her mother's arms; then to the headquarters to report the death of that *sale bête*. Friend Trowbridge will stay with the young lady for so long as he deems necessary, and I shall remain with him to help. Then, this evening—with your consent, Friend Trowbridge—you will dine with us, *Sergent*, and I shall tell you all, everything, in total. Death of my life, what a tale it is! *Parbleu*, but you shall call me a liar many times before it is finished!''

JULES DE GRANDIN placed his demitasse on the tabouret and refilled his liqueur glass. ''My friends,'' he began, turning his quick, elfish smile first on Costello, then on me, ''I have promised you a remarkable tale. Very well, then, to begin.''

He flicked a wholly imaginary fleck of dust from his dinner jacket sleeve and crossed his slender, womanishly small feet on the hearth rug.

''Do you recall, Friend Trowbridge, how we went, you and I, to the tea given by the good Madame Norman? Yes? Perhaps, then, you will recall how at the entrance of the ballroom I stopped with a look of astonishment on my face. Very good. At that moment I saw that which made me disbelieve the evidence of my own two eyes. As the gentleman we later met as Count Czerny danced past a mirror on the wall I beheld—*parbleu!* what do you suppose?—*the reflection only of his dancing partner!* It was as if the man had been non-existent, and the young lady had danced past the mirror by herself.

''Now, such a thing was not likely, I admit; you, *Sergent*, and you, too, Friend Trowbridge, will say it was not possible; but such is not the case. In certain circumstances it is possible for that which we see with our eyes to cast no shadow in a mirror. Let that point wait a moment; we have other evidence to consider first.

''When the young man told us of the count's prowess in battle, of his imcomparable ferocity, I began to believe that which I had at first disbelieved, and when he told us the count was a Hungarian, I began to believe more than ever.

''I met the count, as you will remember, and I took his hand in mine. *Parbleu*, it was like a hand with no palm—it had hairs on both sides of it! You, too, Friend Trowbridge, remarked on that phenomenon.

''While I talked with him I managed to maneuver him before a mirror. *Morbleu*, the man was as if he had not been; I could see my own face smiling at me where I knew I should have seen the reflection of his shoulder!

''Now, attend me: The *Sûreté Général*—what you call the Police Headquarters—of Paris is not like your English and American bureaus. All facts, no matter however seemingly absurd, which come to that office are carefully noted down for future reference. Among other histories I have read in the archives of that office was that of one Baron Lajos Czuczron of Transylvania, whose actions had once been watched by our secret agents.

"This man was rich and favored beyond the common run of Hungarian petty nobles, but he was far from beloved by his peasantry. He was known as cruel, wicked and implacable, and no one could be found who had ever one kind word to say for him.

"Half the countryside suspected him of being a *loup-garou*, or werewolf, the others credited a local legend that a woman of his family had once in the olden days taken a demon to husband and that he was the offspring of that unholy union. According to the story, the progeny of this wicked woman lived like an ordinary man for one hundred years, then died on the stroke of the century *unless his vitality was renewed by drinking the blood of a slaughtered virgin!*

"Absurd? Possibly. An English intelligence office would have said 'bally nonsense' if one of its agents had sent in such a report. An American bureau would have labeled the report as being the sauce-of-the-apple; but consider this fact: in six hundred years there was no single record of a Baron Czuczron having died. Barons grew old—old to the point of death—but always there came along a new baron, a man in the prime of life, *not a youth*, to take the old baron's place, nor could any say when the old baron had died or where his body had been laid.

"Now, I had been told that a man under a curse—the werewolf, the vampire, or any other thing in man's shape who lives more than his allotted time by virtue of wickedness—can not cast a shadow in a mirror; also that those accursed ones have hair in the palms of their hands. *Eh bien,* with this foreknowledge, I engaged this man who called himself Count Czerny in conversation concerning Transylvania. *Parbleu,* the fellow denied all knowledge of the country. He denied it with more force than was necessary. 'You are a liar, *Monsieur le Comte,*' I tell him, but I say it to myself. Even yet, however, I do not think what I think later.

"Then came the case of the young Eckhart. He loses blood, he can not say how or why, but Friend Trowbridge and I find a queer mark on his body. I think to me, 'If, perhaps, a vampire—a member of that accursed tribe who leave their graves by night and suck the blood of the living—were here, that would account for this young man's condition. But where would such a being come from? It is not likely.'

"Then I meet that old man, the one you call Indian John. He tells me much of the history of this town in the early days, and he tells me something more. He tells of a man, an old, old man, who has paid him much money to go to a certain grave—the grave of a reputed witch—in the old cemetery and dig from about it a growth of wild garlic. Garlic, I know, is a plant intolerable to the vampire. He can not abide it. If it is planted on his grave he can not pass it.

"I ask myself, 'Who would want such a thing to be, and why?' But I have no answer; only, I know, if a vampire have been confined to that grave by planted garlic, then liberated when that garlic is taken away, it would account for the young Eckhart's strange sickness.

"*Tiens,* Friend Trowbridge and I visit that grave, and on its tombstone we read a verse which makes me believe the tenant of that grave may be a vampire. We interview the good minister of the church and learn that another man, an old, old man, have also inquired about that strange grave. 'Who have done this?' I ask me; but even yet I have no definite answer to my question.

"As we rush to the Norman house to see young Eckhart I stop at an

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Italian green grocer's and ask for fresh garlic, for I think perhaps we can use it to protect the young Eckhart if it really is a vampire which is troubling him. *Parbleu,* some man, an old, old man, have what you Americans call 'cornered' the available supply of garlic. *'Cordieu,'* I tell me, 'this old man, he constantly crosses our trail! Also he is a very great nuisance.'

"The Italian tell me the garlic was sent to a house in Rupleysville, so I have an idea where this interfering old rascal may abide. But at that moment I have greater need to see our friend Eckhart than to ask further questions of the Italian. Before I go, however, I tell that shopkeeper that his garlic customer has the evil eye. *Parbleu,* Monsieur Garlic-Buyer, you will have no more dealings with *that* Italian! He knows what he knows.

"When we arrive at the Norman house we find young Eckhart in great trouble, and a black serving maid tells of a strange-looking woman who *bit* him. Also, we find tooth-marks on his breast. 'The vampire-woman, Sarah, is, in very truth, at large,' I tell me, and so I hasten to the cemetery to make her fast to her grave with a wooden stake, for, once he is staked down, the vampire can no longer roam. He is finished.

"Friend Trowbridge will testify he saw blood on the stake driven into a drave dug nearly three hundred years ago. Is it not so, *mon ami?*"

I nodded assent, and he took up his narrative:

"Why this old man should wish to liberate the vampire-woman, I know not; certain it is, one of that grisly guild, or one closely associated with it, as this 'Count Czerny' undoubtedly was, can tell when another of the company is in the vicinity, and I doubt not he did this deed for pure malice and deviltry.

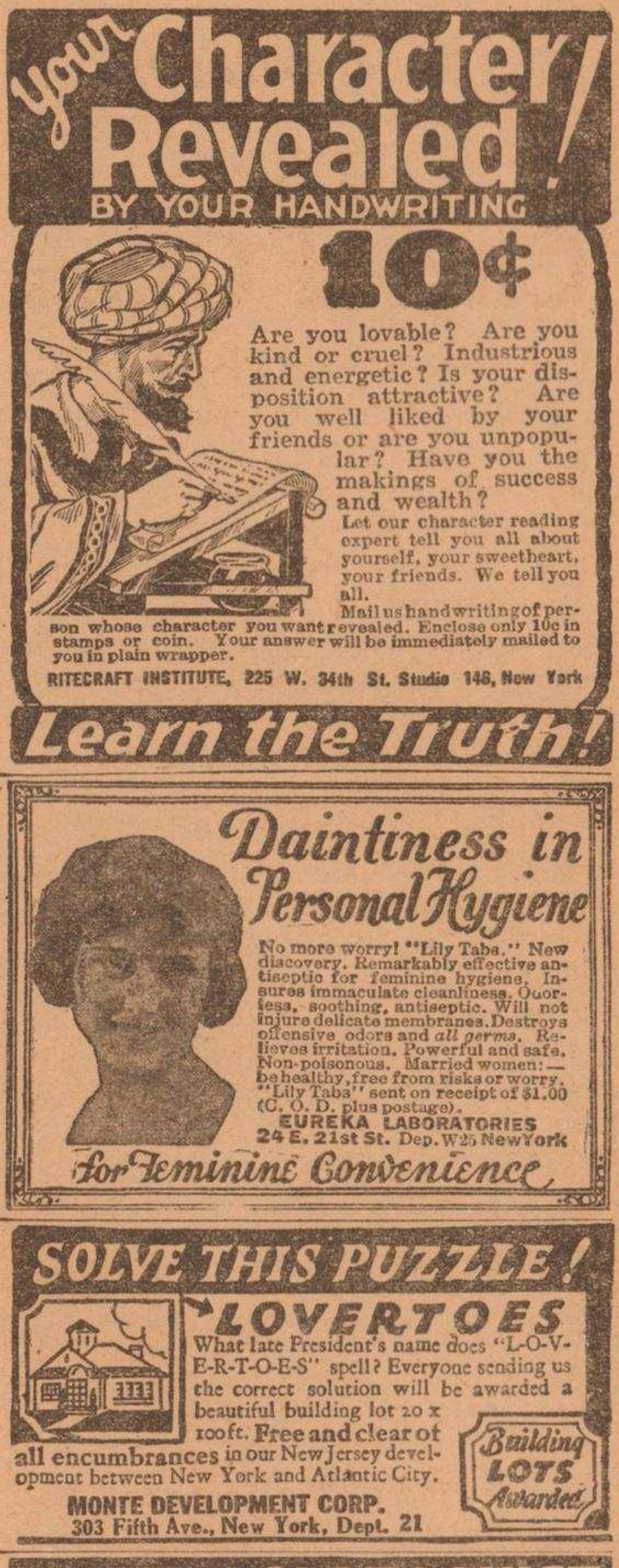
"However that may be, Friend Trowbridge tells me he have seen the count, and that he seems to have aged greatly. The man who visited the clergyman and the man who bought the garlic was also much older than the count as we knew him. 'Ah ha, he is coming to the end of his century,' I tell me; 'now look out for devilment, Jules de Grandin. Certainly, it is sure to come.'

"And then, my *Sergent*, come you with your tale of Mademoiselle Norman's disappearance, and I, too, think perhaps she has run away from home voluntarily, of her own free will, until you say the Italian shopkeeper recognized the old man who accosted her as one who has the evil eye. Now what old man, save the one who bought the garlic and who lives at Rupleysville, would that Italian accuse of the evil eye? *Pardieu*, has he not already told you the same man once bought his garlic? But yes. The case is complete.

"The girl has disappeared, an old, old man has accosted her; an old, old man who was so strong he could overcome a policeman; the count is nearing his century mark when he must die like other men unless he can secure the blood of a virgin to revivify him. I am more than certain that the count and baron are one and the same and that they both dwell at Rupleysville. *Voilà*, we go to Rupleysville, and we arrive there not one little minute too soon. *N'est-ce-pas, mes amis?*"

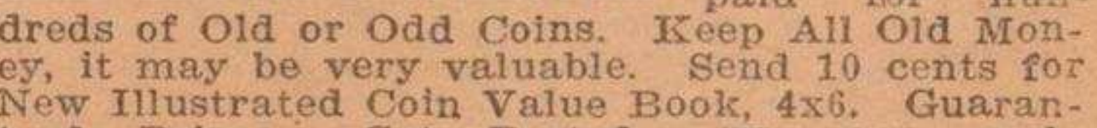
"Sure," Costello agreed, rising and holding out his hand in farewell, "you've got th' goods, doc. No mistake about it."

To me, as I helped him with his coat in the hall, the detective confided, "An' he only had one shot o' licker all evenin'! Gosh, doc, if one drink could fix me up like that I wouldn't care *how* much prohibition we had!"









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Atomic Conquerors

(Continued from page 180)

until it seemed to be obscured by a mass of small dark clouds, clouds that drew together, fused, condensed. Smaller and smaller grew that mass of blackness, the sunlight pouring down around its edges. And now it was descending, dropping swiftly down toward the massed disks above, dropping down until it showed itself as not a single mass, but as several, dropping down until he saw that it was five black disks, five that raced toward the line of other disks above. Wonder filled him, and a dawning comprehension. These were disks returning from the superworld, he saw, dwindling down until they entered our own universe—but how came it that only five returned? Five, of the mighty thousands Marlowe had seen, that had attacked the superworld! Were they messengers?

He saw the five race toward the hundreds above, saw them hang with those hundreds for a space of minutes, then confusion seemed to run through the massed disks above, that were suddenly swooping back down to the hilltop. As they sank down to the summit, their numbers darkened the sky, and he saw, without understanding, a mass of their number that seemed to grow smaller, that dwindled and vanished within the pit. Another mass did likewise, and another. They were returning to their own atom! And now Hunter understood, at last.

The five were—*survivors!*

Their attack on the superworld had failed—they were in retreat—retreat from—but look! *Look!*

The sky above was again darkening, even more intensely than before. Even as the disks of the invaders dwindled and sank with frantic haste into the pit, the darkness above was compressing, contracting, resolving

into a myriad of dark, long shapes, shapes that swooped swiftly down upon the disordered disks above. Long, black, fishlike hulls, utterly different from the disks of the atomic people. As they came down upon the disks, flashes of violent lightning flickered from the fish-hulls, striking disk after disk, sending them down in whirling masses of bursting flames.

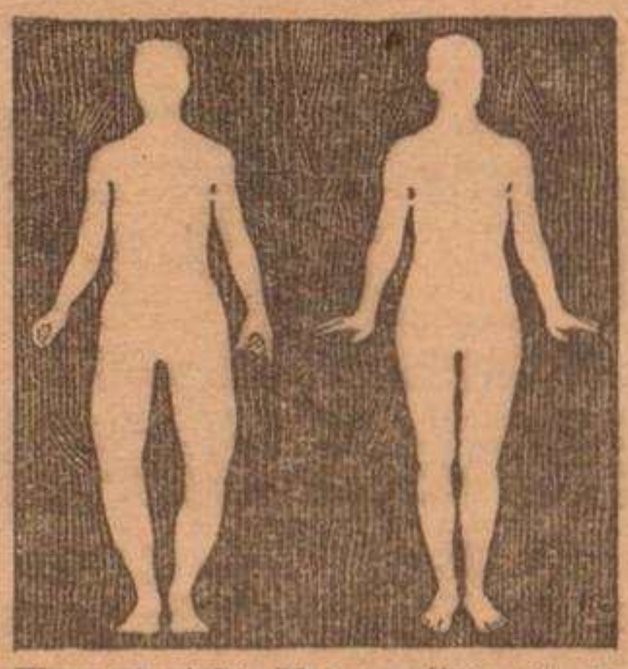
It was the superpeople, Hunter knew, pursuing the atomic invaders from their own greater world, where the attack of their mighty fleet of disks had failed.

From the few disks that stood to the terrible attack of the superpeople, the blue Cold Ray sprang out sullenly, but at its first appearance the circling, swooping hulls vanished entirely from view. Then from all the air around the disks, flash on flash of lightning stabbed at them. The superwarriors had made themselves invisible.

In panic haste the last few disks sank down toward the pit and the lightning ceased abruptly. It was as though the desire of the attacking superpeople was only to force the atomic invaders back down into their own universe. The last few disks dwindled, diminished, vanished into the pit, into the sand-grain, and the last humming sound ceased. The invaders had been swept from the Earth. Running out from the cabin, Hunter saw that the pit was empty of them, and he shouted aloud.

Abruptly the long narrow shapes of the hulls reappeared above, swooping swiftly down upon the hilltop. And with a sudden sense of nearing peril, Hunter fled down the hillside, sinking to the ground when his stiff limbs could carry him no farther. Above, the black hulls were clustered thickly around the hilltop, and the droning of a machine of some sort reached him, then a sudden sharp tapping of metal on metal.

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hulls suddenly swung up from the summit and hovered momentarily, circling. And from one of their number, beneath the rest, swung suspended a glistening globe of shining metal, a ball some three feet in thickness. Even as the awed Hunter comprehended that the superpeople had sealed the sand-grain within that shining metal sphere, from all the gathered hulls above, flash after flash of terrific lightning stabbed down toward the hilltop, with a splitting crash, and beneath Hunter the ground heaved and swayed. He staggered to his feet, glimpsed the edge of a narrow, deep abyss in the hilltop created by that blasting force, then saw the ball of metal whirling down into this abyss, holding within it the atomic world, forever. Again flashed down the lightning, and beneath him was a gigantic rumbling, a grinding and crashing, as the abyss closed, prisoning the ball within its incalculable depths.

Hunter sank again to the ground, his brain turning dizzily. He saw vaguely the dark hulls sweeping back up toward the zenith, dimly saw one of them that swooped down close above him and hung for a moment as if in curiosity, and from the side of this a score of faces peered down at him, faces not unhuman in shape, but unhuman in the high and untroubled serenity that lay on them, faces that seemed to look down at him with a calm benevolence, an amused but kindly pity.

Then that last hull, too, drove up toward the zenith, and all gathered there, expanding, growing, darkening the skies once more, bringing twilight that deepened into blackness, a blackness that hung for a moment, then broke up, dimmed, vanished.

Standing there on the hillside, Hunter raised tremulous hands toward the sunlit sky, as if in gratitude, as if in prayer.

8

SUNSET illumined Leadanfoot with a glory of orange and crimson light when Hunter reached the village. He walked slowly down the silent, deserted street, and sat down wearily on a bench in front of the inn. With an uncertain smile he remembered his conversation with the innkeeper, and wondered where the man was now.

And, too, with a flash of sudden pity, he remembered Marlowe, and their toiling race up the hill. A kindly, honest man he had seemed, one who had probably lived a life of serene content in his quiet museum before fate dragged him into the whirlpool of cosmic war. A war that he had striven to prevent, however powerlessly. And, more somberly, Hunter thought of the other man, of Powell. Well, it was over now, and what could one say of the dead?

As it was, he thought, with those two dead, he was the only man on Earth to know what had really happened. Those others, those millions in the world outside, they would be wondering, doubtful, puzzled, yet thankful, too. Well, soon he would be getting back to that world, to tell them what he knew.

But just now he wanted to sit in the quiet, deserted village, breathing its peace after his two nights and days of nightmare fear and terror. Just now he wanted to sit and listen to little, trivial sounds, the wind that whispered in his ears, the crickets in the long grass. . . . . .

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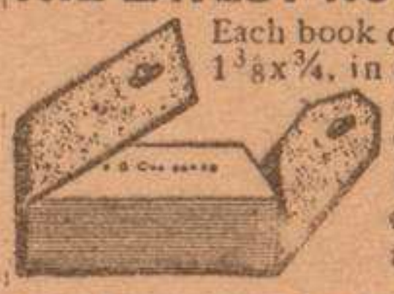
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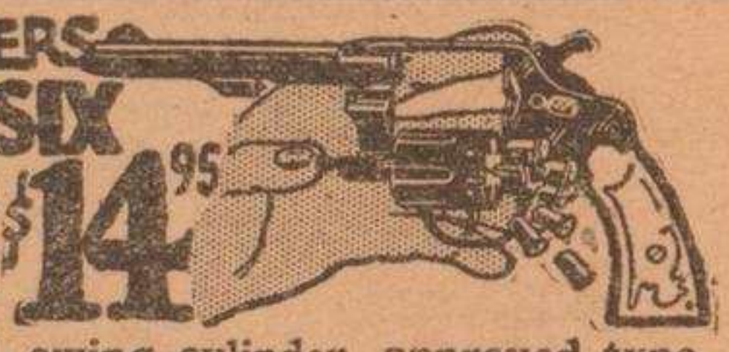
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The Brimstone Cat

(Continued from page 192)

toward us, and one of them raised his hand, in which there was a heavy club.

Another of my queer friends is Hari Tosuki, the Japanese wrestler. From him I once learned something of ju-jitsu. Now that knowledge stood me in good stead. I threw the man with the club, felling him with a catch that broke his arm and knocked him senseless. Then I grappled with the other villain—an ugly, evil creature, powerful but with a misshapen back, as I discovered when I finally had him down.

Meanwhile, the girl, instead of fainting or crying out again, had fled down the street. She came back, just as I was reflecting with some pride that I had done credit to Hari, my teacher. With her were two big policemen.

They put handcuffs on our assailants and the girl told her story, while one of the policemen made notes for the charge that should be entered against the thugs.

The girl had been on an errand in this part of the city, where she was a stranger. The errand had detained her much later than she expected, and in the dusk she had lost her way. The two ruffians had held her up, and, infuriated when they found that she had but a few cents in her pocketbook, had attempted further outrage. She had broken away and fled down the side street, coming upon me.

As she told her story, I looked at her for the first time. Or was it the first time? She was a tiny thing with red-gold curls and a dimple in one cheek that made my heart pound madly with a desire to kiss it. Her eyes were of a clear blue like that of the sea on a calm summer afternoon and as I looked into them I knew

why Govern Aristé had never found other women fair.

I had been as a voyager who sails on a long journey, seeking he knows not what, until on a clear day he comes to a bay of calm blue water that is his harbor and his home.

As I looked into her eyes, I saw recognition of me leap into her own.

"My name is Govern Aristé, and I am sure I have met you before," I told her. "May I call a taxi and take you home?"

"And I have met you, although I do not recall where," she replied. "Your name is an odd one but I do not seem to remember it."

"I have always wished for a comfortable, sensible name," I confided, "such a name as Peter."

"Peter would suit you much better," she agreed. "My name is Edith Montgomery. I live with my father, who will be much worried at my late return. I shall be very glad to have you take me home."

I hailed a passing taxi. As we climbed into it, the police patrol drove up and a big policeman led the deformed ruffian toward it. The man turned and cursed me, the cause of his misfortune; and in his evil face, now under the strong light of the machine's headlight, I saw distinctly the brutal features of Tom, the hangman of London Town.

But I had other things to think of than hangmen. A May morning in the hunting park of good Queen Bess or a taxicab in a dark city street—when a man finds romance, what matters the setting? The rapture is the same.

In some way—I can not remember the details—we reached my lady's home. She left me with a sweet-spoken good-bye and an invitation to call on the morrow and receive her father's thanks, after she had told him the story of her unpleasant adventure.

Somehow—I can not remember the

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details—I reached again this room in Mrs. O'Flynn's house, where the damnable cat has now ceased its caterwauling.

I have written this story—what a story!—as best I might, when a vision ever comes between me and my typewriter, the vision of the sweetest, fairest face in the world. What hair! what eyes! and what a bewitching mouth! And her blush! Yes, she blushed at the look I gave her when I bade her good-night. Once before I have seen her blush, when I raised her hand to my lips and touched the body of the brimstone cat——

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I have not found the philosopher's stone, but I have found something dearer to me than my own life.

Did Peter Byfield live? I do not know. But two things I do know. One of them is that some day, and that a day not long distant, I shall marry the lady of my heart—the girl of the red-gold curls and the eyes that are my doors to heaven. The other?

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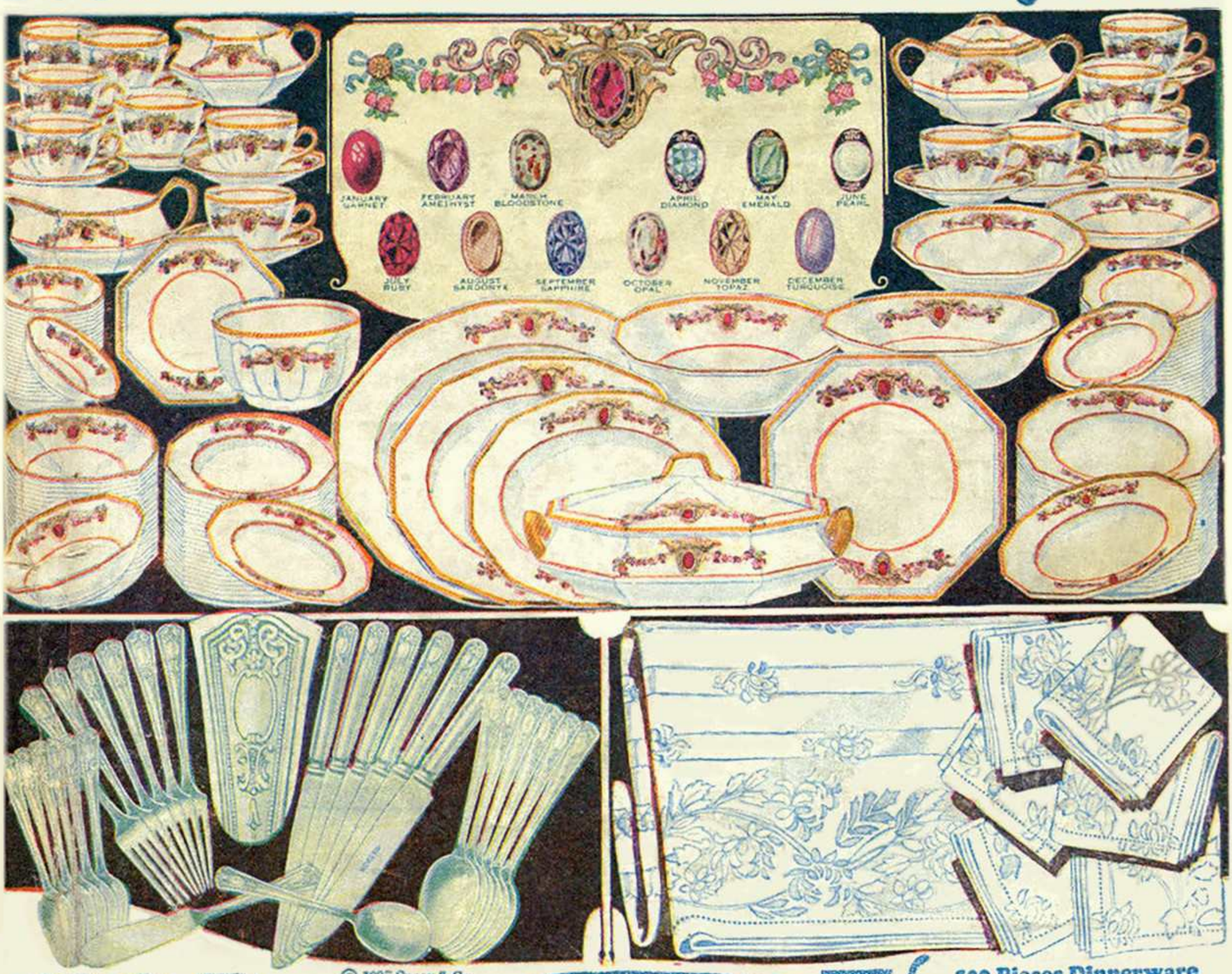
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