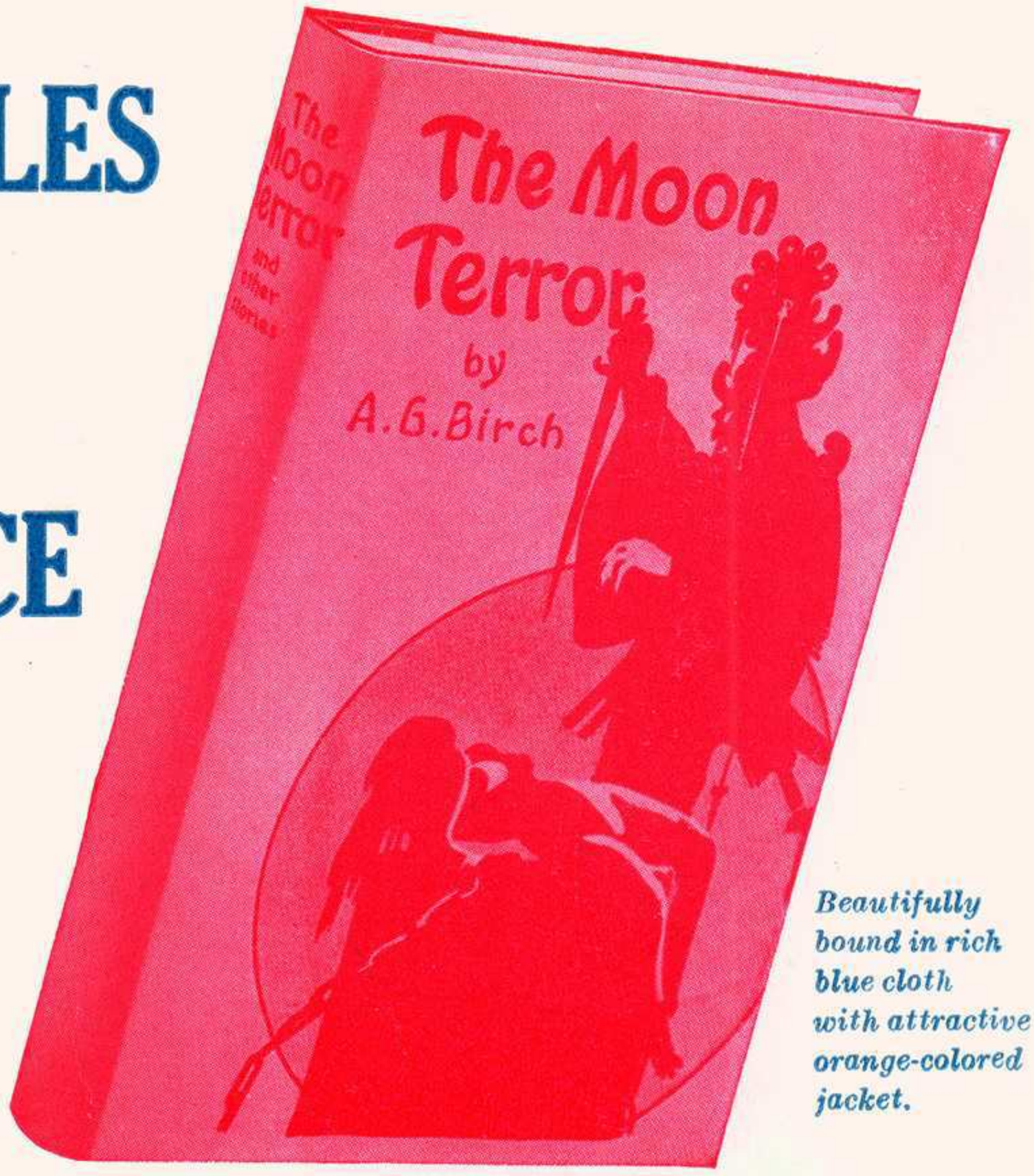
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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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Neptune's Neighbors

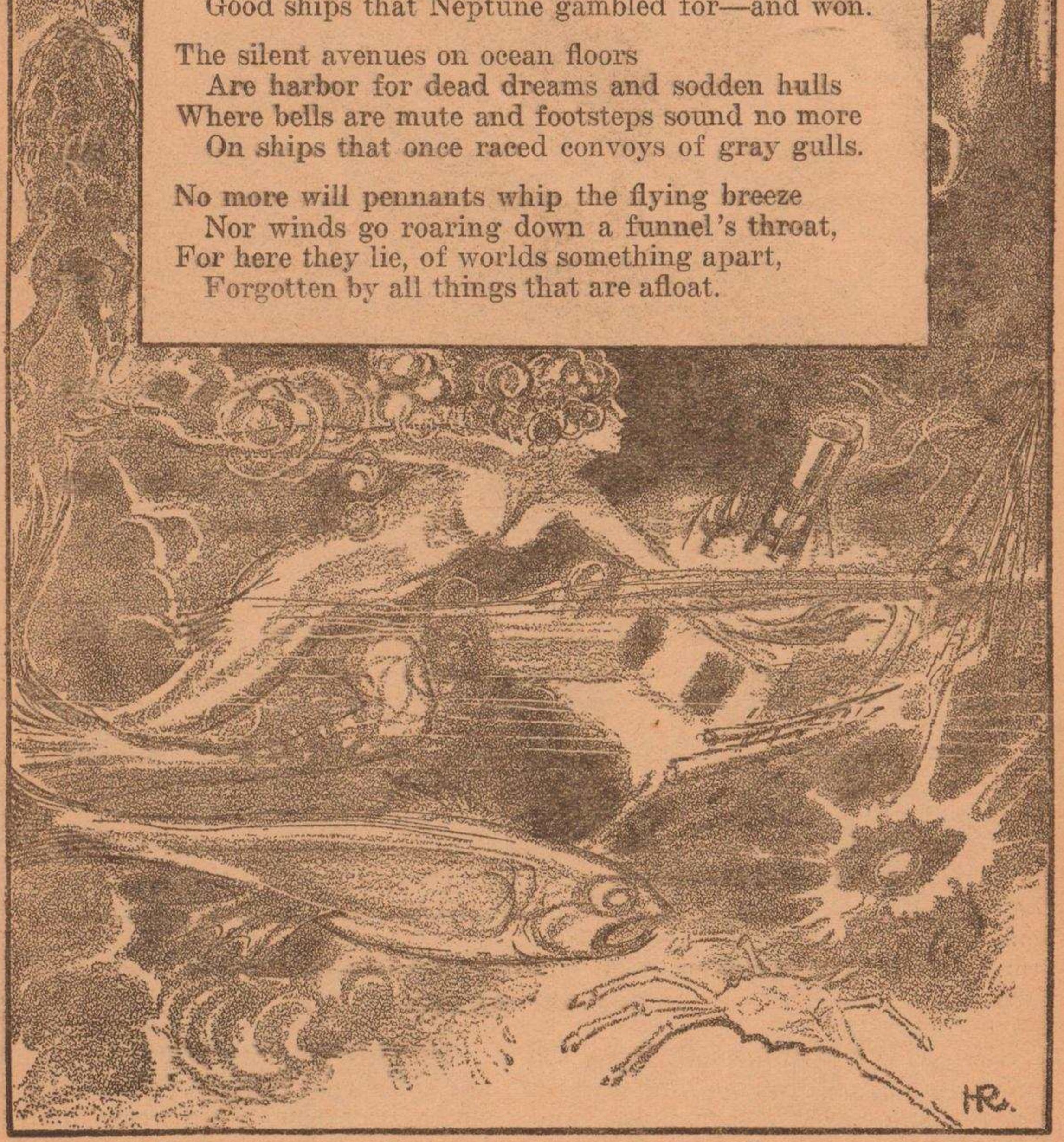
By **CRISTEL HASTINGS**

In shadowed glens they wait beneath the waves,
Darting like furtive arrows through the gloom,
Haunting the ghostly hulls that lie at rest—
Old slanting decks that settled to their doom.

Strange shapes are here, patrolling somber depths,
Peering through portholes that once framed the sun,
Nosing the keels that lie in sanded graves—
Good ships that Neptune gambled for—and won.

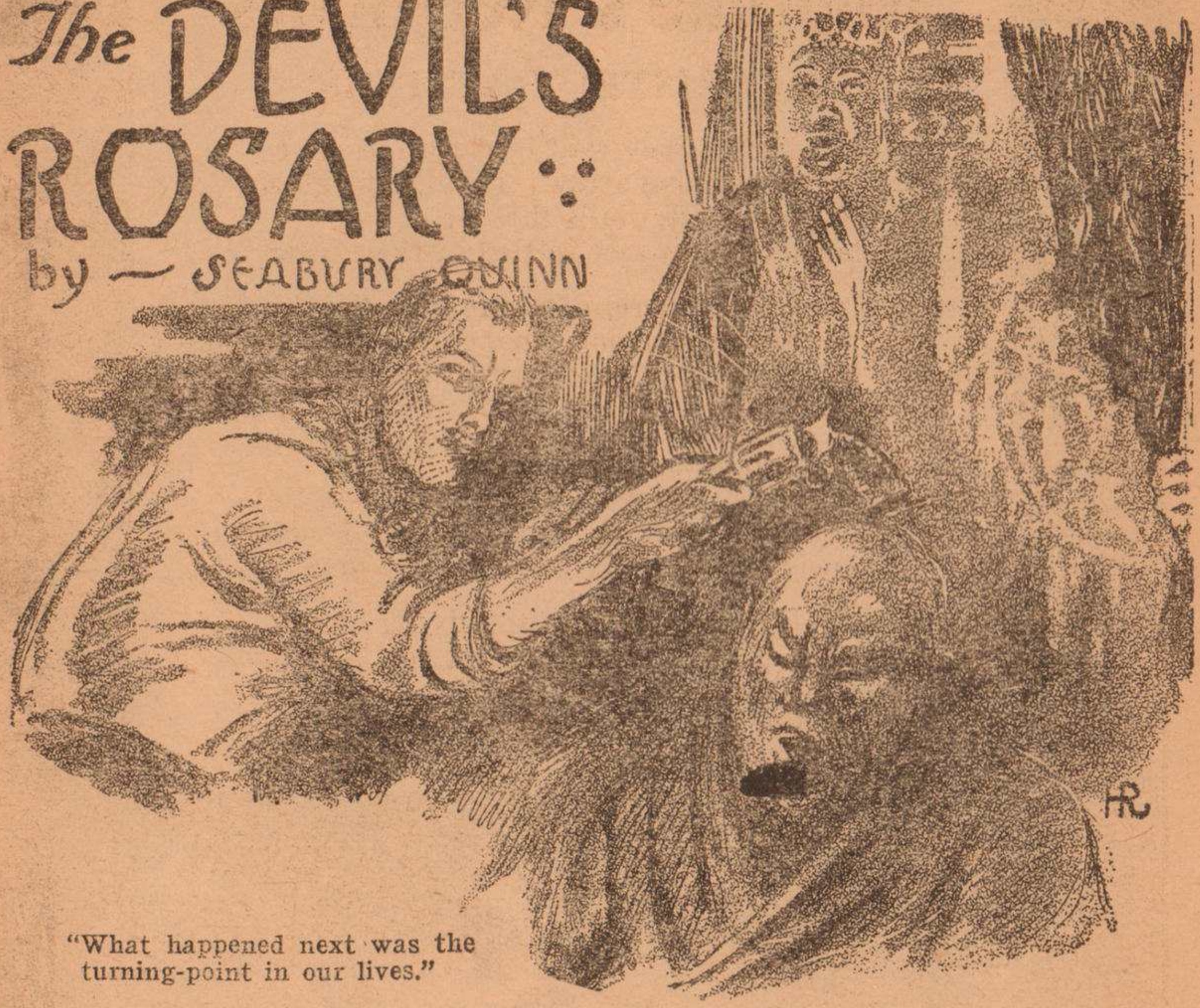
The silent avenues on ocean floors
Are harbor for dead dreams and sodden hulls
Where bells are mute and footsteps sound no more
On ships that once raced convoys of gray gulls.

No more will pennants whip the flying breeze
Nor winds go roaring down a funnel's throat,
For here they lie, of worlds something apart,
Forgotten by all things that are afloat.



The DEVIL'S ROSARY

by — SEABURY QUINN



"What happened next was the turning-point in our lives."

MY FRIEND Jules de Grandin was in a seasonably sentimental mood. "It is the springtime, Friend Trowbridge," he reminded as we walked down Tonawanda Avenue. "The horse-chestnuts are in bloom and the blackbirds whistle among the branches at St. Cloud; the tables are once more set before the cafés, and—*grand Dieu, la belle créature!*" He cut short his remarks to stare in undisguised admiration at a girl about to enter an old-fashioned horse-drawn victoria at the curb.

Embarrassed, I plucked him by the elbow, intent on drawing him onward, but he snatched his arm away and bounded forward with a cry, even as my fingers touched his sleeve. "Attend her, my friend," he called; "she faints!"

As she seated herself on the taupe cushions of her carriage, the girl reached inside her silver mesh bag, evidently in search of a handkerchief, fumbled a moment among the miscellany of feminine fripperies inside the reticule, then wilted forward as though bludgeoned.

"*Mademoiselle,* you are ill, you are in trouble, you must let us help you!" de Grandin exclaimed as he mounted the vehicle's step. "We are physicians," he added in belated explanation as the elderly coachman turned and favored us with a hostile stare.

The girl was plainly fighting hard for consciousness. Her face had gone death-gray beneath its film of delicate make-up, and her lips trembled and quavered like those of a child about to weep, but she made a brave effort at composure. "I—I'm—all—right—

thank—you,'' she murmured disjointedly. ''It's—just—the—heat——'' Her protest died half uttered and her eyelids fluttered down as her head fell forward on de Grandin's ready shoulder.

''*Morbleu*, she *has* swooned!'' the little Frenchman whispered. ''To Dr. Trowbridge's house—993 Susquehanna Avenue!'' he called authoritatively to the coachman. ''*Mademoiselle* is indisposed.'' Turning to the girl he busied himself making her as comfortable as possible as the rubber-tired vehicle rolled smoothly over the asphalt roadway.

She was, as de Grandin had said, a ''*belle créature.*'' From the top of her velour hat to the pointed tips of her suede pumps she was all in gray, a platinum fox scarf complementing the soft, clinging stuff of her costume, a tiny bouquet of early-spring violets lending the sole touch of color to her ensemble. A single tendril of daffodil-yellow hair escaped from beneath the margin of her close-fitting hat lay across a cheek as creamy-smooth and delicate as a babe's.

''Gently, my friend,'' de Grandin bade as the carriage stopped before my door. ''Take her arm—so. Now, we shall soon have her recovered.''

In the surgery he assisted the girl to a chair and mixed a strong dose of aromatic ammonia, then held it to the patient's blanched lips.

''Ah—so, she revives,'' he commented in a satisfied voice as the delicate, violet-veined lids fluttered uncertainly a moment, then rose slowly, unveiling a pair of wide, frightened purple eyes.

''Oh——'' the girl began in a sort of choked whisper, half rising from her seat, but de Grandin put a hand gently on her shoulder and forced her back.

''Make haste slowly, *ma belle petite*,'' he counseled. ''You are still weak from shock and it is not well to tax your strength. If you will be so good as to drink this——'' He extended the glass of ammonia toward her with a bow, but she seemed not to see it. Instead, she stared about the room with a dazed, panic-stricken look, her lips trembling, her whole body quaking in a perfect ague of unreasoning terror. Somehow, as I watched, I was reminded of a spectacle I had once witnessed at the zoo when Rajah, a thirty-foot Indian python, had refused food, and the curators, rather than lose a valuable reptile by starvation, overrode their compunctions and thrust a poor, helpless white rabbit into the monster's glass-walled den.

''I've seen it; I've seen it; *I've seen it!*'' She chanted the litany of terror, each repetition higher, more intense, nearer the boundary of hysteria than the one before.

''*Mademoiselle!*'' de Grandin's peremptory tone cut her terrified iteration short. ''You will please not repeat meaningless nothings to yourself while we stand here like a pair of stone monkeys. What is it you have seen, if you please?''

The unemotional, icy monotone in which he spoke brought the girl from her near-hysteria as a sudden dash of cold water in the face might have done. ''This!'' she cried in a sort of frenzied desperation as she thrust her hand into the mesh bag pendent from her wrist. For a moment she ransacked its interior with groping fingers; then, gingerly, as though she held something live and venomous, brought forth a tiny object and extended it to him.

''U'm?'' he murmured non-committally, taking the thing from her and holding it up to the light as though it were an oddity of nature.

It was somewhat smaller than a hazel-nut, smooth as ivory, and stained a brilliant red. Through its axis was bored a hole, evidently for the purpose of accommodating a cord. Obviously, it was one of a strand of inexpensive beads, though I was at a loss to say of what material it was made. In any event, I could see nothing about the commonplace little

trinket to warrant such evident terror as our patient displayed.

Jules de Grandin was apparently struck by the incongruity of cause and effect, too, for he glanced from the little red globule to the girl, then back again, and his narrow, dark eyebrows raised interrogatively. At length: "I do not think I apprehend the connection," he confessed. "This"—he tapped the tiny ball with a well manicured forefinger—"may have deep significance to you, *Mademoiselle*, but to me it appears——"

"Significance?" the girl echoed. "It has! When my mother was drowned in Paris, a ball like this was found clutched in her hand. When my brother died in London, we found one on the counterpane of his bed. Last summer my sister was drowned while swimming at Atlantic Highlands. When they recovered her body, they found one of these terrible beads hidden in her bathing-cap!" She broke off with a retching sob and rested her arm on the surgery table, pillowing her face on it and surrendering herself to a paroxysm of weeping.

"Oh, I'm doomed," she wailed between blanching lips. "There's no help for me, and—I'm too young; I don't want to die!"

"Few people do, *Mademoiselle*," de Grandin remarked dryly. "However, I see no cause of immediate despair. Over an hour has passed since you discovered this evil talisman, and you still live. So much for the past. For the future you may trust in the mercy of heaven and the cleverness of Jules de Grandin. Meantime, if you are sufficiently recovered, we shall do ourselves the honor of escorting you home."

UNDER de Grandin's adroit questioning we learned much of the girl's story during our homeward drive. She was Haroldine Arkright, daughter of James Arkright, a wealthy widower who had lately moved to Harrisonville and leased the Broussard mansion in the fashionable west end. Though only nineteen years old, she had spent so much time abroad that America was more foreign to her than France, Spain or England.

Born in Waterbury, Connecticut, she had lived there during her first twelve years, and her family had been somewhat less than moderately well-to-do. Her father was an engineer, and spent much time abroad. Occasionally, when his remittances were delayed, the family felt the pinch of undisguised poverty. One day her father returned home unexpectedly, apparently in a state of great agitation. There had been mysterious whisperings, much furtive going and coming; then the family entrained for Boston, going immediately to the Hoosac Tunnel Docks and taking ship for Europe.

She and her sister were put to school in a convent at Rheims, and though they had frequent and affectionate letters from their parents, the communications came from different places each time; so she had the impression her elders led a Bedouin existence.

At the outbreak of the war the girls were taken to a Spanish seminary, where they remained until two years before, when they joined their parents in Paris.

"We'd lived there only a little while," she continued, "when two gendarmes came to our apartment one afternoon and asked for Daddy. One of them whispered something to him and he turned white as a sheet; then, when the other took something from his pocket and showed it, Daddy fell over in a dead faint. It wasn't till several hours later that we children were told. Mother's body had been found floating in the Seine, and one of those horrible little red balls was in her hand. That was the first we ever heard of them.

"Though Daddy was terribly affected by the tragedy, there was some-

thing we couldn't understand about his actions. As soon as the *Pompes Funèbres* (the municipal undertakers) had conducted the services, he made arrangements with a solicitor to sell all our furniture, and we moved to London without stopping to pack anything but a few clothes and toilet articles.

"In London we took a little cottage out by Garden City, and we lived—it seemed to me—almost in hiding; but before we'd lived there a year my brother Philip died, and—they found the second of these red beads lying on the cover of his bed.

"Father seemed almost beside himself when Phil died. We left—fled would be a better word—just as we had gone from Paris, without stopping to pack a thing but our clothes. When we arrived in America we lived in a little hotel in downtown New York for a while, then moved to Harrisonville and rented this house furnished.

"Last summer Charlotte went down to the Highlands with a party of friends, and——" she paused again, and de Grandin nodded understandingly.

"Has *Monsieur* your father ever taken you into his confidence?" he asked at length. "Has he, by any chance, told you the origin of these so mysterious little red pellets and——"

"Not till Charlotte drowned," she cut in. "After that he told me that if I ever saw such a ball anywhere—whether worn as an ornament by some person, or among my things, or even lying in the street—I was to come to him at once."

"U'm?" he nodded gravely. "And have you, perhaps, some idea how this might have come into your purse?"

"No. I'm sure it wasn't there when I left home this morning, and it wasn't there when I opened my bag to put my change in after making my purchases at Braunstein's, either. The first I saw of it was when I felt for a handkerchief after getting into the carriage, and—oh, I'm terribly afraid, Dr. de Grandin. I'm too young to die! It's not fair; I'm only nineteen, and I was to have been married this June and——"

"Softly, *ma chère,*" he soothed. "Do not distress yourself unnecessarily. Remember, I am with you."

"But what can you do?" she demanded. "I tell you, when one of these beads appears anywhere about a member of our family, it's too late for——"

"*Mademoiselle,*" he interrupted, "it is never too late for Jules de Grandin—if he be called in time. In your case we have——" His words were drowned by a sudden angry roar as a sheet of vivid lightning tore across the sky, followed by the bellow of a deafening crash of thunder.

"*Parbleu,* we shall be drenched!" de Grandin cried, eyeing the cloud-hung heavens apprehensively. "Quick, Trowbridge, *mon vieux,* assist Mademoiselle Haroldine to alight. I think we would better hail a taxi and permit the coachman to return alone with the carriage.

"One moment, if you please, *Mademoiselle,*" he ordered as the girl took my outstretched hand; "that little red ball which you did so unaccountably find in your purse, you will let me have it—a little wetting will make it none the less interesting to your father." Without so much as a word of apology, he opened the girl's bag, extracted the sinister red globule and deposited it between the cushions of the carriage seat, then, with the coachman's aid, proceeded to raise the vehicle's collache top.

As the covered carriage rolled rapidly away, he raised his hand, halting a taxicab, and calling sharply to the chauffeur: "Make haste, my friend. Should you arrive at our destination before the storm breaks, there is in my pocket an extra dollar for you."

The driver earned his fee with compound interest, for it seemed to me we transgressed every traffic ordi-

nance on the books in the course of our ride, cutting corners on two wheels, racing madly in the wrong direction through one-way streets, taking more than one chance of fatal collision with passing vehicles.

The floodgates of the clouds were just opening, and great torrents of water were cataracting down when we drew up beneath the Arkright porte-cochère and de Grandin handed Haroldine from the cab with a ceremonious bow, then turned to pay the taxi-man his well-earned bonus.

"*Mordieu,* our luck holds excellently well——" he began as we turned toward the door, but a blaze of lightning more savage than any we had seen thus far and the roaring detonation of a thunderclap which seemed fairly to split the heavens blotted out the remainder of his sentence.

The girl shrank against me with a frightened little cry as the lightning seared our eyes, and I sympathized with her terror, for it seemed to me the flash must have struck almost at our feet, so nearly simultaneous were fire and thunder, but a wild, half-hysterical laugh from de Grandin brought me round with an astonished exclamation.

The little Frenchman had rushed from the shelter of the mansion's porch and pointed dramatically toward the big stone pillars flanking the entrance to the grounds. There, toppled on its side as though struck fairly by a high-explosive shell, lay the victoria we had ordered to follow us, the horses kicking wildly at their shattered harness, the coachman thrown a clear dozen feet from his vehicle, and the carriage itself reduced to splinters scarcely larger than match-staves.

Heedless of the drenching rain, we raced across the lawn and halted by the prostrate postilion. Miraculously, the man was not only living, but regaining consciousness as we reached him. "Glory be to God!" he exclaimed piously as we helped him to his feet. " 'Tis only by th' mercy o' heaven I'm still a livin' man!"

"*Eh bien,* my friend"—de Grandin gave his little blond mustache a sharp twist as he surveyed the ruined carriage—"perhapsly the stupidity of hell may have something to do with it. Look to your horses; they seem scarcely worse off than yourself, but they may be up to mischief if they remain unchaperoned."

Once more beneath the shelter of the porte-cochère, as calmly as though discussing the probability of the storm's abatement, he proposed: "Let us go in, my friends. The horses and coachman will soon be all right. As for the carriage"—he raised his narrow shoulders in a fatalistic shrug—"*Mademoiselle,* I hope *Monsieur* your father carried adequate insurance on it."

2

THE little Frenchman laid his hand on the polished brass handle of the big oak door, but the portal held its place unyieldingly, and it was not till the girl had pressed the bell button several times that a butler who looked as if his early training had been acquired while serving as guard in a penitentiary appeared and paid us the compliment of a searching inspection before standing aside to admit us.

"Your father's in the living-room, Miss Haroldine," he answered the girl's quick question, then followed us half-way down the hall, as though reluctant to let us out of sight.

Heavy draperies of mulberry and gold brocade were drawn across the living-room windows, shutting out the lightning flashes and muffling the rumble of the thunder. A fire of resined logs burned cheerfully in the marble-arched fireplace, taking the edge from the early-spring chill; electric lamps under painted shades spilled pools of light on Turkey carpets, mahogany shelves loaded with ranks of morocco-bound volumes and

the blurred blues, reds and purples of Oriental porcelains. On the walls the dwarfed perfection of several beautifully executed miniatures showed, and in the far corner of the apartment loomed the magnificence of a massive grand piano.

James Arkright leaped from the overstuffed armchair in which he had been lounging before the fire and whirled to face us as we entered the room, almost, it seemed to me, as though he were expecting an attack. He was a middle-aged man, slender almost to the point of emaciation, with an oddly parchmentlike skin and a long, gaunt face rendered longer by the iron-gray imperial pendant from his chin. His nose was thin and high-bridged, like the beak of a predatory bird, and his ears queer, Panesque appendages, giving his face an odd, impish look. But it was his eyes which riveted our attention most of all. They were of an indeterminate color, neither gray nor hazel, but somewhere between, and darted continually here and there, keeping us constantly in view, yet seeming to watch every corner of the room at the same time. For a moment, as we trooped into the room, he surveyed us in turn with that strange, roving glance, a light of inquiring uncertainty in his eyes fading to a temporary relief as his daughter presented us.

As he resumed his seat before the fire the skirt of his jacket flicked back and I caught a fleeting glimpse of the corrugated stock of a heavy revolver holstered to his belt.

The customary courtesies having been exchanged we lapsed into a silence which stretched and lengthened until I began to feel like a bashful lad seeking an excuse for bidding his sweetheart adieu. I cleared my throat, preparatory to making some inane remark concerning the sudden storm, but de Grandin forestalled me.

"*Monsieur,*" he asked as his direct, unwinking stare bored straight into Arkright's oddly watchful eyes, "when was it you were in Tibet, if you please?"

The effect was electric. Our host bounded from his chair as though propelled by an uncoiled spring, and for once his eyes ceased to rove as he regarded the little Frenchman with a gaze of mixed incredulity and horror. His hand slipped beneath his jacket to the butt of the concealed weapon, but:

"Violence is unnecessary, my friend," de Grandin assured him coolly. "We are come to help you, if possible, and besides I have you covered"—he glanced momentarily at the bulge in his jacket pocket where the muzzle of his tiny Ortgies automatic pressed against the cloth—"and it would be but an instant's work to kill you several times before you could reach your pistol. Very good"—he gave one of his quick, elfish smiles as the other subsided into his chair—"we do make progress.

"You wonder, perhapsly, how comes it I ask that question? Very well. A half-hour or so ago, when *Mademoiselle* your lovely daughter was recovered from her fainting-spell in Dr. Trowbridge's office, she tells us of the sinister red bead she has found in her purse, and of the evil fortune such little balls have been connected with in the past.

"I, *Monsieur,* have traveled a very great much. In darkest Africa, in innermost Asia, where few white men have gone and lived to boast of it, I have been there. Among the head-hunters of Papua, beside the upper banks of the Amazon, Jules de Grandin has been. *Alors,* is it so strange that I recognize this so mysterious ball for what it is? *Parbleu,* in disguise I have fingered many such in the lamaseries of Tibet!

"*Mademoiselle's* story, it tells me much; but there is much more I would learn from you if I am to be of service. You were once poor. That is no disgrace. You suddenly became rich; that also is no disgrace, nor is the fact

that you traveled up and down the world almost constantly after the acquisition of your fortune necessarily confession of wrongdoing. But''—he fixed his eyes challengingly on our host—''but what of the other occurrences? How comes it that *Madame* your wife (God rest her spirit!) was found floating in the Seine with such a red ball clutched in her poor, dead hand?

''Me, I have recognized this ball. It is a bead from the rosary of a Buddhist lama of that devil-ridden gable of the world we call Tibet. How came *Madame* to be grasping it? Who knows?

''When next we see one of these red beads, it is on the occasion of the sudden sad death of the young *Monsieur*, your son.

''Later, when you have fled like one pursued to America and settled in this small city which nestles in the shadow of the great New York, comes the death of your daughter, Mademoiselle Charlotte—and once more the red ball appears.

''This afternoon Mademoiselle Haroldine finds the talisman of impending doom in her purse and forthwith swoons in terror. Dr. Trowbridge and I succor her and are conveying her to you when a storm arises out of a clear sky. We change vehicles and I leave the red bead behind. All goes well until—*pouf!*—a bolt of lightning strikes the carriage in which the holder of this devil's rosary seems to ride, and demolishes it. But horses and coachman are spared. *Cordieu,* it is more than merely strange; it is surprizing, it is amazing, it is astonishing! One who does not know what Jules de Grandin knows would think it incomprehensible.

''It is not so. I know what I have seen. In Tibet I have seen those masked devil-dancers cause the rain to fall and the winds to blow and the lightning bolts to strike where they willed. They are worshipers of the demons of the air, my friends, and it was not for nothing the wise old Hebrews named Satan, the rejected of God, the Prince of the Powers of the Air. No.

''Very well. We have here so many elements that we need scarcely guess to know what the answer is. *Monsieur* Arkright, as the roast follows the fish and coffee and cognac follow both, it follows that you once wrested from the lamas of Tibet some secret they wished kept; that by that secret you did obtain much wealth; and that in revenge those old heathen monks of the mountains follow you and yours with implacable hatred. Each time they strike, it would appear, they leave one of these beads from the red rosary of vengeance as sign and seal of their accomplished purpose. Am I not right?'' He looked expectantly at our host a moment; then, with a gestured application for permission from Haroldine, produced a French cigarette, set it alight and inhaled its acrid, ill-flavored smoke with gusto.

JAMES ARKRIGHT regarded the little Frenchman as a respectable matron might look at the blackmailer threatening to disclose an indiscretion of her youth. With a deep, shuddering sigh he slumped forward in his chair like a man from whom all the resistance has been squeezed with a single titanic pressure. ''You're right, Dr. de Grandin,'' he admitted in a toneless voice, and his eyes no longer seemed to take inventory of everything about him. ''I *was* in Tibet; it was there I stole the *Pi Yü* Stone—would God I'd never seen the damned thing!''

''Ah?'' murmured de Grandin, emitting a twin column of mordant smoke from his narrow nostrils. ''We make progress. Say on, *Monsieur;* I listen with ears like the rabbit's. This *Pi Yü* Stone, it is what?''

Something like diffidence showed in Arkright's face as he replied, ''You won't believe me, when I've told you.''

De Grandin emitted a final puff of smoke and ground the fire from his cigarette against the bottom of a cloisonné bowl. "*Eh bien, Monsieur,*" he answered with an impatient shrug, "it is not the wondrous things men refuse to credit. Tell the ordinary citizen that Mars is sixty million miles from the earth, and he believes you without question. Hang up a sign informing him that a fence is newly painted, and he must needs smear his finger to prove your veracity. Proceed, if you please."

"I was born in Waterbury," Arkright began in a sort of half-fearful, half-stubborn monotone, "and educated as an engineer. My father was a Congregational clergyman, and money was none too plentiful with us; so, when I completed my course at Sheff, I took the first job that offered. They don't pay any too princely salaries to cubs just out of school, you know, and the very necessity of my finding employment right away kept me from making a decent bargain for myself.

"For ten years I sweated for the N. Y., N. H. & H., watching most of my classmates pass me by as though I stood stone-still. Finally I was fed up. I had a wife and three children, and hardly enough money to feed them, let alone give them the things my classmates' families had. So, when I got an offer from a British house to do some work in the Himalayas it looked about as gorgeous to me as the fairy godmother's gifts did to Cinderella. It would get me away from America and the constant reminders of my failure, at any rate.

"The job took me into upper Nepal and I worked at it for close to three years, earning the customary vacation at last. Instead of going down into India, as most of the men did, I pushed up into Tibet with another chap who was keen on research, and a party of six Bhotia bearers. We had no particular goal in mind, but we'd been so fed up on stories of the weird happenings in those mountain lamaseries, we thought we'd go up and have a look—see on our own.

"There was some good shooting on the way, and what few natives we ran into were harmless enough if you kept 'em far enough away to prevent their cooties from climbing aboard you; so we really didn't get much excitement out of the trip, and had about decided it was a bust when we came on a little lamasery perched like an eagle's nest on the edge of an enormous cliff.

"We managed to scramble up the zigzag path to the place, and had some difficulty getting in, but at last the ta-lama agreed we might spend the night there.

"They didn't seem to take any particular notice of us after we'd unslung our packs in the courtyard, and we had the run of the place pretty much to ourselves. Clendenning, my English companion, had knocked about Central Asia for upward of twenty years, and spoke several Chinese dialects as well as Tibetan, but for some reason he'd played dumb when we knocked at the gates and let our head man interpret for us.

"About 4 o'clock in the afternoon he came to me in a perfect fever of excitement. 'Arkright, old boy,' he whispered, 'this blighted place is simply filthy with gold—raw, virgin gold!'

"'You're spoofing,' I told him; 'these poor old duffers are so God-awful poor they'd crawl a mile on their bare knees and elbows for a handful of copper *cash*.'

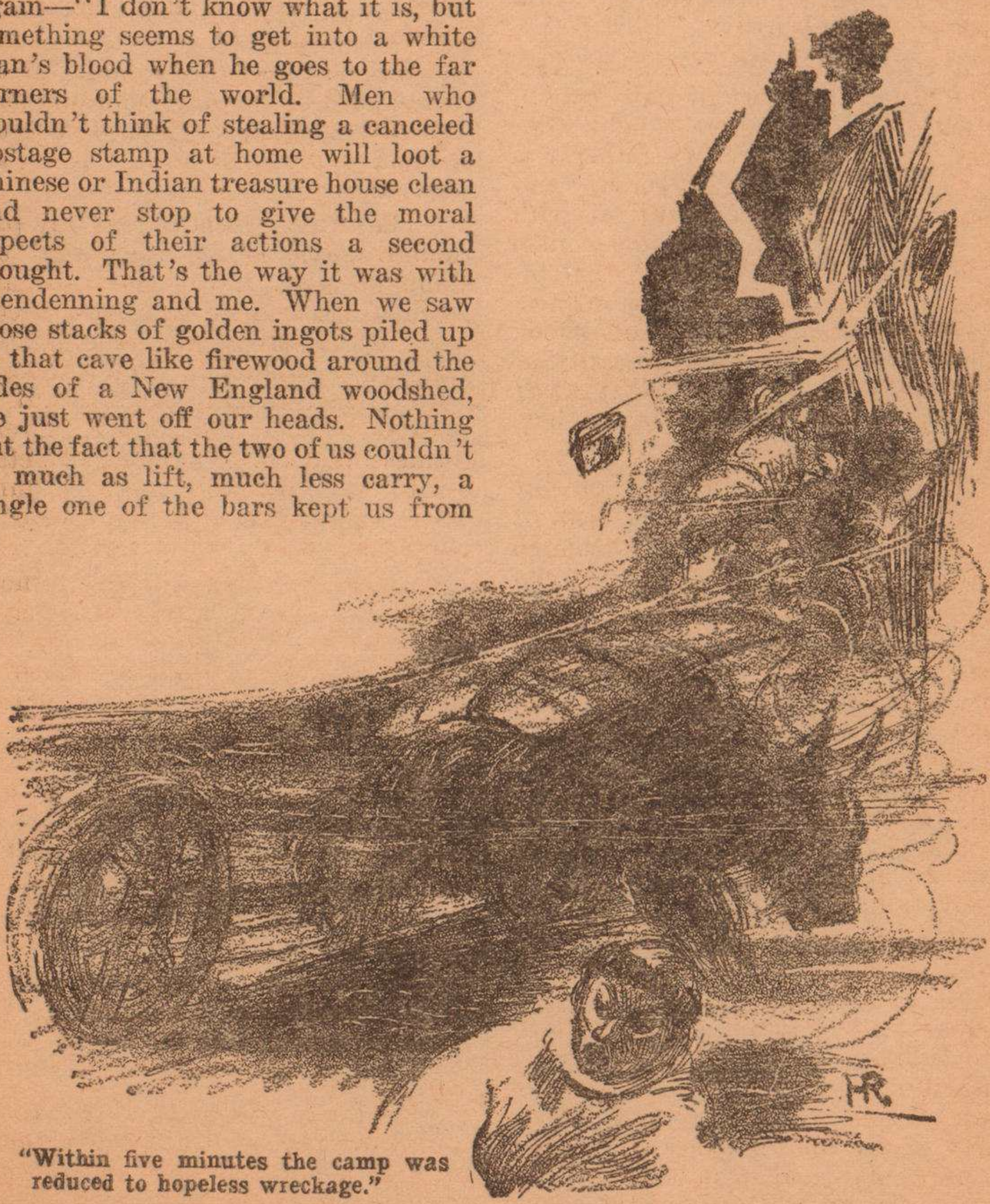
"'*Cash* my hat!' he returned. 'I tell you, they've got great heaps and stacks of gold here; gold enough to make our perishing fortunes ten times over if we could shift to get the blighted stuff away. Come along, I'll show you.'

"He fairly dragged me across the courtyard where our duffle was stored, through a low doorway, and down a passage cut in the solid rock. There

wasn't a lama or servant in sight as we made our way through one tunnel after another; I suppose they were so sure we couldn't understand their lingo that they thought it a waste of time to watch us. At any rate, no one offered us any interruption while we clambered down three or four flights of stairs to a sort of cavern which had been artificially enlarged to make a big, vaulted cellar.

"Gentlemen"—Arkright looked from de Grandin to me and back again—"I don't know what it is, but something seems to get into a white man's blood when he goes to the far corners of the world. Men who wouldn't think of stealing a canceled postage stamp at home will loot a Chinese or Indian treasure house clean and never stop to give the moral aspects of their actions a second thought. That's the way it was with Clendenning and me. When we saw those stacks of golden ingots piled up in that cave like firewood around the sides of a New England woodshed, we just went off our heads. Nothing but the fact that the two of us couldn't so much as lift, much less carry, a single one of the bars kept us from making off with the treasure that minute.

"When we saw we couldn't carry any of it off we were almost wild. Scheme after scheme for getting away with the stuff was broached, only to be discarded. Stealth was no go, for we'd be sure to be seen if we tried to lead our bearers down the tunnels; force was out of the question, for the lamas outnumbered us ten to one, and the ugly-looking knives they wore



"Within five minutes the camp was reduced to hopeless wreckage."

were sufficient warning to us not to get them roused.

"Finally, when we were almost insane with futile planning, Clendenning suggested, 'Come on, let's get out of this cursed place. If we look around a little we may find a cache of jewels—we wouldn't need a derrick to carry off a couple of Imperial quarts of them, at any rate.'

"The underground passages were like a Cretan labyrinth, and we lost our way more than once while we stumbled around with no light but the flicker of Clendenning's electric torch, but after an hour or more of floundering over the damp, slippery stones of the tunnels, we came to a door stopped with a curtain of yak's hide. A fat, shaven-headed lama was sitting beside it, but he was sound asleep and we didn't trouble to waken him.

"Inside was a fair-sized room, partly hollowed out of the living rock, partly natural grotto. Multicolored flags draped from the low ceiling, each emblazoned with prayers or mottoes in Chinese ideographs or painted with effigies of holy saints or gods and goddesses. Big bands of silk cloth festooned down the walls. On each side of the doorway were prayer wheels ready to be spun, and a plate of beaten gold with the signs of the Chinese zodiac was above the lintel. On both sides of the approach to the altar were low, red-lacquered benches for the lamas and the choir. Small lamps with tiny, flickering flames threw their rays on the gold and silver vessels and candlesticks. At the extreme end of the room, veiling the sanctuary, hung a heavy curtain of yellow silk painted with Tibetan inscriptions.

"While we were standing there, wondering what our next move would be, the shuffle of feet and the faint tinkle of bells came to us. 'Quick,' Clendenning ordered, 'we mustn't be caught here!' He ran to the door, but it was too late, for the monk on guard was already awake, and we could see the faint gleam of light from candles borne in procession at the farther end of the corridor.

"WHAT happened next was the turning-point in our lives, gentlemen. Without stopping to think, apparently, Clendenning acted. Snatching the heavy Browning from his belt he hit the guardian monk a terrific blow over the head, dragged him through the doorway and ripped off his robe. 'Here, Arkright, put this on!' he commanded as he lugged the unconscious man's body into a dark corner of the room and concealed himself behind one of the wall draperies.

"I slipped the yellow gown over my clothes and squatted in front of the nearest prayer wheel, spinning the thing like mad.

"I suppose you've already noticed I've a rather Mongolian cast of features?" he asked with a bleak smile.

"*Nom d'un fusil, Monsieur*, let us not discuss personal pulchritude, or its lack, if you please!" de Grandin exclaimed testily. "Be so good as to advance with your narrative!"

"It wasn't vanity which prompted the question," Arkright replied. "Even with my beard, I'm sometimes taken for a Chinaman or a half-caste. In those days I was clean-shaven, and both Clendenning and I had had our heads shaved for sanitary reasons before setting out on our trip; so, with the lama's robe pulled up about my neck, in the dim light of the sanctuary I passed very well for one of the brotherhood, and not one of the monks in the procession gave me so much as a second glance.

"The ta-lama—I suppose you'd call him the abbot of the community—led the procession into the temple and halted before the sanctuary curtain. Two subordinate lamas pulled the veil aside, and out of the dim light from the flickering lamps there gradually appeared the great golden statue of

Buddha seated in the Golden Lotus. The face of the image was indifferent and calm with only the softest gleam of light animating it, yet despite the repose of the bloated features it seemed to me there was something malignant about the countenance.

"Glancing up under my brows as I turned the prayer wheel, I could see the main idol was flanked on each side by dozens of smaller statues, each, apparently, of solid gold.

"The ta-lama struck a great bronze gong with a padded drumstick to attract the Buddha's attention to his prayer, then closed his eyes, placed his hands together before his face and prayed. As his sleeve fell away, I noticed a rosary of red beads, like those I was later to know with such horror, looped about his left wrist.

"The subordinate lamas all bent their foreheads to the floor while their master prayed standing before the face of Buddha. Finally, the abbot lowered his hands, and his followers rose and gathered at the foot of the altar. He opened a small, ovenlike receptacle beneath the calyx of the Golden Lotus and took from it a little golden image which one of his subordinates placed among the ranks of subsidiary Buddhas to the right of the great idol. Then he replaced the golden stautuette with another exactly like it, except fashioned of lead, closed the sliding door to the little cavity and turned from the altar. Then, followed by his company, he marched from the chapel, leaving Clendenning and me in possession.

"It didn't take us more than a minute to rush up those altar steps, swing back the curtain and open the door under the Golden Lotus, you may be sure.

"Inside the door was a compartment about the size of a moderately large gas stove's oven, and in it were the little image we had seen the talama put in and half a dozen bars of lead, iron and copper, each the exact dimensions of the golden ingots we'd seen in the treasure chamber.

"I said the bars were lead, copper and iron, but that's a misstatement. All of them *had* been composed of those metals, *but every one was from a quarter to three-fourths solid gold.* Slowly, as a loaf of bread browns by degrees in a bake-oven, these bars of base metal were being transmuted into solid, virgin gold.

"Clendenning and I looked at each other in dumfounded amazement. We knew it couldn't be possible, yet there it was, before our eyes.

"For a moment Clendenning peered into the alchemist's cabinet, then suddenly gave a low whistle. At the extreme back of the 'oven' was a piece of odd-looking substance about the size of a child's fist; something like jade, something like amber, yet differing subtly from each. As Clendenning reached his hand into the compartment to indicate it with his finger the diamond setting of a ring he wore suddenly glowed and sparkled as though lit from within by living fire.

" 'For Gawd's sake!' he exclaimed. "D'ye see what it is, Arkright? It's the Philosopher's Stone, or I'm a Dutchman!' "

"The Philosopher's Stone?" I queried, puzzled.

De Grandin made a gesture of impatience, but Arkright's queer, haunted eyes were on me, and he failed to notice the Frenchman's annoyance.

"Yes, Dr. Trowbridge," he replied. "The ancient alchemists thought there was a substance which would convert all base metals into gold by the power of its magical emanations, you know. Nearly all noted magi believed in it, and most of them attempted to make it synthetically. Many of the things we use in everyday life were discovered as by-products while the ancients were seeking to perfect the magic formula. Bötticher stumbled on the method of making Dresden porcelain

while searching for the treasure; Roger Bacon evolved the composition of gunpowder in the same way; Gerber discovered the properties of acids, Van Helmont secured the first accurate data on the nature of gases and the famous Dr. Glauber discovered the medicinal salts which bear his name in the course of experiments in search of the Stone.

"Oddly enough, the ancients were on the right track all the while, though, of course, they could not know it; for they were wont to refer to the Stone as a substratum—from the Latin *sub* and *stratus*, of course, signifying something spread under—and hundreds of years later scientists actually discovered the uranium oxide we know as pitchblende, the chief source of radium.

"Clendenning must have realized the queer substance in the altar was possessed of remarkable radioactive properties, for instead of attempting to grasp it in his fingers, as I should have done, he seized two of the altar candlesticks, and holding them like a pair of pincers, lifted the thing bodily from its setting; then, taking great care not to touch it, wrapped and rewrapped it in thin sheets of gold stripped from the altar ornaments. His data were incomplete, of course, but his reasoning, or perhaps his scientifically trained instinct, was accurate. You see, he inferred that since the 'stone' had the property of transmuting base metals with which it came in near contact into gold, gold would in all probability be the one element impervious to its radioactive rays, and consequently the only effective form of insulation. We had seen the ta-lama and his assistants grasp the little image of Buddha so recently transformed from lead to gold with their bare hands, so felt reasonably sure there would be no danger of radium burns from gold recently in contact with the substance, while there might be grave danger if we used anything but gold as wrappings for it.

"Clendenning was for strangling the lama we had stunned when we saw the procession headed toward the chapel, but I persuaded him to tie and gag the fellow and leave him hidden in the shrine; so when we had finished this we crept through the underground passages to the courtyard where our Bhotias were squatting beside the luggage and ordered them to break camp at once.

"The old ta-lama came to bid us a courteous good-bye and refused our offered payment for our entertainment, and we set off on the trail toward Nepal as if the devil were on our heels. He was, though we didn't know it then.

"OUR way was mostly downhill, and everything seemed in our favor. We pushed on long after the sun had set, and by 10 o'clock were well past the third *tach-davan*, or pass, from the lamasery. When we finally made camp Clendenning could hardly wait for our tent to be pitched before experimenting with our loot.

"Unwrapping the strange substance, we noticed that it glowed in the half-light of the tent with a sort of greenish phosphorescence, which made Clendenning christen it *Pi Yü*, which is Chinese for jade, and by that name we knew it thereafter. We put a pair of pistol bullets inside the wrappings, and lay down for a few hours' sleep with the *Pi Yü* between us. At 5 the next morning when we routed out the bearers and prepared to get under way, the entire leaden portions of the cartridges had been transmuted to gold and the copper powder-jackets were beginning to take on a decided golden glint. Forcing the shells off, we found the powder with which the cartridges were charged had become pure gold dust. This afforded us some valuable data. Lead was transmuted more quickly

than copper, and semi-metallic substances like gunpowder were apparently even more susceptible than pure metals, though the powder's granular form might have sped its transmutation.

"We drove the bearers like slave-masters that day, and they were on the point of open mutiny when evening came. Poor devils, if they'd known what lay behind there'd have been little enough need to urge them on.

"Camp had been made and we had all settled down to a sleep of utter exhaustion when I first heard it. Very faint and far away it was, so faint as to be scarcely recognizable, but growing louder each second—the rumbling whistle of a wind of hurricane velocity shrieking and tearing down the passes.

"I kicked Clendenning awake, and together we made for a cleft in the rocks, yelling to our Bhotias to take cover at the same time. The poor devils were too waterlogged with sleep to realize what we shouted, and before we could give a second warning the thing was among them. Demoniacal blasts of wind so fierce we could almost see them shrieked and screamed and howled through the camp, each gust seeming to be aimed with dreadful accuracy. They whirled and twisted and tore about, scattering blazing logs like sparks from bursting firecrackers, literally tearing our tents into scraps no larger than a man's hand, picking up beasts and men bodily and hurling them against the cliff-walls till they were battered out of all semblance of their original form. Within five minutes our camp was reduced to such hopeless wreckage as may be seen only in the wake of a tornado, and Clendenning and I were the only living things within a radius of five miles.

"We were about to crawl from our hiding-place when something warned me the danger was not yet past, and I grabbed at Clendenning's arm. He pulled away, but left the musette bag in which the *Pi Yü* was packed in my hand. Next moment he walked to the center of the shambles which had been our camp and began looking around in a dazed sort of way. Almost as he came to a halt, a terrific roar sounded and the entire air seemed to burn with the fury of a bursting lightning-bolt. Clendenning was wiped out as though he had never been—torn literally to dust by the unspeakable force of the lightning, and even the rock where he had stood was scarred and blackened as though water-blasted. But the terrible performance didn't stop there. Bolt after bolt of frightful lightning was hurled down like an accurately aimed barrage till every shred of our men, our yaks, our tents and our camp paraphernalia had not only been milled to dust, but completely obliterated.

"How long the artillery-fire from the sky lasted I do not know. To me, as I crouched in the little cave between the rocks, it seemed hours, years, centuries. Actually, I suppose, it kept up for something like five minutes. I think I must have fainted with the horror of it at the last, for the next thing I knew the sun was shining and the air was clear and icy-cold. No one passing could have told from the keenest observation that anything living had occupied our camp-site in years. There was no sign or trace—absolutely none—of human or animal occupancy to be found. Only the cracked and lightning-blackened rocks bore witness to the terrible bombardment which had been laid down.

"I wasted precious hours in searching, but not a shred of cloth or flesh, not a lock of hair or a congealed drop of blood remained of my companions.

"THE following days were like a nightmare—one of those awful dreams in which the sleeper is forever fleeing and forever pursued by something unnamably horrible. A dozen times a day I'd hear the skirling tempests rushing down the passes be-

hind and scuttle to the nearest hole in the rocks like a panic-stricken rabbit when the falcon's shadow suddenly appears across its path. Sometimes I'd be storm-bound for hours while the wind howled like a troop of demons outside my retreat and the lightning-strokes rattled almost like hailstones on the rubble outside. Sometimes the vengeful tempest would last only a few minutes and I'd be released to fly like a mouse seeking sanctuary from the cat for a few miles before I was driven to cover once more.

"There were several packs of emergency rations in the musette bag, and I made out for drink by chipping off bits of ice from the frozen mountain springs and melting them in my tin cup, but I was a mere rack of bones and tattered hide encased in still more tattered clothes when I finally staggered into an outpost settlement in Nepal and fell babbling like an imbecile into the arms of a *sowar* sentry.

"The lamas' vengeance seemed confined to the territorial limits of Tibet, for I was unmolested during the entire period of my illness and convalescence in the Nepalese village.

"When I was strong enough to travel I was passed down country to my outfit, but I was still so ill and nervous that the company doctor gave me a certificate of physical disability and I was furnished with transportation home.

"I'd procured some scrap metal before embarking on the P. and O boat, and in the privacy of my cabin I amused myself by testing the powers of the *Pi Yü*. Travel had not altered them, and in three days I had about ten pounds of gold where I'd had half that weight of iron.

"I was bursting with the wonderful news when I reached Waterbury, and could scarcely wait to tell my wife, but as I walked up the street toward my house an ugly, Mongolian-faced man suddenly stepped out from behind a roadside tree and barred my way. He did not utter a syllable, but stood immovable in the path before me, regarding me with such a look of concentrated malice and hatred that my breath caught fast in my throat. For perhaps half a minute he glared at me, then raised his left hand and pointed directly at my face. As his sleeve fell back, I caught the gleam of a string of small, red beads looped round his wrist. Next instant he turned away and seemed to walk through an invisible door in the air—one moment I saw him, the next he had disappeared. As I stood staring stupidly at the spot where he had vanished, I felt a terrific blast of ice-cold wind blowing about me, tearing off my hat and sending me staggering against the nearest front-yard fence.

"The wind subsided in a moment, but it had blown away my peace of mind forever. From that instant I knew myself to be a marked man, a man whose only safety lay in flight and concealment.

"My daughter has told you the remainder of the story, how my wife was first to go, and how they found that accursed red bead which is the trade mark of the lamas' blood-vengeance clasped in her hand; how my son was the next victim of those Tibetan devils' revenge, then my daughter Charlotte; now she, too, is marked for destruction. Oh, gentlemen"—his eyes once more roved restlessly about—"if you only knew the inferno of terror and uncertainty I've been through during these terrible years, you'd realize I've paid my debt to those mountain fiends ten times over with compound interest compounded tenfold!"

Our host ended his narrative almost in a shriek, then settled forward in his chair, chin sunk on breast, hands lying flaccidly in his lap, almost as if the death of which he lived in daily dread had overtaken him at last.

In the silence of the dimly lit drawing-room the logs burned with a soft-

ly hissing crackle; the little ormolu clock on the marble mantel beat off the seconds with hushed, hurrying strokes as though it held its breath and went on tiptoe in fear of something lurking in the shadows. Outside the curtained windows the subsiding storm moaned dismally, like an animal in pain.

Jules de Grandin darted his quick, birdlike glance from the dejected Arkright to his white-lipped daughter, then at me, then back again at Arkright. "*Tiens, Monsieur,*" he remarked, "it would appear you find yourself in what the Americans call one damn-bad fix. *Sacré bleu,* those ape-faced men of the mountains know how to hate well, and they have the powers of the tempest at their command, while you have nothing but Jules de Grandin.

"No matter; it is enough. I do not think you will be attacked again today. Make yourselves as happy as may be, keep careful watch for more of those damnation red beads, and notify me immediately one of them reappears. Meantime I go to dinner and to consult a friend whose counsel will assuredly show us a way out of our troubles. *Mademoiselle, Monsieur,* I wish you a very good evening." Bending formally from the hips, he turned on his heel and strode from the drawing-room.

"DO YOU think there was anything in that cock-and-bull story of Arkright's?" I asked as we walked home through the clear, rain-washed April evening.

"Assuredly," he responded with a nod. "It has altogether the ring of truth, my friend. From what he tells us, the *Pi Yü* Stone which he and his friend stole from the men of the mountain is merely some little-known form of radium, and what do we know of radium, when all is said and done? *Barbe d'un pou,* nothing or less!

"True, we know the terrific and incessant discharge of etheric waves consequent on the disintegration of the radium atoms is so powerful that even such known and powerful forces as electrical energy are completely destroyed by it. In the presence of radium, we know, non-conductors of electricity become conductors, differences of potential cease to exist and electroscopes and Leyden jars fail to retain their charges. But all this is but the barest fraction of the possibilities.

"Consider: Not long ago we believed the atom to be the ultimate particle of matter, and thought all atoms had individuality. An atom of iron, for instance, was to us the smallest particle of iron possible, and differed distinctly from an atom of hydrogen. But with even such little knowledge as we already have of radioactive substances we have learned that all matter is composed of varying charges of electricity. The atom, we now believe, consists of a proton composed of a charge of positive electricity surrounded by a number of electrons, or negative charges, and the number of these electrons determines the nature of the atom. Radium itself, if left to itself, disintegrated into helium, finally into lead. Suppose, however, the process be reversed. Suppose the radioactive emanations of this *Pi Yü* which Monsieur Arkright thieved away from the lamas, so affect the balance of protons and electrons of metals brought close to it as to change their atoms from atoms of zinc, lead or iron to atoms of pure gold. All that would be needed to do it would be a rearrangement of protons and electrons. The hypothesis is simple and believable, though not to be easily explained. You see?"

"No, I don't," I confessed, "but I'm willing to take your word for it. Meantime——"

"Meantime we have the important matter of dinner to consider," he interrupted with a smile as we turned into my front yard. "*Pipe d'un chameau,* I am hungry like a family

of famished wolves with all this learned talk.''

3

"TROWBRIDGE, *mon vieux*, they are at their devil's work again—have you seen the evening papers?'' de Grandin exclaimed as he burst into the office several days later.

"Eh—what?'' I demanded, putting aside the copy of Corwin's monograph on Multiple Neuritis and staring at him. "Who are 'they,' and what have 'they' been up to?''

"Who? Name of a little green man, those devils of the mountains, those Tibetan priests, those servants of the *Pi Yü* Stone!'' he responded. "Peruse *le journal*, if you please.'' He thrust a copy of the afternoon paper into my hand, seated himself on the corner of the desk and regarded his brightly polished nails with an air of deep solicitude. I read:

Gangland Suspected in Beauty's Death

Police believe it was to put the seal of eternal silence on her rouged lips that pretty Lillian Conover was "taken for a ride" late last night or early this morning. The young woman's body, terribly beaten and almost denuded of clothing, was found lying in one of the bunkers of the Sedgemoor Country Club's golf course near the Albemarle Pike shortly after 6 o'clock this morning by an employee of the club. From the fact that no blood was found near the body, despite the terrible mauling it had received, police believe the young woman had been "put on the spot" somewhere else, then brought to the deserted links and left there by the slayers or their accomplices.

The Conover girl was known to have been intimate with a number of questionable characters, and had been arrested several times for shoplifting and petty thefts. It is thought she might have learned something of the secrets of a gang of bootleggers or hijackers and threatened to betray them to rival gangsters, necessitating her silencing by the approved methods of gangland.

The body, when found, was clothed in the remnants of a gray ensemble with a gray fox neck-piece and a silver mesh bag was still looped about one of her wrists. In the purse were four ten-dollar bills and some silver, showing conclusively that robbery was not the motive for the crime.

The authorities are checking up the girl's movements on the day before her death, and an arrest is promised within twenty-four hours.

"U'm?'' I remarked, laying down the paper.

"U'm?'' he mocked. "May the devil's choicest imps fly away with your 'u'ms', Friend Trowbridge. Come, get the car; we must be off.''

"Off where?''

"Beard of a small blue pig, where, indeed, but to the spot where this so unfortunate girl's dead corpse was discovered? Delay not, we must utilize what little light remains!''

THE bunker where poor Lillian Conover's broken body had been found was a banked sand-trap in the golf course about twenty-five yards from the highway. Throngs of morbidly curious sightseers had trampled the smoothly kept fairways all day, brazenly defying the "Private Property—No Trespassing'' signs with which the links were posted.

To my surprize, de Grandin showed little annoyance at the multitude of footprints about, but turned at once to the business of surveying the terrain. After half an hour's crawling back and forth across the turf, he rose and dusted his trouser knees with a satisfied sigh.

"*Succès!*'' he exclaimed, raising his hand, thumb and forefinger clasped together on something which reflected the last rays of the sinking sun with an ominous red glow. "Behold, *mon ami*, I have found it; it is even as I suspected.''

Looking closely, I saw he held a red bead, about the size of a small hazelnut, the exact duplicate of the little globule Haroldine Arkright had discovered in her reticule.

"Well?'' I asked.

"*Barbe d'un lièvre*, yes; it is very well, indeed,'' he assented with a vigorous nod. "I was certain I should find it here, but had I not, I should have been greatly worried. Let us return, good friend; our quest is done.''

I knew better than to question him as we drove slowly home, but my ears were open wide for any chance remark he might drop. However, he vouchsafed no comment till we reached home; then he hurried to the study and put an urgent call through to the Arkright mansion. Five minutes later he joined me in the library, a smile of satisfaction on his lips. "It is as I thought," he announced. "*Mademoiselle* Haroldine went shopping yesterday afternoon, and the unfortunate Conover girl picked her pocket in the store. Forty dollars was stolen—forty dollars *and a red bead!*"

"She told you this?" I asked. "Why——"

"*Non, non,*" he shook his head. "She did tell me of the forty dollars, yes; the red bead's loss I already knew. Recall, my friend, how was it the poor dead one was dressed, according to the paper?"

"Er——"

"*Précisément.* Her costume was a cheap copy, a caricature, if you please, of the smart ensemble affected by Mademoiselle Haroldine. Poor creature, she plied her pitiful trade of pocket-picking once too often, removed the contents of Haroldine's purse, including the sign of vengeance which had been put there, *le bon Dieu* knows how, and walked forth to her doom. Those who watched for a gray-clad woman with the fatal red ball seized upon her and called down their winds of destruction, even as they did upon the camp of Monsieur Arkright in the mountains of Tibet long years ago. Yes, it is undoubtlessly so."

"Do you think they'll try again?" I asked. "They've already muffed things twice, and——"

"And, as your proverb has it, the third time is the charm," he cut in. "Yes, my friend, they will doubtlessly try again, and again, until they have worked their will, or been diverted. We must bend our energies toward the latter consummation."

"But that's impossible!" I returned. "If those lamas are powerful enough to seek their victims out in France, England and this country and kill them, there's not much chance for the Arkrights in flight, and it's hardly likely we'll be able to argue them out of their determination to exact payment for the theft of their——"

"*Zut!*" he interrupted with a smile. "You do talk much but say little, Friend Trowbridge. Me, I think it highly probable we shall convince the fish-faced gentlemen from Tibet they have more to gain by foregoing their vengeance than by collecting their debt."

4

HARRISONVILLE'S newest citizen had delayed her debut with truly feminine capriciousness, and my vigil at City Hospital had been long and nerve-racking. Half an hour before I had resorted to the Weigand-Martin method of ending the performance, and, shaking with nervous reaction, took the red, wrinkled and astonishingly vocal morsel of humanity from the nurse's hands and laid it in its mother's arms; then, nearer exhaustion than I cared to admit, set out for home and bed.

A rivulet of light trickled under the study door and the murmur of voices mingled with the acrid aroma of de Grandin's cigarette came to me as I let myself in the front door. "*Eh bien,* my friend," the little Frenchman was asserting, "I damn realize that he who sups with the devil must have a long spoon; therefore I have requested your so invaluable advice.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux,*" his uncannily sharp ears recognized my tread as I stepped softly into the hall, "may we trespass on your time a moment? It is of interest."

With a sigh of regret for my lost sleep I put my obstetrical kit on a chair and pushed open the study door.

Opposite de Grandin was seated a figure which might have been the original of the queer little manikins

with which Chinese ivory-carvers love to ornament their work. Hardly more than five feet tall, his girth was so great that he seemed to overflow the confines of the armchair in which he lounged. His head, almost totally void of hair, was nearly globular in shape, and the smooth, hairless skin seemed stretched drum-tight over the fat with which his skull was generously upholstered. Cheeks plump to the point of puffiness almost forced his oblique eyes shut; yet, though his eyes could scarcely be seen, it required no deep intuition to know that they always saw. Between his broad, flat nose and a succession of chins was set incongruously a small, sensitive mouth, full-lipped but mobile, and drooping at the corners in a sort of perpetual sad smile.

"Dr. Feng," de Grandin introduced, "this is my very good friend, Dr. Trowbridge. Trowbridge, my friend, this is Dr. Feng Yuin-han, whose wisdom is about to enable us to foil the machinations of those wicked ones who threaten Mademoiselle Haroldine. Proceed, if you please, *cher ami,*" he motioned the fat little Chinaman to continue the remark he had cut short to acknowledge the introduction.

"It is rather difficult to explain," the visitor returned in a soft, unaccented voice, "but if we stop to remember that the bird stands midway between the reptile and the mammal we may perhaps understand why it is that the cock's blood is most acceptable to those elemental forces which my unfortunate superstitious countrymen seek to propitiate in their temples. These malignant influences were undoubtedly potent in the days we refer to as the age of reptiles, and it may be the cock's lineal descent from the pterodactyl gives his blood the quality of possessing certain emanations soothing to the tempest spirits. In any event, I think you would be well advised to employ such blood in your protective experiments."

"And the ashes?" de Grandin put in eagerly.

"Those I can procure for you by noon tomorrow. Camphor wood is something of a rarity here, but I can obtain enough for your purpose, I am sure."

"*Bon, très bon!*" the Frenchman exclaimed delightedly. "If those camel-faces will but have the consideration to wait our preparations, I damn think we shall tender them the party of surprize. Yes. *Parbleu,* we shall astonish them!"

SHORTLY after noon the following day an asthmatic Ford delivery wagon bearing the picture of a crowing cockerel and the legend

P. GRASSO
Vendita di Pollame Vivi

on its weatherworn leatherette sides drew up before the house, and an Italian youth in badly soiled corduroys and with a permanent expression indicative of some secret sorrow climbed lugubriously from the driver's seat, took a covered two-gallon can, obviously originally intended as a container for Quick's Grade A Lard, from the interior of the vehicle and advanced toward the front porch.

"Docta de Grandin 'ere?" he demanded as Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, answered his ring.

"No, he ain't," the indignant Nora informed him, "an' if he wuz, 'tis at th' back door th' likes o' you should be inquirin' fer 'im!"

The descendant of the Cæsars was in no mood for argument. "You taka dissa bucket an' tella heem I breeng it—Pete Grasso," he returned, thrusting the lard tin into the scandalized housekeeper's hands. "You tella heem I sella da han, I sella da roosta, too, an' I keela heem w'an my customers ask for it; but I no lika for sella da blood. No, *santissimo Dio,* not me!

(Continued on page 567)

The World-Wrecker

by Arlton Eadie



"Everything seemed to spin around in a roaring chaos."

TERRY HINTON woke with a start as the telephone at his bedside rang long and noisily, and the first words that he addressed to the offending instrument bore not the slightest resemblance to a morning prayer. Having spent a very strenuous night in first witnessing and afterward reporting a big East End fire, he felt a very natural irritation at this interruption of his well-earnt slumbers. Jerking off the receiver, he recognized the voice of McBlair, news editor of the well-known daily paper on whose behalf his labors had been expended.

"I've rung up to report the approaching end of the world," announced that worthy.

Terry yawned audibly. "In that case I wish you'd chosen a more convenient time. Is this some obscure joke that you're trying to crack?"

"Heaven forbid!" was McBlair's pious denial. "No, laddie, I'm quite serious. When the advertisement manager opened his morning mail he found among it a long notice sent for insertion at the usual rates. This was to the effect that if the inhabitants of the earth did not consent to accept certain drastic changes which the writer thought desirable, their globe was going to be rendered uninhabitable."

"Hoax," interjected Terry impatiently.

"There were twenty five-pound

notes enclosed,'' returned the Scotsman dryly. ''Rather a lot to pay for a joke, eh?''

''Madman,'' was Terry's next suggestion.

''If so, then he's the most scientific one I've struck yet.''

''Who is he, anyway?''

''That's just what we'd like to know. The covering letter bore neither address nor signature, while the manifesto—for that's what the advertisement amounts to—was also unsigned. The chief thinks there's something serious behind his blather; but he wants to get the most authoritative opinion on the subject before he decides whether to publish or not. That's why I've spoilt your beauty sleep.''

''Well, I don't think my opinion would carry much weight——'' Terry began modestly.

''I wasn't asking for it,'' cut in McBlair. ''The man whose opinion we're hankering after is Professor Amos Merrivale, LL. D., F. R. S., and a few other letters that I've forgotten for the minute. He's the foremost authority on cosmical statics, and he happens to live in your neighborhood —Tudor Towers, Blackheath. Interview him, and get his opinion of the soundness or otherwise of the scientific proposition I'm about to dictate to you.''

For the next five minutes Terry's pencil flew rapidly over his notebook as he took down the string of words which came across the wire. It was with a sigh of heart-felt relief that he at last hung up the receiver; then, having washed, shaved and breakfasted in record time, he set out upon his quest.

Terry Hinton had entered the realms of journalism by a devious route which had embraced in turn university lecture-rooms, army dug-outs, and the stages of provincial theaters. Although no startling success had marked his journey to the ''Street of Ink,'' the experience gained thereby proved of no little service in the profession in which he now found himself. A hitherto unsuspected ''nose for news,'' together with a knack of presenting the acquired information in an eminently readable form, had raised him, at the age of twenty-seven, from a tentative free-lance to a full-blown reporter.

Tall, broad-shouldered, muscular, his figure was that of one who could enjoy to the full the thrill of a well-contested rugger match or the friendly rivalry of the running-track. A stickler for classical regularity might have hesitated to call him handsome; yet there was a pleasing look on his clean-cut features, and his steady gray eyes held an expression that seemed to indicate that the brain behind them was both keen to observe and quick to act.

IN SPITE of its name, Tudor Towers was far from being an ancient structure, having been erected less than thirty years since by a soap-boiler who had retired from business with unlimited wealth and a taste for sham antiques. But the stuccoed walls looked quite as gloomily depressing as the genuine article as Terry, passing beneath the portcullis of the frowning outer gate, made his way to the main entrance and rang the bell.

''Kindly step this way, sir,'' said the liveried man-servant, receiving Terry's card on a silver salver and ushering him into a small room hung with tapestry and lighted by narrow, slitlike windows. The change from the bright sunlight to the half-darkness of the room had been so abrupt that for a moment Terry's dazzled eyes could not discern if the room was tenanted or not.

''A gentleman to see Professor Merrivale,'' said the man in a mournful tone; then withdrew and closed the door.

There was a slight rustling movement, and a girl came forward into

the shaft of sunlight which streamed through the nearest window. Terry restrained his start of surprize with difficulty. So perfectly modeled was her face that, as she sat in the shadow, he had thought it to be the creation of the artist-craftsman who had woven that Old World tapestry, rather than a girl of flesh and blood.

"Professor Merrivale is unable to receive you at present," she said, glancing at the card on the table. "I am his private secretary. Can I be of any service to you?"

Terry hesitated, then shook his head.

"I'm afraid not, miss. I wished to consult the professor about a matter that is—er—rather complicated and—er—abstruse——"

"And consequently quite beyond my poor understanding—is that what you were going to say?"

Terry was beginning to find that the blue eyes which had looked so demure could, on occasion, be very penetrating. He felt himself turning red beneath their steady gaze.

"If that is what is holding you back, Mr. Hinton, you may go ahead right now," she went on. "It may set your mind at ease to know that I took science honors at Cambridge, and that since then I have constantly assisted the professor in his observations and calculations. If your inquiry has to do with sidereal phenomena, I may be able to assist you."

"Is that so?" smiled Terry. "I must really apologize for my mistake. I had no idea that I was talking to an astronomeress—if that's the correct term to use. You see, you looked so——"

"So stupid?" she suggested helpfully.

"Of course not!" he denied indignantly. "No, you looked so"—he was about to say "pretty," but he had the readiness to change it to—"so unlike what I've always imagined a lady professor to look."

"Oh, we don't all wear elastic-sided boots and pre-war frocks," she returned, with a laughing shrug. "And now, if you please, we will get down to business."

Terry obediently produced his notebook and handed her the text of McBlair's telephoned message. Watching her as she read, he thought he could see an ever-growing surprize reflected in her features.

"This is certainly an extraordinary document," she said, raising her eyes to his. "But the underlying principle is quite sound. It is quite possible for the writer to carry out his threat, provided that he is not mistaken in his interpretation of the Frauenhofer lines which are to be found in the spectra of all heavenly bodies. I presume that you are acquainted with the broad outlines of spectrum analysis? The light from any shining object—in this case it is that given out by the tail of a comet—is allowed to pass through a prism, which, of course, splits it up into a series of blended colors exactly resembling a rainbow. There are usually several black bars crossing this many-colored band, and long and patient experimenting has enabled us to tell by these the actual chemical components of the particular star to which the telescope is pointed. All this, of course, is quite elementary and may be found in any text-book. But there are certain lines and combinations of lines which represent elements not present on our earth. I may instance the well-known case of helium, which was observed to be present in the sun long before it was identified as a terrestrial element in 1895. The spectra of some comets have so far defied exact analysis. Carbon, combined with hydrogen; sodium, magnesium, iron and nitrogen have been recognized, all in an incandescent state, naturally; but there are other elements which we have, so far, failed to find on the earth. It is these unknown chemicals that the writer claims to have dis-

covered. If his claim is well founded, it is quite within his power to put his threat—grotesque though it may seem at first sight—into execution. And that will mean——''

''Yes?'' prompted Terry Hinton, as her voice died away.

''The annihilation of every living thing on the earth!''

Scarcely had the words quitted her lips before the dull thud of an explosion came from some distant part of the house. The girl started to her feet.

''The laboratory!'' she spoke quietly, though with a whitening face. ''There has been an accident.''

She made for the door, but Terry was there before her.

''Where is it?'' he rapped out. ''Let me go.''

''You'd never find it in time,'' she said, shaking her head.

As he tore open the door he was aware of a strange, pungent reek, which grew stronger as he dashed at her heels down a long passage which led to the rear of the house. A short flight of stone steps he took at a jump, and here the gas was almost overpowering. Terry decided that the time had come for him to assert himself.

''Stay where you are,'' he ordered. ''Where is the laboratory? Quick!''

''Third door—right,'' she managed to gasp before she sank, half fainting, on the steps.

A STREAM of evil-smelling vapor rushed out as Terry dashed open the door indicated, but, mindful of his war-time experiences in France, he was already holding his breath. Lying face downward amid the fragments of a shattered retort was the figure of a man clad in a long white overall. Pausing only to hurl a stool through the large window at the farther end of the laboratory, Terry snatched up the unconscious form, threw it across his shoulder, and made for the door.

Six strides had served to take him down the passage as he had rushed to the rescue, but now the way seemed endless to his stumbling feet. Breathe he dared not, though his lungs were bursting with the strain. His streaming eyes sought in vain to pierce the whirling mist that encompassed him. Supporting himself, and guiding his footsteps by the wall, he staggered onward.

Surely he had not come all this distance? Could he have missed his way? Even as the thought chilled his heart the voice of the girl came from ahead, and never did music fall more sweetly on Terry's ears.

''This way, Mr. Hinton. Straight forward. A few more steps——''

Terry was conscious of a burst of sunlight and a draft of air which seemed like nectar to his famished lungs. Swaying like a drunken man, he lowered the inert body from his shoulder and saw with satisfaction that it still breathed. Then everything seemed to spin round in a roaring chaos, out of which, far off but clear, there sounded a voice which said:

''Drink this.''

What it was that he swallowed Terry had not the faintest idea. But no sooner had it passed his lips than he felt his brain becoming clearer. He opened his eyes to find the girl bending over him, her eyes wide with anxiety and her breath coming fast between her parted lips.

''Thanks,'' he said, rising slowly to his feet.

''It is I who ought to thank you for so gravely risking your life to save that of my employer,'' she answered with some little warmth.

Terry Hinton looked down at the professor, into whose sallow face a tinge of color was returning.

''Whew! it must be pretty violent gas to bowl one over like that. I scarcely breathed the stuff, and yet it

nearly got me down. What gas is it?''

The eyes which had hitherto looked straight into his own now suddenly sought the ground.

''I have not the slightest idea,'' she answered, and Terry, with a start of wonder, sensed a sudden coldness in her voice.

It was only after the professor had been assisted to his room by the footmen that Terry remembered the mission which had brought him to the house. He waited long enough for the girl to recover from her fright; then made his way indoors and resumed the conversation at the point where it had been so sensationally interrupted.

''So the thing is quite feasible, then?'' he said, tapping his notebook.

''Quite. You see the whole thing hangs on Newton's First Law of Motion. I presume you know what that is?''

''I've forgotten,'' said Terry unblushingly.

''It reads: 'Every body continues in its state of rest or of uniform motion in a straight line, except in so far as it may be compelled by force to change that state.' Now the earth, as you know, does not travel in a straight line; the attraction of the sun bends its course into a nearly circular orbit. Abolish that force, or overcome or neutralize it ever so little, and the earth will travel off at a tangent into space.''

''But I always understood that everything in the universe was subject to the sun's gravitations!'' protested Terry.

''With one exception, Mr. Hinton,'' she corrected gravely. ''The tail of a comet always points *away* from the sun; in other words, the unknown elements of which it is composed possess the property of being repelled by it, instead of attracted. Once let loose a cloud of this unknown gas (which according to the writer of this letter is unknown no longer) and the earth, freed from the restraining force which has held it in its place since the beginning of time, will float off——''

''Like a captive balloon when the cable snaps?'' suggested Terry.

''Quite so.'' There was no answering smile on her face at his elementary simile. ''Only, unlike the captive balloon, the earth would never return.''

Terry, writing up his ''copy'' as the train whirled him Londonward, mentally decided that statics—as expounded by the pretty lips of Alma Wexford—was one of the most fascinating things he had ever struck.

ALTHOUGH the unknown correspondent had prepaid his advertisement to the extent of £100, he must have admitted that he received his full money's-worth of publicity. When the numerous readers of the *Daily Wire* opened their papers the following morning they were confronted with a splash of huge black type which positively shrieked its message:

THE WORLD IN PERIL!

THREAT TO THE WHOLE HUMAN RACE

SELF-ELECTED DICTATOR SAYS WE MUST OBEY OR PERISH. WILL THE GOVERNMENT SUBMIT?

Yesterday our advertising department received a notice for publication in our columns that was so grotesque that it was at first set down to be the production of some unfortunate maniac. Further study of the document, together with a consultation with one of our leading scientists, has convinced us that—bizarre though the statement seems—there is a possibility of the threat being put into operation. Whether the results would be as dire as the writer assumes, it is not our intention to discuss at present; but there appears to be no grounds for doubting that the writer is in deadly earnest, and, unless his identity is promptly discovered and he himself placed under restraint, will probably succeed in inflicting a catastrophe which must result in considerable loss of life.

Below we give the full text of this unprecedented demand:

TO THE INHABITANTS OF THE PLANET EARTH

HEREBY TAKE NOTICE, that from this day a new Autocracy of the World is inaugurated. Henceforward the supreme Lawgiver and Ruler will be MYSELF. I hereby abolish all existing Kings, Emperors, Potentates, Presidents, Senates and Parliaments, investing MYSELF with their powers and authorities.

ALSO TAKE NOTICE, that it is not a vain desire for power or self-aggrandizement that has called upon me to take this step, but a sincere desire for the happiness, well-being and prosperity of the human race. Tyranny, oppression, poverty and war shall cease; the hungry and the homeless shall be so no longer; all shall partake equally of the fruits of the earth.

AND FURTHER TAKE NOTICE, that if, in their blindness and self-conceit, the present Rulers of the various Nations shall refuse to abdicate and recognize MYSELF as Supreme Ruler, I will mark MY displeasure by plunging this planet, Earth, into a desolation complete and final.

THAT IS TO SAY, that if, by the first day of the coming month my orders, as set forth below, are not carried out, the Earth will begin to move from its orbit, away from the Sun. That it is possible for me to accomplish this is proved by the data which is already in the hands of the Editor of this Journal. Divested of all scientific terms, it amounts to this:

By discovering and separating an element which has hitherto been known only by its occurrence in the spectra of the tails of various comets, I have evolved a gas, colorless, tasteless and imperceptible, which possesses the property of overcoming gravitation. By releasing this gas while the Earth is at its aphelion (its farthest distance from the sun, and a point where it is at its smallest velocity) I will sever the connecting link, as it were, allowing our globe to travel off into interplanetary space, where, deprived of the light and heat of the central luminary, all life on its surface will cease.

FINALLY TAKE NOTICE, that these MY orders are to be carried out without delay:

1—All earthly authority shall cease from this day, save only that of MYSELF.

2—That all paper currency, together with all bonds, securities, certificates and all documents relating to same, shall be destroyed. All gold and silver, whether coined or uncoined, shall be sunk in the deepest part of the Pacific Ocean.

3—All arms, ammunition, naval and military stores shall be destroyed; all warships that can not be converted into cargo-carrying vessels shall be sunk.

4—That I shall be acknowledged as AUTOCRAT OF THE HUMAN RACE, and as such MY orders shall meet with unquestioning obedience.

WHEREIN FAIL NOT AT YOUR PERIL!

It is impossible to describe adequately the sensation produced by the publication of this outrageous proclamation. As a journalistic scoop it surpassed all expectation. Before 9 o'clock every available copy of the *Wire* had been sold, and after that they were snapped up as fast as the roaring presses could disgorge them. By 10, a posse of mounted police was detailed to keep back the crowd which had gathered before the editorial office, while another squad marshaled the string of lorries which were being loaded direct from the machine room to cope with the demands from the provinces.

The noon editions contained the news that a meeting of the cabinet was being held, and the additional fact that the astronomer royal had been summoned to the conclave was thought worthy of a special edition soon afterward. Their proceedings were, of course, secret, but their drift may be gathered when it is stated that, immediately the meeting rose, the premier was observed to emerge from Downing Street, cross Whitehall and enter the precincts of New Scotland Yard.

His business there was quickly transacted.

"Find the man who started all this," he said to the first commissioner, "and put him under lock and key before the country goes mad."

That night the denizens of London's underworld found themselves and their doings invested with a strange and unusual immunity. That terror of evildoers, the Flying Squad, were flying at bigger game than they.

THE remainder of the week passed without any further communication from the mysterious being who

aspired to control the destinies of his fellow-men; for which fact Terry Hinton was not ungrateful. By some obscure process of reasoning, the editor-in-chief had come to regard Terry as being the only member of the staff capable of doing justice to the theme which still continued to be the *Wire's* leading feature, and numerous indeed had been the clues and rumors of clues that he had been called upon to investigate. Heartily glad was he to hand in his last sheaf of copy on Friday night, with the comforting knowledge that he had the following day free in which to carry out his cherished intention of paying another visit to Tudor Towers.

An anxiety to know if Professor Merrivale had recovered from his accident would, he decided, be a quite plausible excuse; but he did not attempt to disguise from himself the fact that it was a desire to renew his acquaintance with the pretty secretary that lay at the bottom of his concern about the old scientist's health.

He found Merrivale in his study, poring over a paper on which was a chaotic jumble of algebraical signs and figures.

"Yes, I'm quite fit again, thanks," he said in answer to Terry's inquiry. "But it was touch-and-go that time, and no mistake. If you had delayed your plucky rush for another couple of minutes I should have been far beyond such petty questions as the probable fate of our earth." And he made a motion of his hand toward his calculations.

"So you take the threat seriously?" Terry asked.

"Most decidedly I do. Considering the gigantic strides which science has made during the last few years, it is only fools who scoff at its future possibilities. If this would-be autocrat had indeed solved the mystery of the Frauenhofer lines, it is quite possible that he may carry out his threat. You must understand that the movements of the earth are very delicately adjusted. The tendency of the spinning globe to move off in a straight line is counterbalanced by the pull exercised by the sun; while the tendency for it to fall into the sun is in turn neutralized by the velocity with which the earth is endowed. So finely are the various forces poised against each other, that a mere straw—comparatively speaking—would be sufficient to upset the balance. But we have become so used to the stability of our Mother Earth that it is hard for the lay mind to realize its extreme precariousness. Had they sentient minds, the tiny insects which live upon the bark of an aged oak-tree might as well argue that their habitation, having remained unchanged through countless generations of their brief lives, is therefore of eternal permanence. But one day there comes a woodman with his ax, and the oak crashes to the ground, much to the surprize of its insect philosophers. So it is likely to be with us."

Terry Hinton nodded absently. A scientific lecture from the dry old professor did not sound nearly so interesting as the one which Alma Wexford had delivered for his sole benefit. He had glanced eagerly round the study when he had entered, and had been conscious of a feeling of disappointment when he had failed to see her.

"I trust Miss Wexford is quite recovered?" He tried to make his tone sound casual as he asked the question, but Merrivale shot a keen glance at him all the same.

"Oh, quite—quite," he assured him. "She is at present engaged in developing some photographs which I took last night—quite a lot of our work is done with the camera, you know. Ah, here she is."

Alma Wexford entered the room briskly, but as her eyes fell upon the young reporter she seemed to pause a moment in her steps. She was dressed in a businesslike white overall and carried a rack containing several

photographic negatives. It may have been because of the contrast of the white linen, or because of the close atmosphere in which she had been working, or it may have been some other emotion, but it certainly seemed as if there was an unusually high color in her cheeks as she came forward and shook hands.

"I thought I'd come round and see you once again before we were all snuffed out," Terry explained with an attempt at jocularity.

"That was certainly good of you, Mr. Hinton," she answered, with a gravity that was somewhat spoilt by her laughing eyes.

"You see, I wanted my last earthly impression to be a pleasant one," he went on to explain.

"So you thought you'd fill in your last hours with another scientific lecture?" she countered. "I did not know that you were such a devotee."

"Oh, but I am!" he cried fervently, and meant every word that he said. But he was not thinking of science when he spoke.

Merrivale had finished examining the plates and now sauntered across to where the two were talking by the window.

"You newspapermen generally know a lot more than you put into print," he began by saying. "Now, what's your candid opinion of the situation, Mr. Hinton?"

Terry hesitated. It is true that, as a reporter, he was to a certain extent "in the know" about many things which the general public would be much astonished to learn. But such things were not to be discussed with a stranger, even though he were the employer of a girl whom Terry was beginning to regard as being the most desirable in the whole world.

"Well, there are so many aspects of the situation," he temporized, "that one can hardly sum them up in a few words."

"I was alluding to its political aspect," explained the other.

"I was not aware that it had one."

"Weren't you?" Merrivale favored him with a keen glance. "Well, you can take it from me that it has. Of course, as a scientist my interest in political matters is merely academic—I survey the mass of humanity which constitutes the so-called civilized nations of the earth with that same dispassionate curiosity with which an entomologist observes the activities of a nest of ants or a hive of bees. He notes their tendencies without trying to share their emotions—if they possess such."

During this frankly egoistic avowal Terry had taken a good look at the face of the old scientist. It was that of a man well over fifty years of age. Clean-shaven, thin, ascetic-looking, it would have served, had it been crowned with a miter or a cope, as a model for some saintly prelate. And yet, as Terry continued to look, there gradually dawned on him the consciousness of something hard, relentless, beneath that placid exterior. And into the mild eyes there would occasionally flash a look so cold, inexorable and fierce, that the watcher was irresistibly reminded of a keen-pointed dagger being drawn momentarily from its velvet sheath.

"But I do not think there can be the slightest doubt that a political crisis is approaching," Merrivale was saying. "Unless the government submits to the demands of this—what does he call himself?—this Autocrat of the Human Race——"

"They will not do that," Terry interposed quickly.

"Then they may have the decision taken out of their hands by the mob. Fear is still a very potent factor in the human mind, Mr. Hinton. We have, I admit, progressed a long way down that path which separates us from our arboreal ancestors, but we have not yet shed our respect for that instinct of self-preservation which, after all, is the first law of nature."

"You think that fear will induce

the world to place its neck beneath the heel of this newly risen scientific slaughterer?'' There was a flush of anger on the young man's face as he asked the question.

''Tut, tut,'' remonstrated the professor, holding up his hands. ''We must not allow our primitive instincts to get the better of the scientific calm with which every question should be discussed. This man—whoever he may be—does not desire the annihilation of the world, but its subjection. And if he should turn this world into a frozen globe spinning in the outer realms of space—what then? Are there not other dead and lifeless worlds in the universe?''

Terry rose to his feet a trifle abruptly.

''I'm afraid your finely spun dogmas are too elusive for me to grasp, Professor. To my unscientific mind murder is still murder, even when it's committed on a wholesale scale; and there's still enough of the brute left in me to make me desire to defend my life with such intelligence and strength as I possess. I tell you frankly that if I could get my hands on the man whose misplaced genius is threatening this old world of ours——''

''Yes?'' said Merrivale softly, regarding him with inscrutable eyes.

''I'd kill him with as little compunction as I would a mad dog!''

A mocking smile twisted the old man's withered lips.

''But if this mysterious person were a young and beautiful woman, with smooth, soft arms that could embrace, and warm red lips that could be kissed? What if she loved you and was by you beloved? Would you kill *her?*''

''In that case''—Terry's set mouth relaxed in a sudden grin—''I'd see if I couldn't give her something better to think about than depopulating the world. Good morning.''

Professor Merrivale chuckled softly as he watched Terry's stalwart figure go striding down the graveled drive.

IT WAS an evening exactly two weeks after the *Wire* had launched its literary bombshell, and the dance-supper at the Blitz Hotel was in full swing. If a casual observer had happened to notice the two elderly gentlemen who occupied a table set a little apart from the rest, he would probably have assumed that they were two bachelor clubmen of convivial tastes, out for an evening's amusement. As a matter of fact, one was Sir Edmund Brailsford, secretary of state for the Home Department, and the other was the editor-in-chief of the *Daily Wire,* and the matter which they appeared to discuss so off-handedly was one which deeply concerned the destiny of the whole world.

''You really should not have published without giving us a hint beforehand,'' Sir Edmund was saying. ''But, the mischief being done, I assume that you're willing to do your best to mitigate it?''

Under ordinary circumstances the editor would rather have perished at the stake than renounce the freedom of the press. But the home secretary was an old schoolfellow, and was, moreover, a statesman who would have quite a lot of fingers in the next birthday-honor pie.

''Of course, my dear Sir Edmund,'' he hastened to murmur. ''We'll do anything in reason—anything.''

''Oh, I do not want you to eat your words,'' returned the other, smiling. ''I just want you to begin to throw out hints that the threat is merely bluff—political bluff.''

''I understand,'' nodded the editor. ''You want to reassure the public.''

Sir Edmund's smile deepened as he made a little gesture toward the laughing, care-free throng which crowded the floor. ''They don't look as though they need much reassuring, do they?''

The band struck into the latest dance-craze as he spoke, and for a time the two watched the stream of well-groomed men and daintily dressed women pass before the gilded columns of the alcove in which they were seated. Sir Edmund noticed particularly a tall young fellow dancing with a very pretty girl, and as they swayed past, with perfectly matched steps, he called the attention of his companion to them.

"Look at those two, for instance. Do they appear to be worrying their young heads about what's going to happen when the zero hour strikes? Not a bit of it! All they think of is life and love, the same as we did when we were their ages. Why, I'll wager that they've forgotten all about that proclamation by now."

"You'd lose your money, Sir Edmund," replied the editor dryly. "That happens to be Terry Hinton, one of our livest reporters, and the girl he's dancing with is the private secretary to Professor Merrivale."

TERRY had his runabout parked near, and when the Blitz had disgorged its merry crowd, he and Alma Wexford set out on their way back to Blackheath.

The night was warm and cloudless, with a great amber moon riding low in the heavens. As the car purred its way across Waterloo Bridge, Terry pointed to the light which burned on the summit of the distant clock-tower on their right.

"The House is sitting late," he remarked. "There's an important debate on tonight—some of the back benches are talking about knuckling under to the phantom Autocrat, so the rumor goes. By rights I should now be up in the press gallery, scribbling for dear life."

He turned to meet a pair of reproachful eyes.

"You gave up a big debate to take me out?" she cried. "Oh, I wish I had known you were neglecting your duties."

"Glad you didn't, for I should have come all the same. I want to see all I can of you before the zero hour Life is liable to be short these days, you know."

She looked at him in mild surprize.

"You think there is real danger, then?"

"You yourself thought so a few days since," he countered. "If I remember rightly, it was your arguments that convinced me of its reality."

She lifted her shoulders in a tiny shrug. "I've had time to think since then, and the more I have thought the more fantastic it all seems. Why should anyone wish to be master of the world?"

"I don't know; it's a job I don't hanker after myself, anyway. But others have thought differently. Look at Napoleon, Hannibal, Alexander—they decimated the world in their lust for power. It's like morphia—or money. The more they get the more they want. Talking about hard cash," he went on, pressing his foot on the accelerator as they entered a straight stretch of deserted suburban road, "that self-elected Autocrat must be pretty well off. I was talking to a man I knew at college, who's now a kind of heavenly look-out man at the Royal Observatory, and he assured me that it would need no end of expensive apparatus to get the data contained in that letter which was sent us. By the way," he added casually, "Professor Merrivale has rather a swell outfit, hasn't he?"

"Ours is one of the finest private observatories in Europe." There was something like pride in her voice as she answered.

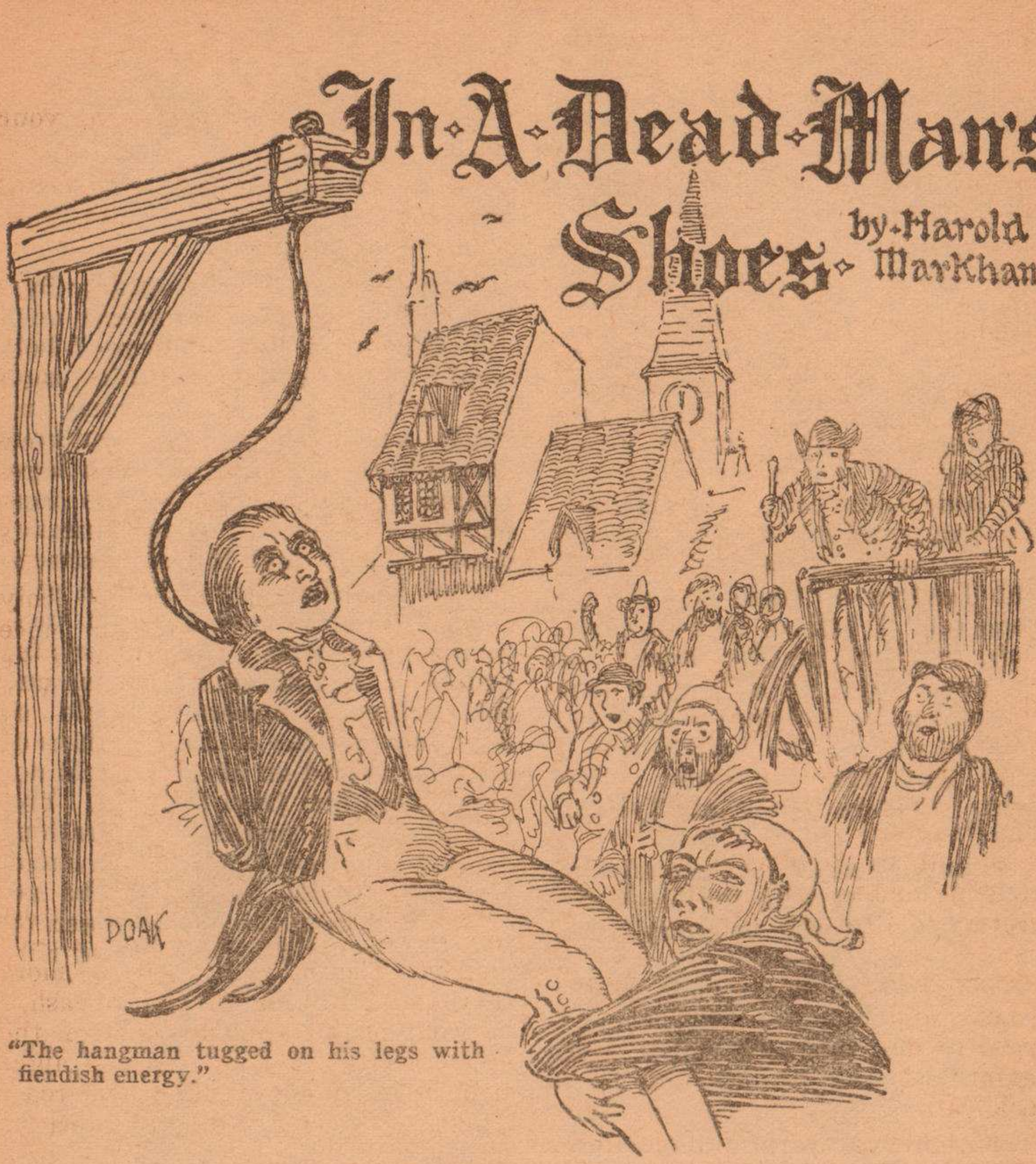
"Photographic spectroscopes, and all that?"

"Of course. He's had one of the high turrets roofed over and fitted

(Continued on page 575)

In A Dead Man's Shoes

by Harold Markham



"The hangman tugged on his legs with fiendish energy."

"OYEZ, oyez, oyez! Let all manner of persons keep silence while judgment of death is passing upon the prisoner at the bar upon pain of imprisonment—God save the King!"

A tense shudder of anticipation ran round the court of the Old Bailey, the one person utterly unmoved besides the usher and the judge being the young man who stood erect in the herb-strewn dock.

"James Barnaby O'Dale," the voice of the old judge came thin but clear through the thick atmosphere of the court, "have you aught to say why judgment of death should not be passed upon you, according to law?"

In the silence that followed row upon row of pale faces and questioning eyes were turned upon the good-looking young highwayman. At last he spoke.

"I' faith, my Lord," he replied, jauntily, "I don't think I'll be troubling ye with any remarks on that score. All the world knows I'm a master at my profession. Faith, wasn't it I held up Seven String Ned himself the night after he stopped Davy Garrick's coach and stripped

the jolly player down to his very shoe-buckles? Nay, my Lord, you'll swing me whatever I say and so I'll make no argument against it; but there's three favors I'd be asking with your kind permission."

His Lordship nodded gravely, and people edged closer to hear what the condemned man would say.

"First, then," young O'Dale began, "I ask for a reasonably sober hangman who'll know his business; secondly, for speech with a certain wench who may ask to see me when I'm taken back to the cells; and, thirdly" —his eyes roved mischievously round the court—"that my old friend Jacob Larkyn do come and see me turned off. I believe he's in court. Jacob, you put up the money for that poor devil of a lawyer who never had a dog's chance to keep my windpipe out of the halter—and I thank you for that—and other things. See ye again at Tyburn, Jacob!"

The judge's clerk had already invested his master with the black cap and the lips of the ordinary were framing their "Amen."

"You shall be taken back to the prison from whence you came," quavered the tired old voice, "and from there to a place of public execution . . . by the neck till your body be dead; and may God have mercy on your soul!"

The parson said his "Amen;" Jim O'Dale bowed ironically to him, and then to the bench, and turned as a warder touched him meaningly on the shoulder.

JACOB LARKYN had been in court and had certainly every intention of seeing the execution. It would have been unlike Jacob to deny himself that crowning pleasure.

He strolled meditatively down Fleet street and turned into the old Cock Tavern, where he sank into a dark corner to ruminate his triumph over a bottle of tawny port.

The little inkeeper of Kensington had much on which to congratulate himself. He had not only cleared a determined rival out of his path but, in doing so, had also paved the way surely toward winning over the subject of their rivalry.

Poor Barbara Challis—pretty Barbara Challis! Her interview with Jim O'Dale in the condemned hole would be her last sight of him; soon she would be out of mourning and ready to listen to the generous friend who had paid for such legal advice as the custom of the time allowed. That had been a master stroke, Jacob told himself between sips of his wine; it had looked positively Christian and had yet been so absolutely safe. The lawyer's fee had been well within his means and the evidence against O'Dale so damning that the entire four inns of court mustered on his side could not have saved him from the rope. Yes, it had been a princely inspiration! None would now suspect that Jacob Larkyn, proven friend of the accused, had been the one to peach on him and guide the Bow Street runners by night to the bedroom where he lay sleeping the sleep of a man who believed himself safe in friendly hands. No, not even if O'Dale suspected—and Jacob half believed he had done so—and voiced his suspicions to Barbara would there be the least atom of proof against the friend who had betrayed him while purporting to be the Good Samaritan of his uttermost need!

THERE was no court of criminal appeal in the days of King George III and executions took place as soon after the trial as the necessary arrangements could be made. By between 4 and 5 in the morning Jacob was in his place, close to the scaffold, and by 6 o'clock he was hemmed in by as villainous a mob as ever offended eye, ear and nose at once. They beguiled the time with

drink and obscene songs, with fighting and filching; but their doings were lost on the ugly, undersized man in the drab coat who stood motionless through the hours before the great black framework whereon the handsome form of Jim O'Dale was soon to swing.

At last, to an accompaniment of coarse cheering, the black cart was seen pushing its way through the crowd, occupied only by the driver, the clergyman and the condemned.

Jacob tiptoed and licked his lips.

It would soon be over now. Soon he would be free to start, unimpeded, on a clear course toward marriage with pretty Barbara Challis!

O'Dale was sitting upright, a rose in his mouth, bowing from side to side as the rogues in the street fought to get closer and acclaim their fellow-rogue in the cart.

Handsome and debonair as usual! Curse his good looks! They were really the foundation of Jacob's hatred. He hated O'Dale for his slim, straight figure that seemed specially made for the fine velvet clothes; for his immaculately powdered hair and his regular features; but most of all for his dainty, almost effeminate hands and feet.

Jacob, otherwise insignificant, was the possessor of big, gnarled hands and stubby, broad feet—the feet of a plebeian, such as would have been no other in the finest, most expensive of shoes. It had been those slim aristocratic feet of O'Dale's that, almost more than his looks and manner, had given him the suggestion of breeding which had carried pretty Barbara off hers the moment she saw him and caused her to break her tentative betrothal to plain Jacob Larkyn.

O'Dale was aware of his looks and proud of them. Even now, as the cart drew up at the scaffold, he gave evidence of the fact; for he had managed to change his dress since being condemned and was resplendent in a scarlet coat, lace ruffles, white silk breeches and stockings, and highly polished shoes with buckles of curiously wrought gold.

The ordinary got down as the cart was drawn under the noose, and some semblance of a hush was made in the crowd, expectant of the thrill of a dying speech.

O'Dale bowed gallantly to some ladies in a window opposite, then north, south, east and west. They did not hurry over a hanging in those days. The executioner waited patiently for him, rope in hand.

"Good people!" began the highwayman, pitching his voice clearly. "I'm sorry to cheat ye of a speech; but 'faith, barkers and rapier come handier to me than my mother tongue and therefore I must. But there's one I would have a word with before my friend here serves me with his particular fashion in collar. Jacob, my buck, come forward. I have a word to speak and a last bequest to make ye. Tut, man, don't hang back in that ashamed way—come out, my little Jacob, and show yourself!"

With a grim smile that he hoped would be accepted as a friendly one Jacob stepped forward.

"Dear friend," Jim went on, "you have done much for poor O'Dale in the matter of his late trial and present appointment with Tyburn Tree, and he appreciates it, believe me. Jacob, I have a little gift to make you—one you will be liking, I fancy —these gold buckles and my last pair of shoes. Take them and wear them, Jacob, in memory of what you did for 'Captain' Jim O'Dale!"

The hangman made a gesture as if to speak. O'Dale turned on him.

"Tut, Mister Ketch—I know the clothes I'm turned off in are yours by right of law or customs or both, but you shalln't deny my friend here this trifle! On my life, if you do, I'll take off my coat before I hang and throw it to the mob—and you'll

see it is a rare fine coat, Ketch, my buck—not one to let slip through an honest hangman's fingers, hey? There, that's settled!" he added as the hangman nodded a grudging assent; and, taking off his lace stock, gave his neck to the halter and his arms ready to be tied.

Jacob stood back, clenching his teeth, while the final preparations were made. A dead silence now reigned. . . .

The hangman gave a signal to the driver. The cart moved off with a sharp jolt and the rope was jerked tight, quivering under the condemned man's weight.

For a minute or so he struggled violently, his body twisting and his feet threshing the air. Then he swung gently from side to side, bending and stretching his knees slowly. Then, with what seemed like a final reaction to the strangling noose, his whole body stiffened into rigidity—one last violent convulsion, and it hung motionless. Were his sufferings so quickly over?

No! To the disgust of the watching multitude the wretched man's struggles recommenced with even greater violence: the legs kicked out, as if striving to find ground whereon to plant the twinkling feet; the breast heaved; the features under the white cap swelled till it looked like a grotesque plaster mask of its wearer. Could this really be the handsome, nonchalant Jim O'Dale?

The hangman hesitated, then ran below the scaffold, and, catching those struggling legs round the knees, tugged on them with fiendish energy. A bestial tussle between him and his victim followed and was met with groans, cat-calls and hissing from the crowd.

O'Dale's struggles subsided; the hangman gave a final jerk to his legs and let him go. He swung motionless, like the man-shaped pendulum of some gruesome clock. A little from side to side he swung, then turned slowly round, this way and that, his knees slightly drawn up and one foot a little above the other.

Jim O'Dale was out of misery at last.

HAVING feasted his eyes on the highwayman's death agonies, Jacob would have made off; but the press of the mob was too close for him and there was nothing left but to wait patiently for the cutting down. For half an hour the body of his once-handsome rival swung in the breeze before his eyes; then the hangman mounted the scaffold and with a couple of slices of his knife severed the rope and let it drop limply to the ground.

The mob pressed closer, those in front eager to chaffer with the executioner for portions of the rope, greatly prized in those days as mascots; and thus was Jacob thrust right forward till he stood within a couple of paces of the corpse of the man he had betrayed.

He looked down at it and for the first time was a little ashamed of what he had done: this limp thing had once been a laughing, rollicking young fellow, whom, at times, even his hatred could not prevent him from admiring—whom he had envied even as he hated him—the apple of pretty Barbara's eye. He, Jacob Larkyn, was responsible that life was now extinct—he had done a thing that no power on earth could undo. It had seemed just and desirable at the time, but now he was ashamed.

"Here, Master!"

He looked up into a lantern-jawed, masked face.

"A bargain's a bargain, y'know!" grinned the hangman and thrust into his hands a pair of shoes with buckles of curiously wrought gold.

Mechanically his fingers closed on them and he pushed his way through the crowd.

BACK in Fleet Street, Jacob soothed his rather shaken nerves with another bottle at the Cock, slipping out of sight into his old corner and putting down Jim's dying present out of sight. Little by little, as the wine warmed him, he got over the first disgust and horror of the execution and began to look at things from a different viewpoint. What was done was done. He had got his way and was now free to make the running with Barbara.

A rather ghoulish thought came to him; he had heard of dead man's luck, had seen the mob fighting for the rope with which the young highwayman had been strangled. Might there not be luck for him also in this strange present, made to him on the scaffold by the man he had so cunningly sold?

He laughed harshly at the thought, glanced round the little compartment in which he sat, satisfied himself that no one was spying over the top of either partition or round the side, and then quickly changed his rather old shoes for the smart, gold-buckled ones in which O'Dale had been hanged. They were a shade tight for him across the toes, but of softer leather than he was accustomed to, and he decided he could wear them with ease when he had broken them in a little.

He would go straight back to Kensington and try his luck—"dead man's luck"—would be guided by circumstances as they arose. Who knew?—this might be the very turn of luck he needed to win the heart of her for whom he had done that thing.

Kicking his old pair away into the shadows under the table, he paid his shot and walked out into the street.

Like the good man of business he was, Jacob turned into the Blue Boar to see how the house had prospered while he was away at the execution before he strolled on past it to the creeper-covered cottage where dwelt Barbara Challis; and here the first manifestation of "dead man's luck," as he believed, struck him with its full force as he entered the front door.

"Barbara!" he cried, stopping dead in his tracks.

She halted at the door of his private closet from which she had just come out; halted with parted lips, as if half afraid of him. Then she recovered herself and spoke:

"Jacob—it is all over?"

"Aye, all over. He died like a brave man."

"I knew he would."

The innkeeper went across to the girl, looking for the chance to touch her—to clasp a hand, maybe.

"I did my utmost for him."

"I know, I know. He told me all after the trial . . . we owe you much, Jacob."

He took both her hands, then, and she looked bravely up into his face. She had been crying, it was true; but now tears had given place to a strange glory, the light that illumines a heroine's features in the moment of her trial.

"It was more for you than for him that I did it," said Jacob, quite truthfully. "Come, let us go into my room, Barbara; I have much that I would have you hear."

She yielded to him, let him turn her and guide her gently back through the low, oaken doorway. They sat together on a settee by the fire.

"Yes," Barbara dreamily went on, "we have much to repay you for, Jacob Larkyn—and—and——"

He pressed her hand between both of his.

"Speak not of repayment. Was not the deed its own reward?"

"For you no doubt; but, Jacob, those were Jim's last words to me: 'Forget not all he has done for poor Jim O'Dale and reward him for it.'"

Jacob started violently, and again the feeling of shame passed through him like a knife. This was indeed a reward of good for evil—Devil take it, had he known Jim was such a good fellow he doubted he'd have peached on him so readily! But that was all over and done with and confession would only make matters worse. No, better to accept all these unlooked-for blessings as "dead man's luck" and enjoy them as they came.

Barbara trembled—he could almost believe she shuddered—as he drew her toward him. Then her golden head nestled on his shoulder and the scent of her hair was in his nostrils. . . . 'Gad, but it was marvelous that a woman should console herself so soon! Why, here was the work of months, as he had expected, all done for him in less than an hour! Was there in truth some uncanny, inexplicable magic in a dead man's blessing—in the standing, literally, in a dead man's shoes?

"Jim bade me not mourn for him," said the girl slowly. "He would have none of my wearing black clothes or weeping more than a girl could help——"

"Aye, aye, my dear. He was right."

"——and above all," Barbara went on, "he would have it that I must go to the play this evening—go to the play and relieve my mind utterly of the terrible thing they did to him today."

"The play? So!"

"To Drury Lane, Jacob—Davy Garrick plays *Hamlet* there tonight. It is his last performance of the piece. Jim and I went to his first. Shall we go together, Jacob? It was Jim's last wish."

"Whatever you please, child; so it be for your happiness."

Again she trembled—or maybe shuddered—in his arms.

"Then I would desire to go, Jacob; yes, I would desire that of all things."

"So be it, then. We go."

THE play might have been better chosen to suit a man with such a conscience as Jacob Larkyn's that night; the "Players' Scene" with its dramatic emphasis on the Danish King's treachery reawakened all his scruples as to the death of Jim O'Dale. But he shook them off angrily. Where was the use in mooning over what was done and could not be altered? The man was dead, now, and in the hands of the medical students. He was very likely half dissected already. Enough of him, then! Having sinned the sin of David, what was left a sensible man but at least to enjoy the fruits of his misdeed?

At last the final curtain fell.

"Jacob," said Barbara, gently pressing his arm, "would you do one more little thing for me?"

"Ask it, my love, and see!"

"It is that you take me to the stage entrance—I feel Mr. Garrick is my friend, tonight—a better friend than you imagine, Jacob—I beg you take me where we can see him as he leaves the theater and thank him for his wonderful play."

Was it imagination or reality that her voice trembled with a high-pitched, hysterical note as she concluded her sentence? Never mind! He was in the vein to do whatever she asked, that evening; and it was a small thing to lead her to this player and say a few words of thanks.

THERE was a crowd at the stage door, for "little Davy Garrick" was the idol of London in those days and never left without a bodyguard of some fifty or more about his coach, especially since the affair of Seven String Ned who had held him up on a Tuesday and been himself so dramatically robbed the following

Wednesday by the late "Captain" Jim O'Dale.

Jacob and Barbara waited some time, but at last a rustle in the crowd proclaimed the coming of the famous actor. Then Jacob let go of Barbara's hand to shoulder his way forward for the promised speech.

"Mr. Garrick, sir——"

"Sir to you!"

The little player stopped and, smiling genially, looked Jacob up and down from hat to toes.

"Sir, I have come to thank you on behalf of a young lady who is with me for the fine evening's entertainment you have given us. I protest, sir, you are the very first actor of your time, sir, and——"

He paused, somehow disconcerted.

Garrick was still smiling, but his smile had a flicker of grim curiosity in it; he still looked the innkeeper up and down and seemed particularly interested in his feet.

"May I know your name, sir?"

"With pleasure, Mr. Garrick! I am Jacob Larkyn, at your service, sir, keeper of the Blue Boar in Kensington. Ever at your service, Mr. Garrick, sir."

"Ah! Ever at my service? That is good, Mr. Jacob Larkyn—very good indeed!" and he laughed a little harshly. The crowd edged in round them.

"So Mr. Larkyn is ever at this poor player's service, is he?" Garrick went on. "Then perchance he will tell the poor player where he got those fine gold buckles he is now wearing in his shoes—for, egad, I seem to know them passing well, myself!"

A sudden suspicion dawned on Jacob.

"G-gold b-buckles, sir?" he stammered.

"Yes, fellow!" Garrick changed his bantering manner and snapped at him. "My gold buckles that were stolen off the very shoes I was wearing by a rascal called Seven String Ned, less than a month ago!"

"I—I—I got them honest, sir, I'll swear it—they—they were given to me!"

Garrick smiled unkindly. A growl went up from the crowd.

"And by whom, dear Mr. Larkyn—by whom, pray?"

A girl's voice rang out:

"I will tell you, Mr. Garrick!" With flashing eyes and flaming cheeks Barbara Challis faced Jacob. "Seven String Ned was himself robbed by Jim O'Dale whom they hanged this morning. It was Jim O'Dale gave him those buckles as he gave him many more of your things—search the cupboard in his private closet! He was ever the receiver for O'Dale's stolen goods!"

"Barbara! Delilah!" shrieked Jacob, now fully aware of the trap. "She lies—gentlemen all, she lies—she was that damned highwayman's mistress—if there is anything in my closet she put it there herself! I'll swear——"

A hand struck him across the mouth.

"The lie in your own teeth, you dog!" cried a burly citizen. "Boys, I was in court when Jim O'Dale was tried—this man was his friend and paid for the lawyer to defend him—now, boys, will ye see our little Davy Garrick robbed? Will ye see the scoundrels as filched from him escape?"

"No! No!" shrieked Jacob, blood-guiltiness and terror almost depriving him of the power of coherent speech. "Spare me! Mercy! I can explain—explain all!"

"Explain to a jury!" snarled the foremost citizen. "Seize him, boys! To Newgate with the villain!"

A roar of vindictive enthusiasm answered him and a score pairs of hands gripped the innkeeper. As they dragged him away his voice choked in his throat and he saw

visions swirling in the air before him —a red-robed figure behind a desk, one that wore a snow-white peruke and a black cap—the sea of pale, expectant faces, riveted to the dock —the gaunt, bare framework of the black gallows tree. . . . But last of all, before he fainted and they began to carry him bodily toward Newgate jail, he saw the face of a bereaved girl, flushed and glowing with hatred and with triumph.

Folks Used to Believe



by ALVIN F. HARLOW

THE UNICORN

ONE of the most famous of all the fabulous beasts of history was the unicorn, whose name was derived from two Latin words which meant "one horn." It even gained a place in the coat of arms of Great Britain, its rampant attitude opposite the lion giving rise to the old nursery ballad, beginning, "The Lion and the Unicorn were fighting for the crown."

One of the earliest accounts of the unicorn was that of Ctesias, a historian of the Fifth Century B. C., who declared that in India there were wild asses, very fleet, having in their forehead a horn one and a half cubits long and colored red, black and white; from this horn drinking-cups were made which neutralized poison.

The unicorn was generally represented as a horselike animal save for the horn, which grew forward from its forehead and was twisted in a sort of rope pattern. Some early writers said that the unicorn had been known to worst the elephant in combat. It was usually savage and quarrelsome, but at sight of a young girl became gentle, and would come and lay its head in her lap. This story was illustrated in several old tapestries.

When the unicorn stooped to drink from a pool, its horn dipping into the water purified it and made it sweet. Purchas tells how a party of travelers were poisoned by "the root of Mandioca, but by a peece of Vnicornes horne they were preserued." Sir John Mandeville asserted that in Asia there were "manye white Olifantes," (elephants) "Unycornes and Lyouns and manye other hydous Bestes with outen nombre." The animal was listed in some English works on zoology as late as the middle of the Eighteenth Century; and in France, even up to 1789, instruments supposedly of unicorn's horn were used to test the royal food for poison.

Edward Webbe, an English traveler of the Sixteenth Century, claimed to have visited the mythical monarch, Prester John, whom he located in Ethiopia. "I have seen," says he, "in a place like a park near Prester John's court, three score and seventeene unicornes and elephants all at one time, and they were so tame that I have played with them as one would playe with young lambes."

The HERMIT of CHEMEKETA MOUNTAIN

by THOMAS de V. HARPER



"The three advanced silently, and in their approach the shrinking fugitive read his doom."

CHEMEKETA MOUNTAIN is a wild bit of densely wooded country in the heart of a thinly settled farming district. In the valley at the foot of its eastern slope is a small hamlet of forty or fifty souls which forms the business and social center of the district. The farmers, mostly frugal, hard-working Bohemians, eke out a meager living from the small truck gardens and orchards which constitute their holdings, and help to keep body and soul together by working as day laborers part of the time, while their wives and families labor in the fields. Three days a week the younger children attend the district school, and on Sunday there is church in the village. It is a life of hard work, little pleasure, and back of it all the sinister shadow of Chemeketa Mountain, dark and silent against the setting sun.

There had always been a deal of mystery about the Hermit of Chemeketa Mountain. High up in the forest near the top of the mountain he lived, he and his two dogs. He was a tall, gaunt man, with a ragged, unkempt beard, long, tangled hair, and cold, green-gray eyes that in moments of anger glowered in their deep sockets in a malevolent, unwinking stare. His clothing was filthy and ragged, and was kept in place by bits of string, rusty nails in lieu of buttons, and a frayed rope for a belt.

Where he came from no one knew;

how he made a living was also an unfathomed secret. His shack was high up on the mountain, in the heart of the timber, surrounded by a small patch of half-cleared ground, set off from the forest by a rail fence which seemed always on the verge of falling apart, but somehow never quite accomplished it.

His only companions were two great shaggy wolf-dogs, vicious, evil-looking brutes with red slavering jaws, whose appearance as they would come charging up to the fence on the approach of a stranger was enough to strike terror into the stoutest heart.

If you chanced on the hermit and spoke to him his lips would draw back in a snarl, disclosing vicious, pointed fangs rather than teeth, and his words came in a low, rumbling growl that carried a menace in the tone as well as, usually, in the words.

The natives generally regarded him as having kinship with the two dogs, and believed all three were in league with the devil. They regarded the mountain with fear and awe; and while some drew their wood from the edge of the forest, none was bold enough to venture into its depths after sundown.

It was said that the two dogs ran wild in the woods at night, and wo betide the luckless traveler whose trail they held. True, there were no actual disappearances which could be charged against the brutes, but this was because none tempted the devil, whose agents they were, by venturing into the woods after dark. In the daytime they apparently stayed at or near the hermit's shack, but at night—ah! that was different.

As for the hermit himself, he was possessed of the evil eye, said the natives. If he looked you squarely in the face your cow would become dry; the water in your well would be polluted; and numerous other misfortunes would surely make your days unhappy and your nights full of fear. Your honest farmer would look fearfully over his shoulder, crossing himself the while, as he explained this to you.

One day there came to the hamlet a stranger from the big city down the valley near the sea. A small, furtive, rat-faced chap he was; he appeared on the street but seldom, having obtained a room at Mrs. Sczura's, in which he stayed except when it was absolutely necessary for him to be out. When he did appear on the dusty road which passed for the main street, he walked with his head down and his cap pulled well over his eyes; and if by chance a person happened to approach him suddenly from behind he would find immediate reason to back up against a wall, while his right hand would seek his coat pocket.

After a few days he began to be on the street a little more frequently, and gradually struck up a speaking acquaintance with some of the men who frequented the grocery store corner of an evening. He was reticent regarding his motive in coming to the village, but seemed very much interested in the geography of the surrounding country, asking numerous questions regarding distances to the next towns, the farmhouses by the way, and the like.

It was inevitable, of course, that he should hear of the Hermit of Chemeketa Mountain. Indeed, he had shown a good deal of interest in the topography of the mountain, the depth and denseness of the forest, and the trails through the woods. before anyone thought of the hermit. Or maybe they thought of him, but hesitated to speak; the stranger was from outside, and would not understand.

But eventually someone mentioned the hermit, and described his peculiarities; how he lived alone, except for his two dogs; spoke also of

the ferocity of the dogs, and of the malevolent powers of their master.

The stranger listened, and a ghost of a smile passed across his face, to be instantly repressed. Casually, as if it were a passing thought and a matter of no importance, he suggested that it might be possible that the hermit had a miser's hoard of gold in his little shack on the mountain, and that his apparent poverty was a subterfuge for the purpose of misleading the villagers, while the dogs were purposely kept vicious and his own reputation for supernatural evil powers carefully cultivated purely as a means of insuring undisturbed enjoyment of his hidden wealth.

But no, they said, this could not be; the man was known to have the evil eye. Why, look you, Stanislaus Mathewzewiski, who lived nearest of all the village to the wood, had suddenly come upon the hermit one day face to face just inside the forest, and what had happened? That very night a loose stone on the road had turned under his foot and he had fallen, breaking an arm. And young Hrdlika, who went into the forest with his rifle for a deer, and having wandered farther than he intended—you know what happened to him? Two days later Matilda Czerny, whom he was to have married the following month, ran away to the big city by the sea and married an outsider, a stranger whom she had known for no more than two or three years. Yes, indeed, the hermit had the evil eye, no doubt about it.

As he walked back to his room that night the stranger's ratlike eyes continually sought the black depths of the forest on Chemeketa Mountain, which seemed to hang over the village like a shadow of evil. At his gate he paused and stared long at the summit of the mountain, and then, like one who has come to a definite decision, he nodded his head a couple of times, an ugly light shining in his eyes, then slowly turned and went into the house.

IT WAS two days later that he left his room in the morning, strolling through the village carelessly, as if bound for nowhere in particular, and speaking casually to such of his few acquaintances as he met, until he reached the edge of town. Then he became more circumspect, and was extremely careful that none should see him from there until he plunged into the forest. About sundown, if you had been watching, you might have seen him return, keeping carefully out of sight until well within the village, and returning immediately to his room.

Matt Borlitz, who had a small garden patch on the edge of the village near the forest, came into the post-office the next day with a strange story. He had been aroused about midnight by the frenzied barking of his two fox terriers, and had got up to ascertain the trouble and quiet the dogs. They were on the porch, and as he opened the door they dashed into the house, very evidently in terror of some danger without. Borlitz stepped out on the porch, but at first could see nothing to cause the dogs to act so strangely. As he stared into the darkness, however, three great wolf-dogs suddenly broke out of the forest and passed down the road toward the town. They ran silently, looking neither to the right nor the left; their eyes gleamed like coals of fire, and from where he stood he could see the froth dripping from their slavering jaws as they sped by on their mysterious trail. Borlitz's dogs, ordinarily noisy, fearless animals, cowered and whimpered in apparent abject terror as the spectral figures passed and vanished around a bend in the road.

When he returned to the house Borlitz put the dogs out, much against their will. He heard nothing more from them during the night, but when morning came he found

them both dead, their throats torn out and their bodies mangled.

This was the first of three nights of terror for the village. It was the next night after Borlitz's dogs were killed that Katrina, the little twelve-year-old daughter of Thaddeus Polonski, left the house about 9 o'clock to go to the spring, about fifty yards down the road, to draw a bucket of water against its use in the morning. She was gone a little longer than usual, and then came dashing back to the house, hysterical with terror.

She told how she had drawn the water and was just leaving the spring when three great beasts came rushing down out of the forest. As she crouched, terror-stricken, in the shadow of the little shed over the spring, they rushed silently down the road toward the town and disappeared. The child was too frightened to move from her hiding-place for a time, until she finally mustered up sufficient courage to run across the open space between the spring and the house, arriving breathless with fear, and sobbed out her story to her father.

The next morning Serge Hrdlika, who was the father of the young man whose love affair had terminated so unhappily, and who lived about a hundred yards down the road, found a week-old Holstein calf dead in front of his house, killed in much the same manner as had been Borlitz's dogs the night before.

The men of the village met at the grocery store the next day to see what, if anything, could be done about it. It was pretty generally believed that they must be the hermit's dogs, suddenly taken to straying farther afield than had been their custom. True, he was only known to have two, but it was not impossible that he had recently acquired a third.

A great deal of talk was indulged in, and Borlitz, Polonski, and Hrdlika were especially anxious for something to be done, but the meeting broke up without anything being accomplished when it developed that no one was willing to run the risk of calling on the hermit for the purpose of persuading him to restrain his dogs.

It was that evening, just before dusk, that the second stranger arrived. He was a big, determined-looking chap, with an indefinable something in his appearance that caused Gorgas Pichutzki, the town toper, to hasten home at his first glimpse of the newcomer and bury in a deep hole in his radish patch the gallon jug of hard cider which he had kept in his kitchen. It seemed safer to take no chances.

But the stranger was apparently not interested in Pichutzki's cider or its age or potency. He immediately sought the grocery store, and in the back room held a short conference with Jan Chezik, the proprietor, who was also postmaster and town constable. During the conversation he exhibited certain papers which apparently gained him considerable respect on the part of Jan. He also showed that gentlemen two photographs; they were a full face and profile view of the rat-faced stranger, and at the bottom of each picture was a number.

When he stepped out on the street again the newcomer proceeded directly to Mrs. Sczura's, where he inquired for her roomer. The good woman informed him that the man he sought was out, but would surely return shortly, and would he care to wait? He would, he replied grimly. And he did, in Mrs. Sczura's "sitting-room."

Now, it so happened that just about the time he stood at Mrs. Sczura's door, the man for whom he was asking was coming up the street to the house. When he saw his landlady's visitor, he cursed under his breath, and immediately effaced himself from the

scene by stepping behind a convenient tree, where he remained until the big man had entered the house. Then he retreated back down the street and kept well out of sight of the house until after dark.

His room was on the ground floor, and about 9 that night, when there was no one on the street, he returned and entered the room through a window. He struck no light, and moved with extreme caution, being careful to make no noise. He quickly gathered up a few things which he made into a small, compact bundle, slipped out of the window, and keeping carefully in the shadow, left the town and plunged into the darkness of the forest on Chemeketa Mountain.

His many questions regarding the surrounding country had been in the way of providing for just such a contingency as this, and his plans were all formed. As he neared the top of the mountain he paused for a moment to rest, and the thought of the hermit came to him.

With the thought came a grim smile; there was no danger of any interruption as he passed the place now; no, indeed.

Those doddering fools in the village, with their superstitious talk of the "evil eye"! True, the old man's eyes did gleam wickedly, like two coals of fire, when—what was that? Bah! Nerves! Mustn't let this stuff "get his goat." He reached in his pocket for a cigarette—there it was again! Two flaming red eyes in the path ahead of him! Could it be that the old man—no! For God's sake, what was it?

A long, lean, gray phantom shape that advanced slowly, noiselessly, down the trail; and with his blood turning to ice in his veins he saw coming slowly toward him a great wolf-dog, larger than any he had ever seen, with foam-flecked jaws and an almost human expression of malevolent triumph in the creature's blazing eyes. And the gleaming eyes and snarling lips, God help him, were those of the Hermit of Chemeketa Mountain!

As he stared, paralyzed with terror, the brute was joined by two others; they were possibly not quite so large as their apparent leader, but they were every bit as awe-inspiring. Together the three advanced, silently, noiselessly, and in their relentless approach the shrinking fugitive read his doom as surely as if it were written with letters of fire against the blackness of the forest.

In frantic terror he suddenly whipped out a revolver and emptied it in the direction of the approaching brutes. The six shots had no effect whatever, and with a despairing curse that was half a shriek of terror he flung the gun at them, and turned and fled at full speed back through the forest toward the village. And following him in a noiseless, effortless lope that slowly, surely lessened the distance between them, the three phantom hounds relentlessly held the trail.

About midnight the big stranger who waited in Mrs. Sczura's "sitting-room" made arrangements with that worthy woman for the use of her spare bedroom for the rest of the night.

Came morning, and with it Matt Borlitz, fearfully crossing himself as he told of the hideously mangled body that he had found almost at his door-step. The news soon came to the ears of the big stranger, and he, with a number of the villagers, returned with Borlitz to the little farm at the edge of the wood.

THE body was literally torn to pieces, but identification was not difficult; the man had been a subject of considerable interest in the small community, and his clothing, general build, and other details made recog-

(Continued on page 573)

A Tale of Cesare Borgia

A Dinner at Imola

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

MESSER NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI had just signed his name to a letter to the Ten, when the flap of his tent swung wide in the hand of a lackey, permitting His Highness, the Prince Cesare Borgia, to enter.

"Ah! Excellency." Machiavelli half turned.

"Another letter to the Ten, Messer Machiavelli?" Cesare Borgia shrugged his shoulders. "You keep them well informed as to my movements."

Niccolo Machiavelli made a deprecating gesture. The Borgia prince smiled.

"You had best warn them against guile in their dealings with me, Messer Machiavelli. Florence holds no interest for me—but let them once deceive me, and the Medici rule no longer."

Messer Machiavelli bowed his head. "Florence has no intention, Highness, of going against your wishes. Indeed, she is most anxious to preserve your friendship."

"That will remain as it is, Messer Machiavelli. For the present I have come to ask you to dine with my company on the third night hence. The dinner is in honor of the young Duke Paolo di Colonna."

Messer Machiavelli started. He looked at his host with raised eyebrows. Only yesterday his trusted lackey had informed him of the rumor of a plot against the Borgias, the headquarters of which were in Rome, at the palaces of the Cardinals Orsini and della Rovere. It was rumored, too, that the young Paolo di Colonna was in alliance with this secret revolt, and that he was furthering the cause by sowing the seeds of revolt among the troops in camp at Imola, while at the same time the Duke Giovanni di Orsini was seeking to stir up the Borgia soldiers at Forli. As yet Machiavelli had no knowledge that the prince knew of the affair.

Messer Machiavelli nodded his head. "You honor me," he murmured.

"You will come?"

"With pleasure."

"Very well. We will meet at table, if not before."

The prince signaled to his lackey, who raised the tent flap for his master to take leave of the Florentine envoy. But hardly had the Borgia prince left the tent than Machiavelli gave a quick, short call.

"Giulio!"

From somewhere in the rear of the tent a small, stooped figure arose and stood before Niccolo Machiavelli.

"You called me, Messer Machiavelli?"

"You heard the Borgia?" The figure nodded. "It is well. You will follow him continually until the third night hence." The lackey laughed silently. He nodded. "At the third night, report here before dinner."

The lackey nodded quickly again, and without a word vanished into the interior of the tent, to emerge in the gathering darkness at its back within the minute. Messer Niccolo Machi-

avelli yawned, and gazed speculatively at the hour-glass on his table.

AT THE hour before dinner on the third night, Messer Machiavelli was startled out of his revery by the sudden appearance of his lackey, Giulio.

"He visited at Luigi Reni's," said Giulio abruptly.

"And this Reni?" queried Machiavelli with arched brows.

"Is a magician," answered Giulio suggestively.

"Ah! And what did the Borgia there?"

"He brought with him and left at Reni's a small portrait of the Duke Paolo di Colonna. That was yesterday. Today he went again, and the portrait was returned to him, together with a large package. This package contained, I have made certain, numerous curiously wrought candles for the table tonight."

"That is all?"

"Other than that is of no account. The Borgia prince attended to the usual matters of his troops."

Messer Machiavelli toyed with a quill on his table. "What make you of the candles, Giulio?" he asked.

The lackey smiled suggestively. He hunched his shoulders and spread his hands in an empty gesture.

"Who knows?" he said. "The Borgia takes a portrait of his enemy to a magician, and receives at its return a packet of wax candles. It is said that if one burns a wax effigy of one's foe, made according to certain secret formulas, or if one pierces it to the heart, the model dies."

Messer Machiavelli pondered a space. "How many figures are needed? How many must be burned to rid oneself of an enemy?"

"But one, Excellency. But Cesare is a true Borgia. His resources know no end."

Messer Machiavelli nodded. "It is good work, Giulio; I shall not forget it."

The lackey bowed and vanished in the shadows at the rear of the tent. Messer Machiavelli rose and donned a great cloak. He raised the flap of his tent and looked out at the cloudless sky. Far away, on the horizon toward the east, the full moon was just rising above the hills, and from the marshlands to the west thin wisps of vapor were moving toward the camp. Messer Machiavelli glanced dubiously at the hour-glass on the table, saw that the sand had passed the half-hour, and slipped out of his tent.

AT THE banquet hall the young Paolo di Colonna was the center of a boisterous crowd. Cesare Borgia stood some distance away from him, and was the first to greet the Florentine envoy at his arrival. Messer Machiavelli sought vainly for some trace, some premonition on the inscrutable face of his host; there was naught save a sardonic smile. Messer Machiavelli was uneasy; he bethought himself of the pending alliance between the Council of Ten and di Colonna. He resolved to keep a watchful eye on the Borgia ring, which he knew served as a container for the white powder that Cesare had once shown him. He had often been told that for the Borgia prince to open this ring meant instant death for someone.

Messer Machiavelli moved somewhat closer to the table, the better to observe what Cesare Borgia was occupied with. He gave an involuntary start when he noticed that the prince himself was distributing before the places at table the carven candles that he had received from the magician, Reni. He sought out the place reserved for the prince, and found it quickly by the banner of the Bull draped over the back of the chair. Directly opposite this chair stood one marked with the arms of di Colonna. Messer Machiavelli's eyes strayed unconsciously to the wax figure before his own plate, set at the

arms of the Medici. The figure was merely a replica of a trooper, and so, Messer Machiavelli saw, were many of the others. Some were copies of kings or princes, others of dukes or barons. As his eyes stole down the line of figures, Messer Machiavelli found himself curiously attracted by one, slightly larger than the rest, that bore a suspicious resemblance to someone he knew. He looked at the chair; it was the chair of Paolo di Colonna, and the figure was an exact replica of the young duke.

The strident voice of Cesare Borgia interrupted Messer Machiavelli's thoughts, calling him to table. Some of the young officers were already seated. Smiling inwardly, Machiavelli noticed that the Duke Paolo di Colonna had brought his taster with him; so, he saw, had several of the noblemen who were known to be in sympathy with Borgia enemies.

The dinner progressed smoothly—much too smoothly, Messer Machiavelli thought. Cesare Borgia, as host, discoursed volubly on many subjects, and he did not lack those to argue with him.

During the entire meal the prince had not once touched his ring. Now, toward the end of the meal, the prince indicated by example that his guests were to light the candles at their plates with tapers that had been furnished. Hardly had this been done, than, to the amazement of all present, Cesare Borgia abruptly changed the conversation.

"It is generally known, I believe, that there is a conspiracy now stirring in Rome." The prince looked casually over at the Duke Paolo di Colonna; the duke paled. "Its leaders have been determined, and unless all plans are immediately surrendered to the papal government, they and their estates will be seized and confiscated by His Holiness, Alexander VI. The Cardinals Orsini and della Rovere are heading this move, and there is talk of allying the rebellious Colonna faction——"

The prince was interrupted by a hoarse scream from the Duke Paolo di Colonna, who had half risen from his chair and was clawing at his collar.

"I am burning," he shrieked, and fell toward the table.

A lackey hastily ran to aid him, and in a loud voice Cesare Borgia summoned his physician. Then he crossed around the table and supported the young duke until the doctor came. When at last he entered, the prince gave an order for the duke's removal to his own chamber, aiding the physician and two lackeys to carry the duke to the door of the hall.

Cesare Borgia returned to the table outwardly calm; all about him hummed excited whispers. Many of the soldiers looked questioningly at the duke's taster standing unharmed behind the empty chair. The prince reopened the conversation, and continued to speak until he saw that the flame of di Colonna's candle had burned out. Then he stopped abruptly, and Messer Machiavelli caught him glancing toward the door. At the same moment the curtains at the end of the hall were thrust aside, and the prince's physician ran into the room. He bowed and spoke.

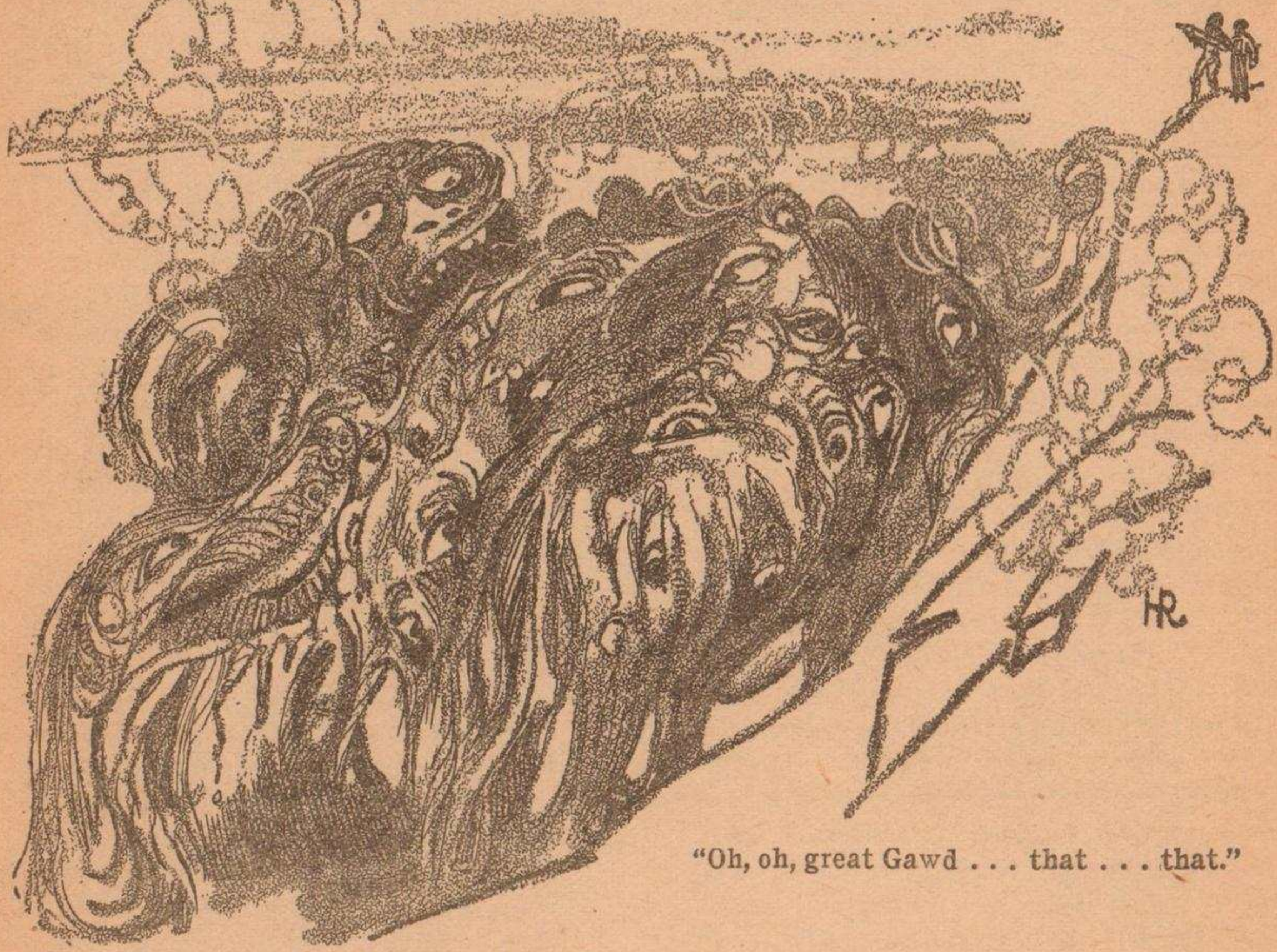
"Highness," he said simply, "the Duke Paolo di Colonna is dead of an unknown illness."

The prince nodded his head and opened his lips. "It is unfortunate; but as God wills, so shall it be."

Without further comment he again opened the subject of the Orsini conspiracy.

The Dunwich Horror

by H. P. LOVECRAFT



"Oh, oh, great Gawd . . . that . . . that."

"Gorgons, and Hydras, and Chimeras—dire stories of Celæno and the Harpies—may reproduce themselves in the brain of superstition—*but they were there before.* They are transcripts, types—the archetypes are in us, and eternal. How else should the recital of that which we know in a waking sense to be false come to affect us at all? Is it that we naturally conceive terror from such objects, considered in their capacity of being able to inflict upon us bodily injury? Oh, least of all! *These terrors are of older standing. They date beyond body* —or without the body, they would have been the same. . . . That the kind of fear here treated is purely spiritual—that it is strong in proportion as it is objectless on earth, that it predominates in the period of our sinless infancy—are difficulties the solution of which might afford some probable insight into our ante-mundane condition, and a peep at least into the shadowland of preexistence."—Charles Lamb: *Witches and Other Night-Fears.*

1

WHEN a traveler in north central Massachusetts takes the wrong fork at the junction of the Aylesbury pike just beyond Dean's Corners he comes upon a lonely and curious country. The ground gets higher, and the brier-bordered stone walls press closer and closer against the ruts of the dusty, curving road. The trees of the frequent forest belts seem too large, and the wild weeds, brambles, and grasses attain a luxuriance not often found in settled regions. At the same time the planted fields appear singularly few and barren; while the sparsely scattered houses wear a surprizing uniform aspect of age, squalor, and dilapidation. Without knowing why, one hesitates

to ask directions from the gnarled, solitary figures spied now and then on crumbling doorsteps or in the sloping, rock-strown meadows. Those figures are so silent and furtive that one feels somehow confronted by forbidden things, with which it would be better to have nothing to do. When a rise in the road brings the mountains in view above the deep woods, the feeling of strange uneasiness is increased. The summits are too rounded and symmetrical to give a sense of comfort and naturalness, and sometimes the sky silhouettes with especial clearness the queer circles of tall stone pillars with which most of them are crowned.

Gorges and ravines of problematical depth intersect the way, and the crude wooden bridges always seem of dubious safety. When the road dips again there are stretches of marshland that one instinctively dislikes, and indeed almost fears at evening when unseen whippoorwills chatter and the fireflies come out in abnormal profusion to dance to the raucous, creepily insistent rhythms of stridently piping bullfrogs. The thin, shining line of the Miskatonic's upper reaches has an oddly serpentlike suggestion as it winds close to the feet of the domed hills among which it rises.

As the hills draw nearer, one heeds their wooded sides more than their stone-crowned tops. Those sides loom up so darkly and precipitously that one wishes they would keep their distance, but there is no road by which to escape them. Across a covered bridge one sees a small village huddled between the stream and the vertical slope of Round Mountain, and wonders at the cluster of rotting gambrel roofs bespeaking an earlier architectural period than that of the neighboring region. It is not reassuring to see, on a closer glance, that most of the houses are deserted and falling to ruin, and that the broken-steepled church now harbors the one slovenly mercantile establishment of the hamlet. One dreads to trust the tenebrous tunnel of the bridge, yet there is no way to avoid it. Once across, it is hard to prevent the impression of a faint, malign odor about the village street, as of the massed mold and decay of centuries. It is always a relief to get clear of the place, and to follow the narrow road around the base of the hills and across the level country beyond till it rejoins the Aylesbury pike. Afterward one sometimes learns that one has been through Dunwich.

Outsiders visit Dunwich as seldom as possible, and since a certain season of horror all the signboards pointing toward it have been taken down. The scenery, judged by any ordinary esthetic canon, is more than commonly beautiful; yet there is no influx of artists or summer tourists. Two centuries ago, when talk of witch-blood, Satan-worship, and strange forest presences was not laughed at, it was the custom to give reasons for avoiding the locality. In our sensible age—since the Dunwich horror of 1928 was hushed up by those who had the town's and the world's welfare at heart—people shun it without knowing exactly why. Perhaps one reason—though it can not apply to uninformed strangers—is that the natives are now repellently decadent, having gone far along that path of retrogression so common in many New England backwaters. They have come to form a race by themselves, with the well-defined mental and physical stigmata of degeneracy and inbreeding. The average of their intelligence is wofully low, whilst their annals reek of overt viciousness and of half-hidden murders, incests, and deeds of almost unnamable violence and perversity. The old gentry, representing the two or three armigerous families which came from Salem in 1692, have kept somewhat above the general level of decay; though many branches are sunk into the sordid populace so deeply that only their names remain as a key to the origin they disgrace. Some

of the Whateleys and Bishops still send their eldest sons to Harvard and Miskatonic, though those sons seldom return to the moldering gambrel roofs under which they and their ancestors were born.

No one, even those who have the facts concerning the recent horror, can say just what is the matter with Dunwich; though old legends speak of unhallowed rites and conclaves of the Indians, amidst which they called forbidden shapes of shadow out of the great rounded hills, and made wild orgiastic prayers that were answered by loud crackings and rumblings from the ground below. In 1747 the Reverend Abijah Hoadley, newly come to the Congregational Church at Dunwich Village, preached a memorable sermon on the close presence of Satan and his imps, in which he said:

> It must be allow'd that these Blasphemies of an infernall Train of Dæmons are Matters of too common Knowledge to be deny'd; the cursed Voices of *Azazel* and *Buzrael*, of *Beelzebub* and *Belial*, being heard from under Ground by above a Score of credible Witnesses now living. I myself did not more than a Fortnight ago catch a very plain Discourse of evill Powers in the Hill behind my House; wherein there were a Rattling and Rolling, Groaning, Screeching, and Hissing, such as no Things of this Earth cou'd raise up, and which must needs have come from those Caves that only black Magick can discover, and only the Divell unlock.

Mr. Hoadley disappeared soon after delivering this sermon; but the text, printed in Springfield, is still extant. Noises in the hills continued to be reported from year to year, and still form a puzzle to geologists and physiographers.

Other traditions tell of foul odors near the hill-crowning circles of stone pillars, and of rushing airy presences to be heard faintly at certain hours from stated points at the bottom of the great ravines; while still others try to explain the Devil's Hop Yard—a bleak, blasted hillside where no tree, shrub, or grass-blade will grow. Then, too, the natives are mortally afraid of the numerous whippoorwills which grow vocal on warm nights. It is vowed that the birds are psychopomps lying in wait for the souls of the dying, and that they time their eery cries in unison with the sufferer's struggling breath. If they can catch the fleeing soul when it leaves the body, they instantly flutter away chittering in demoniac laughter; but if they fail, they subside gradually into a disappointed silence.

These tales, of course, are obsolete and ridiculous; because they come down from very old times. Dunwich is indeed ridiculously old—older by far than any of the communities within thirty miles of it. South of the village one may still spy the cellar walls and chimney of the ancient Bishop house, which was built before 1700; whilst the ruins of the mill at the falls, built in 1806, form the most modern piece of architecture to be seen. Industry did not flourish here, and the Nineteenth Century factory movement proved short-lived. Oldest of all are the great rings of rough-hewn stone columns on the hilltops, but these are more generally attributed to the Indians than to the settlers. Deposits of skulls and bones, found within these circles and around the sizable table-like rock on Sentinel Hill, sustain the popular belief that such spots were once the burial-places of the Pocumtucks; even though many ethnologists, disregarding the absurd improbability of such a theory, persist in believing the remains Caucasian.

2

It was in the township of Dunwich, in a large and partly inhabited farmhouse set against a hillside four miles from the village and a mile and a half from any other dwelling, that Wilbur Whateley was born at 5 a. m. on Sunday, the second of February, 1913. This date was recalled because it was Candlemas, which people in Dunwich curiously observe under an-

other name; and because the noises in the hills had sounded, and all the dogs of the countryside had barked persistently, throughout the night before. Less worthy of notice was the fact that the mother was one of the decadent Whateleys, a somewhat deformed, unattractive albino woman of 35, living with an aged and half-insane father about whom the most frightful tales of wizardry had been whispered in his youth. Lavinia Whateley had no known husband, but according to the custom of the region made no attempt to disavow the child; concerning the other side of whose ancestry the country folk might —and did—speculate as widely as they chose. On the contrary, she seemed strangely proud of the dark, goatish-looking infant who formed such a contrast to her own sickly and pink-eyed albinism, and was heard to mutter many curious prophecies about its unusual powers and tremendous future.

Lavinia was one who would be apt to mutter such things, for she was a lone creature given to wandering amidst thunderstorms in the hills and trying to read the great odorous books which her father had inherited through two centuries of Whateleys, and which were fast falling to pieces with age and worm-holes. She had never been to school, but was filled with disjointed scraps of ancient lore that Old Whateley had taught her. The remote farmhouse had always been feared because of Old Whateley's reputation for black magic, and the unexplained death by violence of Mrs. Whateley when Lavinia was twelve years old had not helped to make the place popular. Isolated among strange influences, Lavinia was fond of wild and grandiose day-dreams and singular occupations; nor was her leisure much taken up by household cares in a home from which all standards of order and cleanliness had long since disappeared.

There was a hideous screaming which echoed above even the hill noises and the dogs' barking on the night Wilbur was born, but no known doctor or midwife presided at his coming. Neighbors knew nothing of him till a week afterward, when Old Whateley drove his sleigh through the snow into Dunwich Village and discoursed incoherently to the group of loungers at Osborn's general store. There seemed to be a change in the old man—an added element of furtiveness in the clouded brain which subtly transformed him from an object to a subject of fear—though he was not one to be perturbed by any common family event. Amidst it all he showed some trace of the pride later noticed in his daughter, and what he said of the child's paternity was remembered by many of his hearers years afterward.

"I dun't keer what folks think—ef Lavinny's boy looked like his pa, he wouldn't look like nothin' ye expeck. Ye needn't think the only folks is the folks hereabouts. Lavinny's read some, an' has seed some things the most o' ye only tell abaout. I calc'late her man is as good a husban' as ye kin find this side of Aylesbury; an' ef ye knowed as much abaout the hills as I dew, ye wouldn't ast no better church weddin' nor her'n. Let me tell ye suthin'—*some day yew folks'll hear a child o' Lavinny's a-callin' its father's name on the top o' Sentinel Hill!*"

The only persons who saw Wilbur during the first month of his life were old Zechariah Whateley, of the undecayed Whateleys, and Earl Sawyer's common-law wife, Mamie Bishop. Mamie's visit was frankly one of curiosity, and her subsequent tales did justice to her observations; but Zechariah came to lead a pair of Alderney cows which Old Whateley had bought of his son Curtis. This marked the beginning of a course of cattle-buying on the part of small Wilbur's family which ended only in 1928, when the Dunwich horror came

and went; yet at no time did the ramshackle Whateley barn seem overcrowded with livestock. There came a period when people were curious enough to steal up and count the herd that grazed precariously on the steep hillside above the old farmhouse, and they could never find more than ten or twelve anemic, bloodless-looking specimens. Evidently some blight or distemper, perhaps sprung from the unwholesome pasturage or the diseased fungi and timbers of the filthy barn, caused a heavy mortality amongst the Whateley animals. Odd wounds or sores, having something of the aspect of incisions, seemed to afflict the visible cattle; and once or twice during the earlier months certain callers fancied they could discern similar sores about the throats of the gray, unshaven old man and his slatternly, crinkly-haired albino daughter.

In the spring after Wilbur's birth Lavinia resumed her customary rambles in the hills, bearing in her misproportioned arms the swarthy child. Public interest in the Whateleys subsided after most of the country folk had seen the baby, and no one bothered to comment on the swift development which that newcomer seemed every day to exhibit. Wilbur's growth was indeed phenomenal, for within three months of his birth he had attained a size and muscular power not usually found in infants under a full year of age. His motions and even his vocal sounds showed a restraint and deliberateness highly peculiar in an infant, and no one was really unprepared when, at seven months, he began to walk unassisted, with falterings which another month was sufficient to remove.

It was somewhat after this time—on Hallowe'en—that a great blaze was seen at midnight on the top of Sentinel Hill where the old table-like stone stands amidst its tumulus of ancient bones. Considerable talk was started when Silas Bishop—of the undecayed Bishops—mentioned having seen the boy running sturdily up that hill ahead of his mother about an hour before the blaze was remarked. Silas was rounding up a stray heifer, but he nearly forgot his mission when he fleetingly spied the two figures in the dim light of his lantern. They darted almost noiselessly through the underbrush, and the astonished watcher seemed to think they were entirely unclothed. Afterward he could not be sure about the boy, who may have had some kind of a fringed belt and a pair of dark blue trunks or trousers on. Wilbur was never subsequently seen alive and conscious without complete and tightly buttoned attire, the disarrangement or threatened disarrangement of which always seemed to fill him with anger and alarm. His contrast with his squalid mother and grandfather in this respect was thought very notable until the horror of 1928 suggested the most valid of reasons.

The next January gossips were mildly interested in the fact that "Lavinny's black brat" had commenced to talk, and at the age of only eleven months. His speech was somewhat remarkable both because of its difference from the ordinary accents of the region, and because it displayed a freedom from infantile lisping of which many children of three or four might well be proud. The boy was not talkative, yet when he spoke he seemed to reflect some elusive element wholly unpossessed by Dunwich and its denizens. The strangeness did not reside in what he said, or even in the simple idioms he used; but seemed vaguely linked with his intonation or with the internal organs that produced the spoken sounds. His facial aspect, too, was remarkable for its maturity; for though he shared his mother's and grandfather's chinlessness, his firm and precociously shaped nose united with the expression on his large, dark, almost Latin eyes to give him an air of quasi-adulthood and well-nigh preternatural intelligence.

He was, however, exceedingly ugly despite his appearance of brilliancy; there being something almost goatish or animalistic about his thick lips, large-pored, yellowish skin, coarse crinkly hair, and oddly elongated ears. He was soon disliked even more decidedly than his mother and grandsire, and all conjectures about him were spiced with references to the bygone magic of Old Whateley, and how the hills once shook when he shrieked the dreadful name of *Yog-Sothoth* in the midst of a circle of stones with a great book open in his arms before him. Dogs abhorred the boy, and he was always obliged to take various defensive measures against their barking menace.

3

MEANWHILE Old Whateley continued to buy cattle without measurably increasing the size of his herd. He also cut timber and began to repair the unused parts of his house—a spacious, peaked-roofed affair whose rear end was buried entirely in the rocky hillside, and whose three least-ruined ground-floor rooms had always been sufficient for himself and his daughter. There must have been prodigious reserves of strength in the old man to enable him to accomplish so much hard labor; and though he still babbled dementedly at times, his carpentry seemed to show the effects of sound calculation. It had really begun as soon as Wilbur was born, when one of the many tool sheds had been put suddenly in order, clapboarded, and fitted with a stout fresh lock. Now, in restoring the abandoned upper story of the house, he was a no less thorough craftsman. His mania showed itself only in his tight boarding-up of all the windows in the reclaimed section—though many declared that it was a crazy thing to bother with the reclamation at all. Less inexplicable was his fitting-up of another downstairs room for his new grandson—a room which several callers saw, though no one was ever admitted to the closely-boarded upper story. This chamber he lined with tall, firm shelving; along which he began gradually to arrange, in apparently careful order, all the rotting ancient books and parts of books which during his own day had been heaped promiscuously in odd corners of the various rooms.

"I made some use of 'em," he would say as he tried to mend a torn black-letter page with paste prepared on the rusty kitchen stove, "but the boy's fitten to make better use of 'em. He'd orter hev 'em as well sot as he kin, for they're goin' to be all of his larnin'."

When Wilbur was a year and seven months old—in September of 1914—his size and accomplishments were almost alarming. He had grown as large as a child of four, and was a fluent and incredibly intelligent talker. He ran freely about the fields and hills, and accompanied his mother on all her wanderings. At home he would pore diligently over the queer pictures and charts in his grandfather's books, while Old Whateley would instruct and catechize him through long, hushed afternoons. By this time the restoration of the house was finished, and those who watched it wondered why one of the upper windows had been made into a solid plank door. It was a window in the rear of the east gable end, close against the hill; and no one could imagine why a cleated wooden runway was built up to it from the ground. About the period of this work's completion people noticed that the old tool-house, tightly locked and windowlessly clapboarded since Wilbur's birth, had been abandoned again. The door swung listlessly open, and when Earl Sawyer once stepped within after a cattle-selling call on Old Whateley he was quite discomposed by the singular odor he encountered—such a stench, he averred, as he had never before smelt in all his

life except near the Indian circles on the hills, and which could not come from anything sane or of this earth. But then, the homes and sheds of Dunwich folk have never been remarkable for olfactory immaculateness.

The following months were void of visible events, save that everyone swore to a slow but steady increase in the mysterious hill noises. On May Eve of 1915 there were tremors which even the Aylesbury people felt, whilst the following Hallowe'en produced an underground rumbling queerly synchronized with bursts of flame—"them witch Whateleys' doin's"—from the summit of Sentinel Hill. Wilbur was growing up uncannily, so that he looked like a boy of ten as he entered his fourth year. He read avidly by himself now; but talked much less than formerly. A settled taciturnity was absorbing him, and for the first time people began to speak specifically of the dawning look of evil in his goatish face. He would sometimes mutter an unfamiliar jargon, and chant in bizarre rhythms which chilled the listener with a sense of unexplainable terror. The aversion displayed toward him by dogs had now become a matter of wide remark, and he was obliged to carry a pistol in order to traverse the countryside in safety. His occasional use of the weapon did not enhance his popularity amongst the owners of canine guardians.

The few callers at the house would often find Lavinia alone on the ground floor, while odd cries and footsteps resounded in the boarded-up second story. She would never tell what her father and the boy were doing up there, though once she turned pale and displayed an abnormal degree of fear when a jocose fish-peddler tried the locked door leading to the stairway. That peddler told the store loungers at Dunwich Village that he thought he heard a horse stamping on that floor above. The loungers reflected, thinking of the door and runway, and of the cattle that so swiftly disappeared. Then they shuddered as they recalled tales of Old Whateley's youth, and of the strange things that are called out of the earth when a bullock is sacrificed at the proper time to certain heathen gods. It had for some time been noticed that dogs had begun to hate and fear the whole Whateley place as violently as they hated and feared young Wilbur personally.

In 1917 the war came, and Squire Sawyer Whateley, as chairman of the local draft board, had hard work finding a quota of young Dunwich men fit even to be sent to a development camp. The government, alarmed at such signs of wholesale regional decadence, sent several officers and medical experts to investigate; conducting a survey which New England newspaper readers may still recall. It was the publicity attending this investigation which set reporters on the track of the Whateleys, and caused the *Boston Globe* and *Arkham Advertiser* to print flamboyant Sunday stories of young Wilbur's precociousness, Old Whateley's black magic, the shelves of strange books, the sealed second story of the ancient farmhouse, and the weirdness of the whole region and its hill noises. Wilbur was four and a half then, and looked like a lad of fifteen. His lip and cheek were fuzzy with a coarse dark down, and his voice had begun to break. Earl Sawyer went out to the Whateley place with both sets of reporters and camera men, and called their attention to the queer stench which now seemed to trickle down from the sealed upper spaces. It was, he said, exactly like a smell he had found in the tool-shed abandoned when the house was finally repaired, and like the faint odors which he sometimes thought he caught near the stone circles on the mountains. Dunwich folk read the stories when they appeared, and grinned over the obvious

mistakes. They wondered, too, why the writers made so much of the fact that Old Whateley always paid for his cattle in gold pieces of extremely ancient date. The Whateleys had received their visitors with ill-concealed distaste, though they did not dare court further publicity by a violent resistance or refusal to talk.

4

For a decade the annals of the Whateleys sink indistinguishably into the general life of a morbid community used to their queer ways and hardened to their May Eve and All-Hallow orgies. Twice a year they would light fires on the top of Sentinel Hill, at which times the mountain rumblings would recur with greater and greater violence; while at all seasons there were strange and portentous doings at the lonely farmhouse. In the course of time callers professed to hear sounds in the sealed upper story even when all the family were downstairs, and they wondered how swiftly or how lingeringly a cow or bullock was usually sacrificed. There was talk of a complaint to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; but nothing ever came of it, since Dunwich folk are never anxious to call the outside world's attention to themselves.

About 1923, when Wilbur was a boy of ten whose mind, voice, stature, and bearded face gave all the impressions of maturity, a second great siege of carpentry went on at the old house. It was all inside the sealed upper part, and from bits of discarded lumber people concluded that the youth and his grandfather had knocked out all the partitions and even removed the attic floor, leaving only one vast open void between the ground story and the peaked roof. They had torn down the great central chimney, too, and fitted the rusty range with a flimsy outside tin stovepipe.

In the spring after this event Old Whateley noticed the growing number of whippoorwills that would come out of Cold Spring Glen to chirp under his window at night. He seemed to regard the circumstance as one of great significance, and told the loungers at Osborn's that he thought his time had almost come.

"They whistle jest in tune with my breathin' naow," he said, "an' I guess they're gittin' ready to ketch my soul. They know it's a-goin" aout, an' dun't calc'late to miss it. Yew'll know, boys, arter I'm gone, whether they git me er not. Ef they dew, they'll keep up a-singin' an' laffin' till break o' day. Ef they dun't, they'll kinder quiet daown like. I expeck them an' the souls they hunts fer hev some pretty tough tussles sometimes."

On Lammas Night, 1924, Dr. Houghton of Aylesbury was hastily summoned by Wilbur Whateley, who had lashed his one remaining horse through the darkness and telephoned from Osborn's in the village. He found Old Whateley in a very grave state, with a cardiac action and stertorous breathing that told of an end not far off. The shapeless albino daughter and oddly bearded grandson stood by the bedside, whilst from the vacant abyss overhead there came a disquieting suggestion of rhythmical surging or lapping, as of the waves on some level beach. The doctor, though, was chiefly disturbed by the chattering night birds outside; a seemingly limitless legion of whippoorwills that cried their endless message in repetitions timed diabolically to the wheezing gasps of the dying man. It was uncanny and unnatural—too much, thought Dr. Houghton, like the whole of the region he had entered so reluctantly in response to the urgent call.

Toward 1 o'clock Old Whateley gained consciousness, and interrupted his wheezing to choke out a few words to his grandson.

"More space, Willy, more space soon. Yew grows—an' *that* grows faster. It'll be ready to sarve ye soon, boy. Open up the gates to Yog-Sothoth with the long chant that ye'll find on page 751 *of the complete edition,* an' *then* put a match to the prison. Fire from airth can't burn it nohaow!"

He was obviously quite mad. After a pause, during which the flock of whippoorwills outside adjusted their cries to the altered tempo while some indications of the strange hill noises came from afar off, he added another sentence or two.

"Feed it reg'lar, Willy, an' mind the quantity; but dun't let it grow too fast fer the place, fer ef it busts quarters or gits aout afore ye opens to Yog-Sothoth, it's all over an' no use. Only them from beyont kin make it multiply an' work. . . . Only them, the old uns as wants to come back. . . ."

But speech gave place to gasps again, and Lavinia screamed at the way the whippoorwills followed the change. It was the same for more than an hour, when the final throaty rattle came. Dr. Houghton drew shrunken lids over the glazing gray eyes as the tumult of birds faded imperceptibly to silence. Lavinia sobbed, but Wilbur only chuckled whilst the hill noises rumbled faintly.

"They didn't git him," he muttered in his heavy bass voice.

Wilbur was by this time a scholar of really tremendous erudition in his one-sided way, and was quietly known by correspondence to many librarians in distant places where rare and forbidden books of old days are kept. He was more and more hated and dreaded around Dunwich because of certain youthful disappearances which suspicion laid vaguely at his door; but was always able to silence inquiry through fear or through use of that fund of old-time gold which still, as in his grandfather's time, went forth regularly and increasingly for cattle-buying. He was now tremendously mature of aspect, and his height, having reached the normal adult limit, seemed inclined to wax beyond that figure. In 1925, when a scholarly correspondent from Miskatonic University called upon him one day and departed pale and puzzled, he was fully six and three-quarters feet tall.

Through all the years Wilbur had treated his half-deformed albino mother with a growing contempt, finally forbidding her to go to the hills with him on May Eve and Hallowmass; and in 1926 the poor creature complained to Mamie Bishop of being afraid of him.

"They's more abaout him as I knows than I kin tell ye, Mamie," she said, "an' naowadays they's more nor what I know myself. I vaow afur Gawd, I dun't know what he wants nor what he's a-tryin' to dew."

That Hallowe'en the hill noises sounded louder than ever, and fire burned on Sentinel Hill as usual, but people paid more attention to the rhythmical screaming of vast flocks of unnaturally belated whippoorwills which seemed to be assembled near the unlighted Whateley farmhouse. After midnight their shrill notes burst into a kind of pandemoniac cachinnation which filled all the countryside, and not until dawn did they finally quiet down. Then they vanished, hurrying southward where they were fully a month overdue. What this meant, no one could quite be certain till later. None of the countryfolk seemed to have died—but poor Lavinia Whateley, the twisted albino, was never seen again.

In the summer of 1927 Wilbur repaired two sheds in the farmyard and began moving his books and effects out to them. Soon afterward Earl Sawyer told the loungers at Osborn's that more carpentry was going on in the Whateley farmhouse. Wilbur was closing all the doors and windows on the ground floor, and seemed to be taking out partitions as

he and his grandfather had done upstairs four years before. He was living in one of the sheds, and Sawyer thought he seemed unusually worried and tremulous. People generally suspected him of knowing something about his mother's disappearance, and very few ever approached his neighborhood now. His height had increased to more than seven feet, and showed no signs of ceasing its development.

5

The following winter brought an event no less strange than Wilbur's first trip outside the Dunwich region. Correspondence with the Widener Library at Harvard, the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, the British Museum, the University of Buenos Aires, and the Library of Miskatonic University at Arkham had failed to get him the loan of a book he desperately wanted; so at length he set out in person, shabby, dirty, bearded, and uncouth of dialect, to consult the copy at Miskatonic, which was the nearest to him geographically. Almost eight feet tall, and carrying a cheap new valise from Osborn's general store, this dark and goatish gargoyle appeared one day in Arkham in quest of the dreaded volume kept under lock and key at the college library—the hideous *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Alhazred in Olaus Wormius' Latin version, as printed in Spain in the Seventeenth Century. He had never seen a city before, but had no thought save to find his way to the university grounds; where, indeed, he passed heedlessly by the great white-fanged watchdog that barked with unnatural fury and enmity, and tugged frantically at its stout chain.

Wilbur had with him the priceless but imperfect copy of Dr. Dee's English version which his grandfather had bequeathed him, and upon receiving access to the Latin copy he at once began to collate the two texts with the aim of discovering a certain passage which would have come on the 751st page of his own defective volume. This much he could not civilly refrain from telling the librarian—the same erudite Henry Armitage (A. M. Miskatonic, Ph. D. Princeton, Litt. D. Johns Hopkins) who had once called at the farm, and who now politely plied him with questions. He was looking, he had to admit, for a kind of formula or incantation containing the frightful name *Yog-Sothoth*, and it puzzled him to find discrepancies, duplications, and ambiguities which made the matter of determination far from easy. As he copied the formula he finally chose, Dr. Armitage looked involuntarily over his shoulder at the open pages; the left-hand one of which, in the Latin version, contained such monstrous threats to the peace and sanity of the world.

Nor is it to be thought [ran the text as Armitage mentally translated it] that man is either the oldest or the last of earth's masters, or that the common bulk of life and substance walks alone. The Old Ones were, the Old Ones are, and the Old Ones shall be. Not in the spaces we know, but *between* them. They walk serene and primal, undimensioned and to us unseen. *Yog-Sothoth* knows the gate. *Yog-Sothoth* is the gate. *Yog-Sothoth* is the key and guardian of the gate. Past, present, future, all are one in *Yog-Sothoth*. He knows where the Old Ones broke through of old, and where They shall break through again. He knows where They have trod earth's fields, and where They still tread them, and why no one can behold Them as They tread. By Their smell can men sometimes know Them near, but of Their semblance can no man know, *saving only in the features of those They have begotten on mankind;* and of those are there many sorts, differing in likeness from man's truest eidolon to that shape without sight or substance which is *They*. They walk unseen and foul in lonely places where the Words have been spoken and the Rites howled through at their Seasons. The wind gibbers with Their voices, and the earth mutters with Their consciousness. They bend the forest and crush the city, yet may not forest or city behold the hand that smites. Kadath in the cold waste hath known Them, and what man knows Kadath? The ice desert of the South and the sunken isles of Ocean hold stones

whereon Their seal is engraven, but who hath seen the deep frozen city or the sealed tower long garlanded with seaweed and barnacles? Great Cthulhu is Their cousin, yet can he spy Them only dimly. *Iä Shub-Niggurath!* As a foulness shall ye know Them. Their hand is at your throats, yet ye see Them not; and Their habitation is even one with your guarded threshold. *Yog-Sothoth* is the key to the gate, whereby the spheres meet. Man rules now where They ruled once; They shall soon rule where man rules now. After summer is winter, and after winter summer. They wait patient and potent, for here shall They reign again.

Dr. Armitage, associating what he was reading with what he had heard of Dunwich and its brooding presences, and of Wilbur Whateley and his dim, hideous aura that stretched from a dubious birth to a cloud of probable matricide, felt a wave of fright as tangible as a draft of the tomb's cold clamminess. The bent, goatish giant before him seemed like the spawn of another planet or dimension; like something only partly of mankind, and linked to black gulfs of essence and entity that stretch like titan fantasms beyond all spheres of force and matter, space and time.

Presently Wilbur raised his head and began speaking in that strange, resonant fashion which hinted at sound-producing organs unlike the run of mankind's.

"Mr. Armitage," he said, "I calc'late I've got to take that book home. They's things in it I've got to try under sarten conditions that I can't git here, an' it 'ud be a mortal sin to let a red-tape rule hold me up. Let me take it along, sir, an' I'll swar they wun't nobody know the difference. I dun't need to tell ye I'll take good keer of it. It wa'n't me that put this Dee copy in the shape it is. . . ."

He stopped as he saw firm denial on the librarian's face, and his own goatish features grew crafty. Armitage, half ready to tell him he might make a copy of what parts he needed, thought suddenly of the possible consequences and checked himself. There was too much responsibility in giving such a being the key to such blasphemous outer spheres. Whateley saw how things stood, and tried to answer lightly.

"Wal, all right, ef ye feel that way abaout it. Maybe Harvard wun't be so fussy as yew be." And without saying more he rose and strode out of the building, stooping at each doorway.

Armitage heard the savage yelping of the great watchdog, and studied Whateley's gorilla-like lope as he crossed the bit of campus visible from the window. He thought of the wild tales he had heard, and recalled the old Sunday stories in the *Advertiser;* these things, and the lore he had picked up from Dunwich rustics and villagers during his one visit there. Unseen things not of earth—or at least not of tri-dimensional earth—rushed fetid and horrible through New England's glens, and brooded obscenely on the mountain tops. Of this he had long felt certain. Now he seemed to sense the close presence of some terrible part of the intruding horror, and to glimpse a hellish advance in the black dominion of the ancient and once passive nightmare. He locked away the *Necronomicon* with a shudder of disgust, but the room still reeked with an unholy and unidentifiable stench. "As a foulness shall ye know them," he quoted. Yes—the odor was the same as that which had sickened him at the Whateley farmhouse less than three years before. He thought of Wilbur, goatish and ominous, once again, and laughed mockingly at the village rumors of his parentage.

"Inbreeding?" Armitage muttered half aloud to himself. "Great God, what simpletons! Show them Arthur Machen's *Great God Pan* and they'll think it a common Dunwich scandal! But what thing—what cursed shapeless influence on or off this three-dimensioned earth—was Wilbur Whateley's father? Born on Candlemas—nine months after May Eve of 1912,

when the talk about the queer earth noises reached clear to Arkham—what walked on the mountains that May Night? What Roodmas horror fastened itself on the world in half-human flesh and blood?"

During the ensuing weeks Dr. Armitage set about to collect all possible data on Wilbur Whateley and the formless presences around Dunwich. He got in communication with Dr. Houghton of Aylesbury, who had attended Old Whateley in his last illness, and found much to ponder over in the grandfather's last words as quoted by the physician. A visit to Dunwich Village failed to bring out much that was new; but a close survey of the *Necronomicon*, in those parts which Wilbur had sought so avidly, seemed to supply new and terrible clues to the nature, methods, and desires of the strange evil so vaguely threatening this planet. Talks with several students of archaic lore in Boston, and letters to many others elsewhere, gave him a growing amazement which passed slowly through varied degrees of alarm to a state of really acute spiritual fear. As the summer drew on he felt dimly that something ought to be done about the lurking terrors of the upper Miskatonic valley, and about the monstrous being known to the human world as Wilbur Whateley.

6

The Dunwich horror itself came between Lammas and the equinox in 1928, and Dr. Armitage was among those who witnessed its monstrous prologue. He had heard, meanwhile, of Whateley's grotesque trip to Cambridge, and of his frantic efforts to borrow or copy from the *Necronomicon* at the Widener Library. Those efforts had been in vain, since Armitage had issued warnings of the keenest intensity to all librarians having charge of the dreaded volume. Wilbur had been shockingly nervous at Cambridge; anxious for the book, yet almost equally anxious to get home again, as if he feared the results of being away long.

Early in August the half-expected outcome developed, and in the small hours of the third Dr. Armitage was awakened suddenly by the wild, fierce cries of the savage watchdog on the college campus. Deep and terrible, the snarling, half-mad growls and barks continued; always in mounting volume, but with hideously significant pauses. Then there rang out a scream from a wholly different throat—such a scream as roused half the sleepers of Arkham and haunted their dreams ever afterward—such a scream as could come from no being born of earth, or wholly of earth.

Armitage hastened into some clothing and rushed across the street and lawn to the college buildings, saw that others were ahead of him; and heard the echoes of a burglar-alarm still shrilling from the library. An open window showed black and gaping in the moonlight. What had come had indeed completed its entrance; for the barking and the screaming, now fast fading into a mixed low growling and moaning, proceeded unmistakably from within. Some instinct warned Armitage that what was taking place was not a thing for unfortified eyes to see, so he brushed back the crowd with authority as he unlocked the vestibule door. Among the others he saw Professor Warren Rice and Dr. Francis Morgan, men to whom he had told some of his conjectures and misgivings; and these two he motioned to accompany him inside. The inward sounds, except for a watchful, droning whine from the dog, had by this time quite subsided; but Armitage now perceived with a sudden start that a loud chorus of whippoorwills among the shrubbery had commenced a damnably rhythmical piping, as if in unison with the last breath of a dying man.

The building was full of a frightful stench which Dr. Armitage knew too

well, and the three men rushed across the hall to the small genealogical reading-room whence the low whining came. For a second nobody dared to turn on the light; then Armitage summoned up his courage and snapped the switch. One of the three—it is not certain which—shrieked aloud at what sprawled before them among disordered tables and overturned chairs. Professor Rice declares that he wholly lost consciousness for an instant, though he did not stumble or fall.

The thing that lay half-bent on its side in a fetid pool of greenish-yellow ichor and tarry stickiness was almost nine feet tall, and the dog had torn off all the clothing and some of the skin. It was not quite dead, but twitched silently and spasmodically while its chest heaved in monstrous unison with the mad piping of the expectant whippoorwills outside. Bits of shoe-leather and fragments of apparel were scattered about the room, and just inside the window an empty canvas sack lay where it had evidently been thrown. Near the central desk a revolver had fallen, a dented but undischarged cartridge later explaining why it had not been fired. The thing itself, however, crowded out all other images at the time. It would be trite and not wholly accurate to say that no human pen could describe it, but one may properly say that it could not be vividly visualized by anyone whose ideas of aspect and contour are too closely bound up with the common life-forms of this planet and of the three known dimensions. It was partly human, beyond a doubt, with very manlike hands and head, and the goatish, chinless face had the stamp of the Whateleys upon it. But the torso and lower parts of the body were teratologically fabulous, so that only generous clothing could ever have enabled it to walk on earth unchallenged or uneradicated.

Above the waist it was semi-anthropomorphic; though its chest, where the dog's rending paws still rested watchfully, had the leathery, reticulated hide of a crocodile or alligator. The back was piebald with yellow and black, and dimly suggested the squamous covering of certain snakes. Below the waist, though, it was the worst; for here all human resemblance left off and sheer fantasy began. The skin was thickly covered with coarse black fur, and from the abdomen a score of long greenish-gray tentacles with red sucking mouths protruded limply. Their arrangement was odd, and seemed to follow the symmetries of some cosmic geometry unknown to earth or the solar system. On each of the hips, deep set in a kind of pinkish, ciliated orbit, was what seemed to be a rudimentary eye; whilst in lieu of a tail there depended a kind of trunk or feeler with purple annular markings, and with many evidences of being an undeveloped mouth or throat. The limbs, save for their black fur, roughly resembled the hind legs of prehistoric earth's giant saurians; and terminated in ridgy-veined pads that were neither hooves nor claws. When the thing breathed, its tail and tentacles rhythmically changed color, as if from some circulatory cause normal to the non-human side of its ancestry. In the tentacles this was observable as a deepening of the greenish tinge, whilst in the tail it was manifest as a yellowish appearance which alternated with a sickly grayish-white in the spaces between the purple rings. Of genuine blood there was none; only the fetid greenish-yellow ichor which trickled along the painted floor beyond the radius of the stickiness, and left a curious discoloration behind it.

As the presence of the three men seemed to rouse the dying thing, it began to mumble without turning or raising its head. Dr. Armitage made no written record of its mouthings, but asserts confidently that nothing in

English was uttered. At first the syllables defied all correlation with any speech of earth, but toward the last there came some disjointed fragments evidently taken from the *Necronomicon*, that monstrous blasphemy in quest of which the thing had perished. Those fragments, as Armitage recalls them, ran something like "*N'gai, n'gha'ghaa, bugg-shoggog, y'hah; Yog-Sothoth, Yog-Sothoth . . .*" They trailed off into nothingness as the whippoorwills shrieked in rhythmical crescendoes of unholy anticipation.

Then came a halt in the gasping, and the dog raised his head in a long, lugubrious howl. A change came over the yellow, goatish face of the prostrate thing, and the great black eyes fell in appallingly. Outside the window the shrilling of the whippoorwills had suddenly ceased, and above the murmurs of the gathering crowd there came the sound of a panic-struck whirring and fluttering. Against the moon vast clouds of feathery watchers rose and raced from sight, frantic at that which they had sought for prey.

All at once the dog started up abruptly, gave a frightened bark, and leaped nervously out the window by which it had entered. A cry rose from the crowd, and Dr. Armitage shouted to the men outside that no one must be admitted till the police or medical examiner came. He was thankful that the windows were just too high to permit of peering in, and drew the dark curtains carefully down over each one. By this time two policemen had arrived; and Dr. Morgan, meeting them in the vestibule, was urging them for their own sakes to postpone entrance to the stench-filled reading-room till the examiner came and the prostrate thing could be covered up.

Meanwhile frightful changes were taking place on the floor. One need not describe the *kind* and *rate* of shrinkage and disintegration that occurred before the eyes of Dr. Armitage and Professor Rice; but it is permissible to say that, aside from the external appearance of face and hands, the really human elements in Wilbur Whateley must have been very small. When the medical examiner came, there was only a sticky whitish mass on the painted boards, and the monstrous odor had nearly disappeared. Apparently Whateley had had no skull or bony skeleton; at least, in any true or stable sense. He had taken somewhat after his unknown father.

7

Yet all this was only the prologue of the actual Dunwich horror. Formalities were gone through by bewildered officials, abnormal details were duly kept from press and public, and men were sent to Dunwich and Aylesbury to look up property and notify any who might be heirs of the late Wilbur Whateley. They found the countryside in great agitation, both because of the growing rumblings beneath the domed hills, and because of the unwonted stench and the surging, lapping sounds which came increasingly from the great empty shell formed by Whateley's boarded-up farmhouse. Earl Sawyer, who tended the horse and cattle during Wilbur's absence, had developed a wofully acute case of nerves. The officials devised excuses not to enter the noisome boarded place; and were glad to confine their survey of the deceased's living quarters, the newly mended sheds, to a single visit. They filed a ponderous report at the courthouse in Aylesbury, and litigations concerning heirship are said to be still in progress amongst the innumerable Whateleys, decayed and undecayed, of the upper Miskatonic valley.

An almost interminable manuscript in strange characters, written in a huge ledger and adjudged a sort of diary because of the spacing and the variations in ink and penmanship, presented a baffling puzzle to those who found it on the old bureau which

served as its owner's desk. After a week of debate it was sent to Miskatonic University, together with the deceased's collection of strange books, for study and possible translation; but even the best linguists soon saw that it was not likely to be unriddled with ease. No trace of the ancient gold with which Wilbur and Old Whateley always paid their debts has yet been discovered.

It was in the dark of September ninth that the horror broke loose. The hill noises had been very pronounced during the evening, and dogs barked frantically all night. Early risers on the tenth noticed a peculiar stench in the air. About 7 o'clock Luther Brown, the hired boy at George Corey's, between Cold Spring Glen and the village, rushed frenziedly back from his morning trip to Ten-Acre Meadow with the cows. He was almost convulsed with fright as he stumbled into the kitchen; and in the yard outside the no less frightened herd were pawing and lowing pitifully, having followed the boy back in the panic they shared with him. Between gasps Luther tried to stammer out his tale to Mrs. Corey.

"Up thar in the rud beyont the glen, Mis' Corey—they's suthin' ben thar! It smells like thunder, an' all the bushes an' little trees is pushed back from the rud like they'd a haouse ben moved along of it. An' that ain't the wust, nuther. They's *prints* in the rud, Mis' Corey—great raound prints as big as barrel-heads, all sunk daown deep like a elephant had ben along, *only they's a sight more nor four feet could make.* I looked at one or two afore I run, an' I see every one was covered with lines spreadin' aout from one place, like as if big palm-leaf fans—twict or three times as big as any they is—hed of ben paounded daown into the rud. An' the smell was awful, like what it is araound Wizard Whateley's ol' haouse. . . ."

Here he faltered, and seemed to shiver afresh with the fright that had sent him flying home. Mrs. Corey, unable to extract more information, began telephoning the neighbors; thus starting on its rounds the overture of panic that heralded the major terrors. When she got Sally Sawyer, housekeeper at Seth Bishop's, the nearest place to Whateley's, it became her turn to listen instead of transmit; for Sally's boy Chauncey, who slept poorly, had been up on the hill toward Whateley's, and had dashed back in terror after one look at the place, and at the pasturage where Mr. Bishop's cows had been left out all night.

"Yes, Mis' Corey," came Sally's tremulous voice over the party wire, "Cha'ncey he just come back a-postin', and couldn't haff talk fer bein' scairt! He says Ol' Whateley's haouse is all blowed up, with the timbers scattered raound like they'd ben dynamite inside; only the bottom floor ain't through, but is all covered with a kind o' tarlike stuff that smells awful an' drips daown offen the aidges onto the graoun' whar the side timbers is blowed away. An' they's awful kinder marks in the yard, tew —great raound marks bigger raound than a hogshead, an' all sticky with stuff like is on the blowed-up haouse. Cha'ncey he says they leads off into the medders, whar a great swath wider'n a barn is matted daown, an' all the stun walls tumbled every which way wherever it goes.

"An' he says, says he, Mis' Corey, as haow he sot to look fer Seth's caows, frighted ez he was; an' faound 'em in the upper pasture nigh the Devil's Hop Yard in an awful shape. Haff on 'em's clean gone, an' nigh haff o' them that's left is sucked most dry o' blood, with sores on 'em like they's ben on Whateley's cattle ever senct Lavinny's black brat was born. Seth he's gone aout naow to look at 'em, though I'll vaow he wun't keer ter git very nigh Wizard Whateley's! Cha'ncey didn't look keerful ter see

whar the big matted-daown swath led arter it leff the pasturage, but he says he thinks it p'inted towards the glen rud to the village.

"I tell ye, Mis' Corey, they's suthin' abroad as hadn't orter be abroad, an' I fer one think that black Wilbur Whateley, as come to the bad eend he desarved, is at the bottom of the breedin' of it. He wa'n't all human hisself, I allus says to everybody; an' I think he an' Ol' Whateley must a raised suthin' in that there nailed-up haouse as ain't even so human as he was. They's allus ben unseen things araound Dunwich—livin' things—as ain't human an' ain't good fer human folks.

"The graoun' was a'talkin' lass night, an' towards mornin' Cha'ncey he heerd the whippoorwills so laoud in Col' Spring Glen he couldn't sleep none. Then he thought he heerd another faintlike saound over towards Wizard Whateley's—a kinder rippin' or tearin' o' wood, like some big box er crate was bein' opened fur off. What with this an' that, he didn't git to sleep at all till sunup, an' no sooner was he up this mornin', but he's got to go over to Whateley's an' see what's the matter. He see enough, I tell ye, Mis' Corey! This dun't mean no good, an' I think as all the menfolks ought to git up a party an' do suthin'. I know suthin' awful's abaout, an' feel my time is nigh, though only Gawd knows jest what it is.

"Did your Luther take accaount o' whar them big tracks led tew? No? Wal, Mis' Corey, ef they was on the glen rud this side o' the glen, an' ain't got to your haouse yet, I calc'late they must go into the glen itself. They would do that. I allus says Col' Spring Glen ain't no healthy nor decent place. The whippoorwills an' fireflies there never did act like they was creaters o' Gawd, an' they's them as says ye kin hear strange things a-rushin' an' a-talkin' in the air daown thar ef ye stand in the right place, atween the rock falls an' Bear's Den."

By that noon fully three-quarters of the men and boys of Dunwich were trooping over the roads and meadows between the new-made Whateley ruins and Cold Spring Glen; examining in horror the vast, monstrous prints, the maimed Bishop cattle, the strange, noisome wreck of the farmhouse, and the bruised, matted vegetation of the fields and roadsides. Whatever had burst loose upon the world had assuredly gone down into the great sinister ravine; for all the trees on the banks were bent and broken, and a great avenue had been gouged in the precipice-hanging underbrush. It was as though a house, launched by an avalanche, had slid down through the tangled growths of the almost vertical slope. From below no sound came, but only a distant, undefinable fetor; and it is not to be wondered at that the men preferred to stay on the edge and argue, rather than descend and beard the unknown Cyclopean horror in its lair. Three dogs that were with the party had barked furiously at first, but seemed cowed and reluctant when near the glen. Someone telephoned the news to the *Aylesbury Transcript;* but the editor, accustomed to wild tales from Dunwich, did no more than concoct a humorous paragraph about it; an item soon afterward reproduced by the Associated Press.

That night everyone went home, and every house and barn was barricaded as stoutly as possible. Needless to say, no cattle were allowed to remain in open pasturage. About 2 in the morning a frightful stench and the savage barking of the dogs awakened the household at Elmer Frye's, on the eastern edge of Cold Spring Glen, and all agreed that they could hear a sort of muffled swishing or lapping sound from somewhere outside. Mrs. Frye proposed telephoning the neighbors, and Elmer was about to

agree when the noise of splintering wood burst in upon their deliberations. It came, apparently, from the barn; and was quickly followed by a hideous screaming and stamping amongst the cattle. The dogs slavered and crouched close to the feet of the fear-numbed family. Frye lit a lantern through force of habit, but knew it would be death to go out into that black farmyard. The children and the womenfolk whimpered, kept from screaming by some obscure, vestigial instinct of defense which told them their lives depended on silence. At last the noise of the cattle subsided to a pitiful moaning, and a great snapping, crashing, and crackling ensued. The Fryes, huddled together in the sitting-room, did not dare to move until the last echoes died away far down in Cold Spring Glen. Then, amidst the dismal moans from the stable and the demoniac piping of late whippoorwills in the glen, Selina Frye tottered to the telephone and spread what news she could of the second phase of the horror.

The next day all the countryside was in a panic; and cowed, uncommunicative groups came and went where the fiendish thing had occurred. Two titan swaths of destruction stretched from the glen to the Frye farmyard, monstrous prints covered the bare patches of ground, and one side of the old red barn had completely caved in. Of the cattle, only about a quarter could be found and identified. Some of these were in curious fragments, and all that survived had to be shot. Earl Sawyer suggested that help be asked from Aylesbury or Arkham, but others maintained it would be of no use. Old Zebulon Whateley, of a branch that hovered about half-way between soundness and decadence, made darkly wild suggestions about rites that ought to be practised on the hilltops. He came of a line where tradition ran strong, and his memories of chantings in the great stone circles were not altogether connected with Wilbur and his grandfather.

Darkness fell upon a stricken countryside too passive to organize for real defense. In a few cases closely related families would band together and watch in the gloom under one roof; but in general there was only a repetition of the barricading of the night before, and a futile, ineffective gesture of loading muskets and setting pitchforks handily about. Nothing, however, occurred except some hill noises; and when the day came there were many who hoped that the new horror had gone as swiftly as it had come. There were even bold souls who proposed an offensive expedition down in the glen, though they did not venture to set an actual example to the still reluctant majority.

When night came again the barricading was repeated, though there was less huddling together of families. In the morning both the Frye and the Seth Bishop households reported excitement among the dogs and vague sounds and stenches from afar, while early explorers noted with horror a fresh set of the monstrous tracks in the road skirting Sentinel Hill. As before, the sides of the road showed a bruising indicative of the blasphemously stupendous bulk of the horror; whilst the conformation of the tracks seemed to argue a passage in two directions, as if the moving mountain had come from Cold Spring Glen and returned to it along the same path. At the base of the hill a thirty-foot swath of crushed shrubbery and saplings led steeply upward, and the seekers gasped when they saw that even the most perpendicular places did not deflect the inexorable trail. Whatever the horror was, it could scale a sheer stony cliff of almost complete verticality; and as the investigators climbed around to the hill's summit by safer routes they saw that the trail ended—or rather, reversed—there.

It was here that the Whateleys used to build their hellish fires and chant their hellish rituals by the table-like stone on May Eve and Hallowmass. Now that very stone formed the center of a vast space thrashed around by the mountainous horror, whilst upon its slightly concave surface was a thick fetid deposit of the same tarry stickiness observed on the floor of the ruined Whateley farmhouse when the horror escaped. Men looked at one another and muttered. Then they looked down the hill. Apparently the horror had descended by a route much the same as that of its ascent. To speculate was futile. Reason, logic, and normal ideas of motivation stood confounded. Only old Zebulon, who was not with the group, could have done justice to the situation or suggested a plausible explanation.

Thursday night began much like the others, but it ended less happily. The whippoorwills in the glen had screamed with such unusual persistence that many could not sleep, and about 3 a. m. all the party telephones rang tremulously. Those who took down their receivers heard a frightmad voice shriek out, "Help, oh, my Gawd! . . ." and some thought a crashing sound followed the breaking off of the exclamation. There was nothing more. No one dared do anything, and no one knew till morning whence the call came. Then those who had heard it called everyone on the line, and found that only the Fryes did not reply. The truth appeared an hour later, when a hastily assembled group of armed men trudged out to the Frye place at the head of the glen. It was horrible, yet hardly a surprize. There were more swaths and monstrous prints, but there was no longer any house. It had caved in like an egg-shell, and amongst the ruins nothing living or dead could be discovered—only a stench and a tarry stickiness. The Elmer Fryes had been erased from Dunwich.

8

In the meantime a quieter yet even more spiritually poignant phase of the horror had been blackly unwinding itself behind the closed door of a shelf-lined room in Arkham. The curious manuscript record or diary of Wilbur Whateley, delivered to Miskatonic University for translation, had caused much worry and bafflement among the experts in languages both ancient and modern; its very alphabet, notwithstanding a general resemblance to the heavily shaded Arabic used in Mesopotamia, being absolutely unknown to any available authority. The final conclusion of the linguists was that the text represented an artificial alphabet, giving the effect of a cipher; though none of the usual methods of cryptographic solution seemed to furnish any clue, even when applied on the basis of every tongue the writer might conceivably have used. The ancient books taken from Whateley's quarters, while absorbingly interesting and in several cases promising to open up new and terrible lines of research among philosophers and men of science, were of no assistance whatever in this matter. One of them, a heavy tome with an iron clasp, was in another unknown alphabet—this one of a very different cast, and resembling Sanskrit more than anything else. The old ledger was at length given wholly into the charge of Dr. Armitage, both because of his peculiar interest in the Whateley matter, and because of his wide linguistic learning and skill in the mystical formulæ of antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Armitage had an idea that the alphabet might be something esoterically used by certain forbidden cults which have come down from old times, and which have inherited many forms and traditions from the wizards of the Saracenic world. That question, however, he did not deem vital; since

it would be unnecessary to know the origin of the symbols if, as he suspected, they were used as a cipher in a modern language. It was his belief that, considering the great amount of text involved, the writer would scarcely have wished the trouble of using another speech than his own, save perhaps in certain special formulæ and incantations. Accordingly he attacked the manuscript with the preliminary assumption that the bulk of it was in English.

Dr. Armitage knew, from the repeated failures of his colleagues, that the riddle was a deep and complex one, and that no simple mode of solution could merit even a trial. All through late August he fortified himself with the massed lore of cryptography, drawing upon the fullest resources of his own library, and wading night after night amidst the arcana of Trithemius' *Poligraphia*, Giambattista Porta's *De Furtivis Literarum Notis*, De Vigenere's *Traité des Chiffres*, Falconer's *Cryptomenysis Patefacta*, Davys' and Thicknesse's Eighteenth Century treatises, and such fairly modern authorities as Blair, von Marten, and Klüber's *Kryptographik*. He interspersed his study of the books with attacks on the manuscript itself, and in time became convinced that he had to deal with one of those subtlest and most ingenious of cryptograms, in which many separate lists of corresponding letters are arranged like the multiplication table, and the message built up with arbitrary key-words known only to the initiated. The older authorities seemed rather more helpful than the newer ones, and Armitage concluded that the code of the manuscript was one of great antiquity, no doubt handed down through a long line of mystical experimenters. Several times he seemed near daylight, only to be set back by some unforeseen obstacle. Then, as September approached, the clouds began to clear. Certain letters, as used in certain parts of the manuscript, emerged definitely and unmistakably; and it became obvious that the text was indeed in English.

On the evening of September second the last major barrier gave way, and Dr. Armitage read for the first time a continuous passage of Wilbur Whateley's annals. It was in truth a diary, as all had thought; and it was couched in a style clearly showing the mixed occult erudition and general illiteracy of the strange being who wrote it. Almost the first long passage that Armitage deciphered, an entry dated November 26, 1916, proved highly startling and disquieting. It was written, he remembered, by a child of three and a half who looked like a lad of twelve or thirteen.

> Today learned the Aklo for the Sabaoth, [it ran] which did not like, it being answerable from the hill and not from the air. That upstairs more ahead of me than I had thought it would be, and is not like to have much earth brain. Shot Elam Hutchins's collie Jack when he went to bite me, and Elam says he would kill me if he dast. I guess he won't. Grandfather kept me saying the Dho formula last night, and I think I saw the inner city at the 2 magnetic poles. I shall go to those poles when the earth is cleared off, if I can't break through with the Dho-Hna formula when I commit it. They from the air told me at Sabbat that it will be years before I can clear off the earth, and I guess Grandfather will be dead then, so I shall have to learn all the angles of the planes and all the formulas between the Yr and the Nhhngr. They from outside will help, but they can not take body without human blood. That upstairs looks it will have the right cast. I can see it a little when I make the Yoorish sign or blow the power of Ibn Ghazi at it, and it is near like them at May Eve on the Hill. The other face may wear off some. I wonder how I shall look when the earth is cleared and there are no earth beings on it. He that came with the Aklo Sabaoth said I may be transfigured, there being much of outside to work on.

Morning found Dr. Armitage in a cold sweat of terror and a frenzy of wakeful concentration. He had not left the manuscript all night, but sat at his table under the electric light turning page after page with shaking hands as fast as he could decipher the

cryptic text. He had nervously telephoned his wife he would not be home, and when she brought him a breakfast from the house he could scarcely dispose of a mouthful. All that day he read on, now and then halted maddeningly as a reapplication of the complex key became necessary. Lunch and dinner were brought him, but he ate only the smallest fraction of either. Toward the middle of the next night he drowsed off in his chair, but soon woke out of a tangle of nightmares almost as hideous as the truths and menaces to man's existence that he had uncovered.

On the morning of September fourth Professor Rice and Dr. Morgan insisted on seeing him for a while, and departed trembling and ashen-gray. That evening he went to bed, but slept only fitfully. Wednesday—the next day—he was back at the manuscript, and began to take copious notes both from the current sections and from those he had already deciphered. In the small hours of that night he slept a little in an easy-chair in his office, but was at the manuscript again before dawn. Some time before noon his physician, Dr. Hartwell, called to see him and insisted that he cease work. He refused, intimating that it was of the most vital importance for him to complete the reading of the diary, and promising an explanation in due course of time.

That evening, just as twilight fell, he finished his terrible perusal and sank back exhausted. His wife, bringing his dinner, found him in a half-comatose state; but he was conscious enough to warn her off with a sharp cry when he saw her eyes wander toward the notes he had taken. Weakly rising, he gathered up the scribbled papers and sealed them all in a great envelope, which he immediately placed in his inside coat pocket. He had sufficient strength to get home, but was so clearly in need of medical aid that Dr. Hartwell was summoned at once. As the doctor put him to bed he could only mutter over and over again, "*But what, in God's name, can we do?*"

Dr. Armitage slept, but was partly delirious the next day. He made no explanations to Hartwell, but in his calmer moments spoke of the imperative need of a long conference with Rice and Morgan. His wilder wanderings were very startling indeed, including frantic appeals that something in a boarded-up farmhouse be destroyed, and fantastic references to some plan for the extirpation of the entire human race and all animal and vegetable life from the earth by some terrible elder race of beings from another dimension. He would shout that the world was in danger, since the Elder Things wished to strip it and drag it away from the solar system and cosmos of matter into some other plane or phase of entity from which it had once fallen, vigintillions of eons ago. At other times he would call for the dreaded *Necronomicon* and the *Dæmonolatreia* of Remigius, in which he seemed hopeful of finding some formula to check the peril he conjured up.

"Stop them, stop them!" he would shout. "Those Whateleys meant to let them in, and the worst of all is left! Tell Rice and Morgan we must do something—it's a blind business, but I know how to make the powder. . . . It hasn't been fed since the second of August, when Wilbur came here to his death, and at that rate . . ."

But Armitage had a sound physique despite his seventy-three years, and slept off his disorder that night without developing any real fever. He woke late Friday, clear of head, though sober, with a gnawing fear and tremendous sense of responsibility. Saturday afternoon he felt able to go over to the library and summon Rice and Morgan for a conference, and the rest of that day and evening the three men tortured their brains in the wildest speculation and the most desperate

debate. Strange and terrible books were drawn voluminously from the stack shelves and from secure places of storage, and diagrams and formulæ were copied with feverish haste and in bewildering abundance. Of skepticism there was none. All three had seen the body of Wilbur Whateley as it lay on the floor in a room of that very building, and after that not one of them could feel even slightly inclined to treat the diary as a madman's raving.

Opinions were divided as to notifying the Massachusetts State Police, and the negative finally won. There were things involved which simply could not be believed by those who had not seen a sample, as indeed was made clear during certain subsequent investigations. Late at night the conference disbanded without having developed a definite plan, but all day Sunday Armitage was busy comparing formulæ and mixing chemicals obtained from the college laboratory. The more he reflected on the hellish diary, the more he was inclined to doubt the efficacy of any material agent in stamping out the entity which Wilbur Whateley had left behind him—the earth-threatening entity which, unknown to him, was to burst forth in a few hours and become the memorable Dunwich horror.

Monday was a repetition of Sunday with Dr. Armitage, for the task in hand required an infinity of research and experiment. Further consultations of the monstrous diary brought about various changes of plan, and he knew that even in the end a large amount of uncertainty must remain. By Tuesday he had a definite line of action mapped out, and believed he would try a trip to Dunwich within a week. Then, on Wednesday, the great shock came. Tucked obscurely away in a corner of the *Arkham Advertiser* was a facetious little item from the Associated Press, telling what a record-breaking monster the bootleg whisky of Dunwich had raised up. Armitage, half stunned, could only telephone for Rice and Morgan. Far into the night they discussed, and the next day was a whirlwind of preparation on the part of them all. Armitage knew he would be meddling with terrible powers, yet saw that there was no other way to annul the deeper and more malign meddling which others had done before him.

9

Friday morning Armitage, Rice and Morgan set out by motor for Dunwich, arriving at the village about 1 in the afternoon. The day was pleasant, but even in the brightest sunlight a kind of quiet dread and portent seemed to hover about the strangely domed hills and the deep, shadowy ravines of the stricken region. Now and then on some mountain top a gaunt circle of stones could be glimpsed against the sky. From the air of hushed fright at Osborn's store they knew something hideous had happened, and soon learned of the annihilation of the Elmer Frye house and family. Throughout that afternoon they rode around Dunwich, questioning the natives concerning all that had occurred, and seeing for themselves with rising pangs of horror the drear Frye ruins with their lingering traces of the tarry stickiness, the blasphemous tracks in the Frye yard, the wounded Seth Bishop cattle, and the enormous swaths of disturbed vegetation in various places. The trail up and down Sentinel Hill seemed to Armitage of almost cataclysmic significance, and he looked long at the sinister altarlike stone on the summit.

At length the visitors, apprised of a party of State Police which had come from Aylesbury that morning in response to the first telephone reports of the Frye tragedy, decided to seek out the officers and compare notes as far as practicable. This, however, they found more easily planned

than performed; since no sign of the party could be found in any direction. There had been five of them in a car, but now the car stood empty near the ruins in the Frye yard. The natives, all of whom had talked with the policemen, seemed at first as perplexed as Armitage and his companions. Then old Sam Hutchins thought of something and turned pale, nudging Fred Farr and pointing to the dank, deep hollow that yawned close by.

"Gawd," he gasped, "I telled 'em not ter go daown into the glen, an' I never thought nobody'd dew it with them tracks an' that smell an' the whippoorwills a-screechin' daown thar in the dark o' noonday. . . ."

A cold shudder ran through natives and visitors alike, and every ear seemed strained in a kind of instinctive, unconscious listening. Armitage, now that he had actually come upon the horror and its monstrous work, trembled with the responsibility he felt to be his. Night would soon fall, and it was then that the mountainous blasphemy lumbered upon its eldritch course. *Negotium perambulans in tenebris*. . . . The old librarian rehearsed the formulæ he had memorized, and clutched the paper containing the alternative ones he had not memorized. He saw that his electric flashlight was in working order. Rice, beside him, took from a valise a metal sprayer of the sort used in combating insects; whilst Morgan uncased the big-game rifle on which he relied despite his colleague's warnings that no material weapon would be of help.

Armitage, having read the hideous diary, knew painfully well what kind of a manifestation to expect, but he did not add to the fright of the Dunwich people by giving any hints or clues. He hoped that it might be conquered without any revelation to the world of the monstrous thing it had escaped. As the shadows gathered, the natives commenced to disperse homeward, anxious to bar themselves indoors despite the present evidence that all human locks and bolts were useless before a force that could bend trees and crush houses when it chose. They shook their heads at the visitors' plan to stand guard at the Frye ruins near the glen; and as they left, had little expectancy of ever seeing the watchers again.

There were rumblings under the hills that night, and the whippoorwills piped threateningly. Once in a while a wind, sweeping up out of Cold Spring Glen, would bring a touch of ineffable fetor to the heavy night air; such a fetor as all three of the watchers had smelled once before, when they stood above a dying thing that had passed for fifteen years and a half as a human being. But the looked-for terror did not appear. Whatever was down there in the glen was biding its time, and Armitage told his colleagues it would be suicidal to try to attack it in the dark.

Morning came wanly, and the night-sounds ceased. It was a gray, bleak day, with now and then a drizzle of rain; and heavier and heavier clouds seemed to be piling themselves up beyond the hills to the northwest. The men from Arkham were undecided what to do. Seeking shelter from the increasing rainfall beneath one of the few undestroyed Frye outbuildings, they debated the wisdom of waiting, or of taking the aggressive and going down into the glen in quest of their nameless, monstrous quarry. The downpour waxed in heaviness, and distant peals of thunder sounded from far horizons. Sheet lightning shimmered, and then a forky bolt flashed near at hand, as if descending into the accursed glen itself. The sky grew very dark, and the watchers hoped that the storm would prove a short, sharp one followed by clear weather.

It was still gruesomely dark when, not much over an hour later, a confused babel of voices sounded down

the road. Another moment brought to view a frightened group of more than a dozen men, running, shouting, and even whimpering hysterically. Someone in the lead began sobbing out words, and the Arkham men started violently when those words developed a coherent form.

"Oh, my Gawd, my Gawd!" the voice choked out; "it's a-goin' agin, *an' this time by day!* It's aout—it's aout an' a-movin' this very minute, an' only the Lord knows when it'll be on us all!"

The speaker panted into silence, but another took up his message.

"Nigh on a haour ago Zeb Whateley here heerd the 'phone a-ringin', an' it was Mis' Corey, George's wife, that lives daown by the junction. She says the hired boy Luther was aout drivin' in the caows from the storm arter the big bolt, when he see all the trees a-bendin' at the maouth o' the glen—opposite side ter this—an' smelt the same awful smell like he smelt when he faound the big tracks las' Monday mornin'. An' she says he says they was a swishin', lappin' saound, more nor what the bendin' trees an' bushes could make, an' all on a suddent the trees along the rud begun ter git pushed one side, an' they was a awful stompin' an' splashin' in the mud. But mind ye, Luther he didn't see nothin' at all, only jest the bendin' trees an' underbrush.

"Then fur ahead where Bishop's Brook goes under the rud he heerd a awful creakin' an' strainin' on the bridge, an' says he could tell the saound o' wood a-startin' to crack an' split. An' all the whiles he never see a thing, only them trees an' bushes a-bendin'. An' when the swishin' saound got very fur off—on the rud towards Wizard Whateley's an' Sentinel Hill—Luther he had the guts ter step up whar he'd heerd it fust an' look at the graound. It was all mud an' water, an' the sky was dark, an' the rain was wipin' aout all tracks abaout as fast as could be; but beginnin' at the glen maouth, whar the trees hed moved, they was still some o' them awful prints big as bar'ls like he seen Monday."

At this point the first excited speaker interrupted.

"But *that* ain't the trouble naow—that was only the start. Zeb here was callin' folks up an' everybody was a-listenin' in when a call from Seth Bishop's cut in. His haousekeeper Sally was carryin' on fit ter kill—she'd jest seed the trees a-bendin' beside the rud, an' says they was a kind o' mushy saound, like a elephant puffin' an' treadin', a-headin' fer the haouse. Then she up an' spoke suddent of a fearful smell, an' says her boy Cha'ncey was a-screamin' as haow it was jest like what he smelt up to the Whateley rewins Monday mornin'. An' the dogs was all barkin' an' whinin' awful.

"An' then she let aout a turrible yell, an' says the shed daown the rud hed jest caved in like the storm hed blowed it over, only the wind wa'n't strong enough to dew that. Everybody was a-listenin', an' ye could hear lots o' folks on the wire a-gaspin'. All to onct Sally she yelled agin, an' says the front yard picket fence hed jest crumpled up, though they wa'n't no sign o' what done it. Then everybody on the line could hear Cha'ncey an' ol' Seth Bishop a-yellin', tew, an' Sally was shriekin' aout that suthin' heavy hed struck the haouse—not lightnin' nor nothin', but suthin' heavy agin' the front, that kep' a-launchin' itself agin an' agin, though ye couldn't see nuthin' aout the front winders. An' then . . . an' then . . ."

Lines of fright deepened on every face; and Armitage, shaken as he was, had barely poise enough to prompt the speaker.

"An' then . . . Sally she yelled aout, 'O help, the haouse is a-cavin' in' . . . an' on the wire we could hear a turrible crashin', an' a hull

flock o' screamin' . . . jest like when Elmer Frye's place was took, only wuss. . . .''

The man paused, and another of the crowd spoke.

''That's all—not a saound nor squeak over the 'phone arter that. Jest still-like. We .that heerd it got aout Fords an' wagons an' raounded up as many able-bodied men-folks as we could get, at Corey's place, an' come up here ter see what yew thought best ter dew. Not but what I think it's the Lord's judgment fer our iniquities, that no mortal kin ever set aside.''

Armitage saw that the time for positive action had come, and spoke decisively to the faltering group of frightened rustics.

''We must follow it, boys.'' He made his voice as reassuring as possible. ''I believe there's a chance of putting it out of business. You men know that those Whateleys were wizards—well, this thing is a thing of wizardry, and must be put down by the same means. I've seen Wilbur Whateley's diary and read some of the strange old books he used to read, and I think I know the right kind of a spell to recite to make the thing fade away. Of course, one can't be sure, but we can always take a chance. It's invisible—I knew it would be—but there's a powder in this long-distance sprayer that might make it show up for a second. Later on we'll try it. It's a frightful thing to have alive, but it isn't as bad as what Wilbur would have let in if he'd lived longer. You'll never know what the world has escaped. Now we've only this one thing to fight, and it can't multiply. It can, though, do a lot of harm; so we mustn't hesitate to rid the community of it.

''We must follow it—and the way to begin is to go to the place that has just been wrecked. Let somebody lead the way—I don't know your roads very well, but I've an idea there might be a shorter cut across lots. How about it?''

The men shuffled about a moment, and then Earl Sawyer spoke softly, pointing with a grimy finger through the steadily lessening rain.

''I guess ye kin git to Seth Bishop's quickest by cuttin' acrost the lower medder here, wadin' the brook at the low place, an' climbin' through Carrier's mowin' an' the timber-lot beyont. That comes aout on the upper rud mighty nigh Seth's—a leetle t'other side.''

Armitage, with Rice and Morgan, started to walk in the direction indicated; and most of the natives followed slowly. The sky was growing lighter, and there were signs that the storm had worn itself away. When Armitage inadvertently took a wrong direction, Joe Osborn warned him and walked ahead to show the right one. Courage and confidence were mounting; though the twilight of the almost perpendicular wooded hill which lay toward the end of their short cut, and among whose fantastic ancient trees they had to scramble as if up a ladder, put these qualities to a severe test.

At length they emerged on a muddy road to find the sun coming out. They were a little beyond the Seth Bishop place, but bent trees and hideously unmistakable tracks showed what had passed by. Only a few moments were consumed in surveying the ruins just around the bend. It was the Frye incident all over again, and nothing dead or living was found in either of the collapsed shells which had been the Bishop house and barn. No one cared to remain there amidst the stench and the tarry stickiness, but all turned instinctively to the line of horrible prints leading on toward the wrecked Whateley farmhouse and the altar-crowned slopes of Sentinel Hill.

As the men passed the site of Wilbur Whateley's abode they shud-

dered visibly, and seemed again to mix hesitancy with their zeal. It was no joke tracking down something as big as a house that one could not see, but that had all the vicious malevolence of a demon. Opposite the base of Sentinel Hill the tracks left the road, and there was a fresh bending and matting visible along the broad swath marking the monster's former route to and from the summit.

Armitage produced a pocket telescope of considerable power and scanned the steep green side of the hill. Then he handed the instrument to Morgan, whose sight was keener. After a moment of gazing Morgan cried out sharply, passing the glass to Earl Sawyer and indicating a certain spot on the slope with his finger. Sawyer, as clumsy as most non-users of optical devices are, fumbled a while; but eventually focused the lenses with Armitage's aid. When he did so his cry was less restrained than Morgan's had been.

"Gawd almighty, the grass an' bushes is a-movin'! It's a-goin' up—slow-like—creepin' up ter the top this minute, heaven only knows what fer!"

Then the germ of panic seemed to spread among the seekers. It was one thing to chase the nameless entity, but quite another to find it. Spells might be all right—but suppose they weren't? Voices began questioning Armitage about what he knew of the thing, and no reply seemed quite to satisfy. Everyone seemed to feel himself in close proximity to phases of nature and of being utterly forbidden, and wholly outside the sane experience of mankind.

10

In the end the three men from Arkham—old, white-bearded Dr. Armitage, stocky, iron-gray Professor Rice, and lean, youngish Dr. Morgan—ascended the mountain alone. After much patient instruction regarding its focusing and use, they left the telescope with the frightened group that remained in the road; and as they climbed they were watched closely by those among whom the glass was passed around. It was hard going, and Armitage had to be helped more than once. High above the toiling group the great swath trembled as its hellish maker repassed with snail-like deliberateness. Then it was obvious that the pursuers were gaining.

Curtis Whateley—of the undecayed branch—was holding the telescope when the Arkham party detoured radically from the swath. He told the crowd that the men were evidently trying to get to a subordinate peak which overlooked the swath at a point considerably ahead of where the shrubbery was now bending. This, indeed, proved to be true; and the party were seen to gain the minor elevation only a short time after the invisible blasphemy had passed it.

Then Wesley Corey, who had taken the glass, cried out that Armitage was adjusting the sprayer which Rice held, and that something must be about to happen. The crowd stirred uneasily, recalling that this sprayer was expected to give the unseen horror a moment of visibility. Two or three men shut their eyes, but Curtis Whateley snatched back the telescope and strained his vision to the utmost. He saw that Rice, from the party's point of vantage above and behind the entity, had an excellent chance of spreading the potent powder with marvelous effect.

Those without the telescope saw only an instant's flash of gray cloud—a cloud about the size of a moderately large building—near the top of the mountain. Curtis, who had held the instrument, dropped it with a piercing shriek into the ankle-deep mud of the road. He reeled, and would have crumpled to the ground had not two or three others seized and steadied him. All he could do was moan half-inaudibly:

"Oh, oh, great Gawd . . . *that* . . . *that* . . ."

There was a pandemonium of questioning, and only Henry Wheeler thought to rescue the fallen telescope and wipe it clean of mud. Curtis was past all coherence, and even isolated replies were almost too much for him.

"Bigger'n a barn . . . all made o' squirmin' ropes . . . hull thing sort o' shaped like a hen's egg bigger'n anything, with dozens o' legs like hogsheads that haff shut up when they step . . . nothin' solid abaout it —all like jelly, an' made o' sep'rit wrigglin' ropes pushed clost together . . . great bulgin' eyes all over it . . . ten or twenty maouths or trunks a-stickin' aout all along the sides, big as stovepipes, an' all a-tossin' an' openin' an' shuttin' . . . all gray, with kinder blue or purple rings . . . *an' Gawd in Heaven—that haff face on top! . . .*"

This final memory, whatever it was, proved too much for poor Curtis, and he collapsed completely before he could say more. Fred Farr and Will Hutchins carried him to the roadside and laid him on the damp grass. Henry Wheeler, trembling, turned the rescued telescope on the mountain to see what he might. Through the lenses were discernible three tiny figures, apparently running toward the summit as fast as the steep incline allowed. Only these—nothing more. Then everyone noticed a strangely unseasonable noise in the deep valley behind, and even in the underbrush of Sentinel Hill itself. It was the piping of unnumbered whippoorwills, and in their shrill chorus there seemed to lurk a note of tense and evil expectancy.

Earl Sawyer now took the telescope and reported the three figures as standing on the topmost ridge, virtually level with the altar-stone but at a considerable distance from it. One figure, he said, seemed to be raising its hands above its head at rhythmic intervals; and as Sawyer mentioned the circumstance the crowd seemed to hear a faint, half-musical sound from the distance, as if a loud chant were accompanying the gestures. The weird silhouette on that remote peak must have been a spectacle of infinite grotesqueness and impressiveness, but no observer was in a mood for esthetic appreciation. "I guess he's sayin' the spell," whispered Wheeler as he snatched back the telescope. The whippoorwills were piping wildly, and in a singularly curious irregular rhythm quite unlike that of the visible ritual.

Suddenly the sunshine seemed to lessen without the intervention of any discernible cloud. It was a very peculiar phenomenon, and was plainly marked by all. A rumbling sound seemed brewing beneath the hills, mixed strangely with a concordant rumbling which clearly came from the sky. Lightning flashed aloft, and the wondering crowd looked in vain for the portents of storm. The chanting of the men from Arkham now became unmistakable, and Wheeler saw through the glass that they were all raising their arms in the rhythmic incantation. From some farmhouse far away came the frantic barking of dogs.

The change in the quality of the daylight increased, and the crowd gazed about the horizon in wonder. A purplish darkness, born of nothing more than a spectral deepening of the sky's blue, pressed down upon the rumbling hills. Then the lightning flashed again, somewhat brighter than before, and the crowd fancied that it had showed a certain mistiness around the altar-stone on the distant height. No one, however, had been using the telescope at that instant. The whippoorwills continued their irregular pulsation, and the men of Dunwich braced themselves tensely against some imponderable menace with which the atmosphere seemed surcharged.

Without warning came those deep,

cracked, raucous vocal sounds which will never leave the memory of the stricken group who heard them. Not from any human throat were they born, for the organs of man can yield no such acoustic perversions. Rather would one have said they came from the pit itself, had not their source been so unmistakably the altar-stone on the peak. It is almost erroneous to call them *sounds* at all, since so much of their ghastly, infra-bass timbre spoke to dim seats of consciousness and terror far subtler than the ear; yet one must do so, since their form was indisputably though vaguely that of half-articulate *words*. They were loud—loud as the rumblings and the thunder above which they echoed—yet did they come from no visible being. And because imagination might suggest a conjectural source in the world of non-visible beings, the huddled crowd at the mountain's base huddled still closer, and winced as if in expectation of a blow.

"Ygnaiih . . . ygnaiih . . . thflthkh'ngha . . . Yog-Sothoth . . ." rang the hideous croaking out of space. *"Y'bthnk . . . h'ehye . . . n'grkdl'lh . . ."*

The speaking impulse seemed to falter here, as if some frightful psychic struggle were going on. Henry Wheeler strained his eye at the telescope, but saw only the three grotesquely silhouetted human figures on the peak, all moving their arms furiously in strange gestures as their incantation drew near its culmination. From what black wells of Acherontic fear or feeling, from what unplumbed gulfs of extra-cosmic consciousness or obscure, long-latent heredity, were those half-articulate thunder-croakings drawn? Presently they began to gather renewed force and coherence as they grew in stark, utter, ultimate frenzy.

"Eh-ya-ya-ya-yahaah . . . e'yaya-yayaaaa . . . ngh'aaaa . . . ngh'aaaa . . . h'yuh . . . h'yuh . . . HELP! HELP! *. . . ff—ff—ff—*FATHER! FATHER! YOG-SOTHOTH! . . ."

But that was all. The pallid group in the road, still reeling at the *indisputably English* syllables that had poured thickly and thunderously down from the frantic vacancy beside that shocking altar-stone, were never to hear such syllables again. Instead, they jumped violently at the terrific report which seemed to rend the hills; the deafening, cataclysmic peal whose source, be it inner earth or sky, no hearer was ever able to place. A single lightning bolt shot from the purple zenith to the altar-stone, and a great tidal wave of viewless force and indescribable stench swept down from the hill to all the countryside. Trees, grass, and underbrush were whipped into a fury; and the frightened crowd at the mountain's base, weakened by the lethal fetor that seemed about to asphyxiate them, were almost hurled off their feet. Dogs howled from the distance, green grass and foliage wilted to a curious, sickly yellow-gray, and over field and forest were scattered the bodies of dead whippoorwills.

The stench left quickly, but the vegetation never came right again. To this day there is something queer and unholy about the growths on and around that fearsome hill. Curtis Whateley was only just regaining consciousness when the Arkham men came slowly down the mountain in the beams of a sunlight once more brilliant and untainted. They were grave and quiet, and seemed shaken by memories and reflections even more terrible than those which had reduced the group of natives to a state of cowed quivering. In reply to a jumble of questions they only shook their heads and reaffirmed one vital fact.

"The thing has gone for ever," Armitage said. "It has been split up into what it was originally made of,

and can never exist again. It was an impossibility in a normal world. Only the least fraction was really matter in any sense we know. It was like its father—and most of it has gone back to him in some vague realm or dimension outside our material universe; some vague abyss out of which only the most accursed rites of human blasphemy could ever have called him for a moment on the hills."

There was a brief silence, and in that pause the scattered senses of poor Curtis Whateley began to knit back into a sort of continuity; so that he put his hands to his head with a moan. Memory seemed to pick itself up where it had left off, and the horror of the sight that had prostrated him burst in upon him again.

"*Oh, oh, my Gawd, that haff face . . . that haff face on top of it . . . that face with the red eyes an' crinkly albino hair, an' no chin, like the Whateleys . . . It was a octopus, centipede, spider kind o' thing, but they was a haff-shaped man's face on top of it, an' it looked like Wizard Whateley's, only it was yards an' yards acrost. . . .*"

He paused exhausted, as the whole group of natives stared in a bewilderment not quite crystallized into fresh terror. Only old Zebulon Whateley, who wanderingly remembered ancient things but who had been silent heretofore, spoke aloud.

"Fifteen year' gone," he rambled, "I heerd Ol' Whateley say as haow some day we'd hear a child o' Lavinny's a-callin' its father's name on the top o' Sentinel Hill. . . ."

But Joe Osborn interrupted him to question the Arkham men anew.

"*What was it, anyhaow,* an' haowever did young Wizard Whateley call it aout o' the air it come from?"

Armitage chose his words carefully.

"It was—well, it was mostly a kind of force that doesn't belong in our part of space; a kind of force that acts and grows and shapes itself by other laws than those of our sort of Nature. We have no business calling in such things from outside, and only very wicked people and very wicked cults ever try to. There was some of it in Wilbur Whateley himself—enough to make a devil and a precocious monster of him, and to make his passing out a pretty terrible sight. I'm going to burn his accursed diary, and if you men are wise you'll dynamite that altar-stone up there, and pull down all the rings of standing stones on the other hills. Things like that brought down the beings those Whateleys were so fond of—the beings they were going to let in tangibly to wipe out the human race and drag the earth off to some nameless place for some nameless purpose.

"But as to this thing we've just sent back—the Whateleys raised it for a terrible part in the doings that were to come. It grew fast and big from the same reason that Wilbur grew fast and big—but it beat him because it had a greater share of the *outsideness* in it. You needn't ask how Wilbur called it out of the air. He didn't call it out. *It was his twin brother, but it looked more like the father than he did.*"



The City of Iron Cubes

by H. F. Arnold



A
Weird-Scientific
Serial Story

The Story Thus Far

SEVEN huge black iron cubes have fallen on a certain plateau in Peru, at intervals of four years. Dr. Frelinghusen, the earthquake specialist, and his friend Dana, investigate the mysterious objects from outer space, and find in one of them a beautiful girl, named Aien, and the corpse of her father. Dr. Frelinghusen deciphers the diary of her father and finds that he had been a scientist on a dying world, who had invented the iron cubes to transport his people to Earth to save them from death. The first cubes had been shot out to learn whether they could be landed successfully on Earth. During a riot when the seventh cube was to start out with a picked crew, the old man and his daughter set out alone, the inventor dying en route. A large scouting party arrives in the eighth cube, and Aien's brother is strangled in sight of Aien, Dana and the doctor. The three hide from the gray-clad invaders from the cube, but Dana, pinned in the wreckage of the cabin during an earthquake, is being slowly strangled by one of the invaders, when he hears an explosion and lapses into unconsciousness.

WHEN I recovered my senses, I became aware that someone was bathing my forehead with water. It splashed in my eyes and ran down into my nostrils, choking me so that I gasped and sputtered.

"That's enough water: he is coming out of it," said a voice. I recognized it as that of the doctor and wondered idly where he had come from. With an effort I fought off my drowsiness and attempted to sit up. A soft hand slipped behind my neck and aided me. It was Aien; a sorry-looking and troubled Aien with tear furrows showing through the caked dust on her face.

Her tears had been for me!

The realization acted more swiftly than any tonic, and in a few minutes I was sitting up. They had relieved me of the burden of debris which pinned me down.

"It was a close call, old boy," said the doctor, and then added grimly, "but it was a closer call for someone else."

He nodded significantly at a heap of rubbish beside the spot where I had been imprisoned. From a few scraps of curiously colored cloth, I identified the heap as the body of my

This story began in WEIRD TALES for March

late antagonist. The corpse had been burned and nearly dissolved into nothingness by some unknown weapon. I looked questioningly at the doctor. He shook his head.

"No, it wasn't I. I fancy you can thank Aien for your life, Dana."

With his help I rose to my feet and walked over to where our visitor was standing. She was regarding the body of the shadow-man with scared, fascinated eyes. At my approach she looked up quickly, and then, burying her face in her hands, ran into the adjoining room. Behind her on the ground was the long, tubelike weapon which I remembered the scout had leaned against the wall as he started toward me.

"Where were you, Doctor?" I asked.

"I've been busy, Dana," he replied, "and just arrived above ground in time to see her aim the tube. There was a flash as of a condensed lightning bolt and then all was over. But tell me quickly what has happened here."

In a few words I related the happenings of the last few hours. When I had finished, he looked unusually grave and questioned me briefly about the apparatus which the invaders had been constructing. I told him as well as I could, and we moved over to where a gap in the wreckage gave us a clear view of the open space surrounding the cubes. Although it was now nearing dusk, the efforts of the workers were continuing with undiminished ardor. I doubted if even the temblor had distracted their attention for more than a few minutes.

In the interval since I had observed them last they had accomplished a seemingly incredible amount of work. In the open space before the cube an immense structure was now rearing itself into the sky. Steel cranes operating from doors half-way up the side of the cube swung huge masses of metal into place even as we watched. As nearly as I can describe it, the edifice resembled nothing so much as a huge cylinder with one end open to the sky. It had a bowl some sixty feet in diameter and had reached a height already greater than that.

The doctor looked it over and whistled softly under his breath. "They're not losing any time, are they?" he queried. "It will soon be up to us to do something or it will be too late."

"What can we do?" I demanded. "In what way can we act? Three of us against at least a thousand, and we don't even know what they are trying to do."

"But I have a very good suspicion," said Dr. Frelinghusen. "Let us get something to eat first and then we will plan out a course of—I repeat it—a course of action."

We went into what had been the adjoining room before the temblor and there found Aien awaiting us. Although her eyes were dry I noticed that her lips quivered as we entered, and I judged it better not to say anything at the time about the events of the afternoon. Not daring to light a fire, we squatted in the ruins of our dwelling and consumed such food as could be eaten uncooked. While we satisfied our hunger I explained and enlarged on what we had seen early in the day.

"You say the prisoner acted grieved and sorrowful when he saw the body of the old man?" demanded the doctor when I reached that point in my narrative.

I answered in the affirmative.

"Then I believe that I can throw some light on that particular portion of the happenings of today, at least," he said. "The prisoner was excited because he saw the body of his own father. The man you saw murdered was undoubtedly Aien's own brother. No wonder she wanted to go to his rescue."

He reached over and patted her

shoulder as she sat beside us bravely attempting to choke down a few morsels of food, although she must have felt that every bite would strangle her.

"And how do you know that?" I demanded.

"From the diary again. In it the inventor often mentioned his son and assistant. I have been puzzled to account for his whereabouts, but the 'shadow-men,' as you call them, of course forced him to help in the construction of another cube and then made him come along to aid them in landing."

"And what else does your precious diary tell you?" I asked. "Does it tell you the purpose of all that?" And I waved my hand at the swift and never-ending activity on the plain before us.

"It does, indeed," he replied, "although I believe I would have guessed it even though it had not. But come, let us see how they are progressing and I will tell you about it."

NIGHT had descended upon the plateau even as we ate. Night but not darkness. From a score of vantage-points, powerful lights similar to those we had observed in the interior of the cube were focused upon the structure in the plain. A soft but penetrating glow bathed the whole area in the center of the ring of cubes.

"Do I need to enlighten you, Dana?" inquired the old man as we watched the work. "Doesn't the very shape and structure of the machinery suggest something to you?"

"It might be a big gun emplacement," I hazarded, "except that there is nothing to shoot at. It might be a telescope or a huge searchlight or almost anything."

"But the direction in which it is pointing! Man, can't you see that it is aimed at the sky?"

Intuition suggested to me a purpose. "You mean it is——"

"Precisely! Imagine, Dana, that you are back in the days of the World War. You are intending to seize enemy territory. What would you do first?"

"I would send out a scouting party, of course."

"Of course you would. You see before you a scouting party dispatched from a dying world. Now suppose that this party entered the enemy's territory and found conditions suitable for a grand attack; in this case suppose they discovered that the earth was habitable and free from fierce inhabitants. What is the next thing to do?"

"Obviously to send a messenger back to tell the forces to come on and consolidate the territory."

"But suppose a messenger isn't practicable. Let us say that the scouting party has traveled 100,000,000 miles at a speed greater than that of a falling body. What then?"

"Then I would use some other means of communication. Say wireless or a rocket or a flare."

"Precisely. My boy, your intelligence is rapidly becoming more and more acute. That is just what our friends, the enemy, are doing. You see before you a giant searchlight or flare which at the proper moment will be touched off, signaling to skilled observers with a battery of telescopes on another terrestrial body that our planet is ripe and ready for the picking. Can you imagine what will result?"

The probability was appalling. I visioned scores and hundreds of such cubes descending at random upon an unsuspecting world. I saw cities leveled as by a stroke of lightning. I saw armies wiped out over night by strange and unknown weapons. I dreamed of a world writhing in agony as it attempted vainly to fight off an overwhelming and implacable foe.

"Are you beginning to comprehend what we are up against?" asked the doctor. "Can you imagine the terror

and ruin and desolation facing our earth if these men succeed in their enterprise, gallant and adventurous as it may seem?''

I nodded, feeling of my sore and torn throat as I did so. I felt small sympathy for our ''gallant'' adversaries.

''Our earth is already becoming overcrowded,'' continued the doctor. ''Can you imagine it filled with the teeming millions of a desperate and alien race—a race that is facing extinction at home and is fighting with its back to the wall? Do you understand what we are combating, Dana?''

I did indeed understand, but the situation appeared hopeless. What could we do? How could we interfere with destiny?

I started to voice my query when Aien's hand clamped down across my lips. Uninterested in and not understanding our conversation, she had been devoting more attention to her surroundings than had the rest of us. Now, in the darkness, I knew that she had heard or seen something. What?

I touched the professor on the arm and felt that he understood. We three sat motionless with our eyes and ears strained to catch the slightest movement or sound.

After a long time, I heard a slight click as though metal had rasped against stone. Our senses strained to the utmost, we sat peering into the darkness. Then a shadow flitted past us and paused to peer at the wreck of our hut. I raised my rifle and covered it but was conscious of the restraining hand of the doctor against my arm.

''For God's sake, Dana, don't shoot,'' he cautioned. ''You will ruin everything if you do.''

Motionless we waited, and after an endless interval of breathless silence the shadow moved on.

''He will be back sooner or later,'' whispered the doctor, ''and there will be others with him. They are searching for their lost companion and I believe they are suspicious of the cabin. It means that we must act tonight.''

''Act?'' I repeated in exasperation. ''How can we act? We are three against a thousand. The most we can hope for is to escape with our lives.''

''We may not accomplish even that much,'' he said, ''but at least we can try. Wait for me here. I am going into the cave under the cabin. While you are waiting, get together such provisions as we three can carry. Get rifles and canteens for the three of us. Whatever you do, make no noise.''

Halting my question with a wave of his arm, he hauled up the trap-door and disappeared into the darkness, leaving me nothing to do but obey his commands. Luckily, our supplies were grouped closely together and had escaped the fall of the roof, so that I had little difficulty in assembling the three packs. Water was not plentiful, but I succeeded in filling three canteens from the pail we had brought in only that morning.

Sensing my preparations, Aien aided me, and after a few minutes of united efforts we found ourselves outfitted as well as we could be for the unknown perils which lay before us.

Unable to do anything further, we sat down on the floor within arm's reach of the trap and waited for the return of the doctor. He was absent for an interminable period. The hour grew later and later. Three times the threatening shadows of the enemy approached our hiding-place so closely that I feared we were discovered. I was confident that out in the night a silent but persistent watch was being kept over the ruins of the cabin.

Aien, beside me, fairly quivered with excitement, and despite the almost constant strain of the past few days—a strain which would have crushed any earth woman—I felt sure she would play her part bravely during what was to come. She was a true

comrade, uncomplaining and unafraid, despite the myriad dangers which encompassed us. I wondered if, cast adrift on a strange and fierce world in the midst of enemies who had slain my father and brother, I myself would have behaved as bravely.

She was a good soldier. Impulsively I felt through the darkness and possessed myself of her hand. She made no resistance and for a time her fingers relaxed passively in my palm. Between us, as always when she was near, I felt pulsing the vital current, the current of life and hope and happiness, the current of love. For I loved her and had from the very first, when her white and suffering face seen through the transparent doors of her cube prison had incited me to rashness in an effort to relieve her distress. I felt that between us words were unnecessary and that she understood my feelings perhaps better than if I had voiced them. Yet she made no resistance!

With a passion that I was wholly unable to withstand, I reached through the night for her other hand and caught her close to me. I felt her muscles tense as she lay in my arms. Then, despite the darkness, our lips met in a first kiss.

The sweetness of her surrender dazzled me. Alone in the wreck of the shattered cabin and surrounded by the gray shadows of enemies, we knew a love such as falls to the lot of but few men and women. After a moment I released her and bent over as might any lover, to kiss my lady's hand.

A BLACK shape looming beside us recalled us to our senses. Automatically I reached for my rifle and then realized that the shadow was Dr. Frelinghusen coming through the trap.

"Dana," he whispered, "I've done it. The scouting party is cut off from their main body. The star signal shall never be sent. We have won."

"How?" I gasped.

"Because nature is helping us," he replied. "But hurry. We must leave this place instantly. Where are the packs?"

Hidden in the shadows, it was some minutes before we found them. The doctor was fuming with an impatience so unusual that I was in some doubt as to his sanity—especially so in the light of his last statement.

At last we got under way, and clinging hand to hand made our way through the underbrush directly behind the cabin. Familiar as he was with the terrain, the doctor guided us in a straight line directly away from the city of cubes and toward the rim of the plateau. Despite his plea of the urgent necessity for haste, I forced him to move slowly and carefully.

The going was rough and highly dangerous. Stumbling through the darkness, we escaped outposts of the shadow-men only by miracles. Time after time, I feared that all was lost and that we were discovered. Then at the last possible moment, fate would intervene and save us by a hair's breadth from being captured.

It was the doctor's fearful impatience which continually threatened us with disaster. Again and again when prudence dictated that we wait and reconnoiter, he pushed boldly ahead. A tiny knight-errant with his cocked rifle in his hand and his white shirt gleaming like a torch, he violated all the rules of careful campaigning and yet escaped discovery.

As we climbed higher and approached the rim of the plateau we came into the circle of reflection from the huge lights in the circle of cubes and our dangers increased a thousandfold.

Once I paused to look behind us in amazement at what was taking place. The immense cylinder had reached a height of at least a hundred feet and was obviously nearing completion. A crew of the dark-clad workmen

swarmed to and fro, manipulating the giant cranes which swung load after load of materials from the cube to the cylinder. They worked with the frenzy of desperation. A hum as of a hive of giant bees came up to us from the circle. The prodigious lights, directed by a score of attendants, swung ceaselessly back and forth across the open space. Furnishing a background for the excitement were the cubes themselves, gigantic monsters crouched, it seemed, in readiness to spring. It was a veritable city—a city of steel and iron, of potential desolation and death.

"Hurry, Dana! Hurry!" The unguarded voice of the doctor sounded from ahead of me. Obeying his command, I turned and made my way up the slope after him, occasionally lending a hand to help Aien over or around a fallen tree or a giant boulder. As the brush cleared away, we ran forward recklessly to keep up with the doctor, who hurried as if endowed with the strength and speed of twenty men.

In front of us, from the rim of the plateau, I heard a shout. We had nearly reached the edge. Disdaining further pretense of taking cover, we pushed boldly through the last line of trees and faced the open expanse of ground which led to the rim.

But the way was barred!

Ahead of us, at intervals along the crest, were placed searchlights, miniature duplicates of the ones in use below. Their rays covered every inch of the edge of the plateau, preventing either entrance or exit, unseen.

Abruptly the doctor paused to drag out his watch and light a match.

"Dana," he said quietly, "we have just about three minutes. Shoot at their lights, and when they go out, run for it."

Sensing at last that our danger was immediate, I dropped on one knee and opened fire on the nearest light. My first shot scored a direct hit and with a splutter the light went out.

Reversing our fire, the doctor and I concentrated our rifle fire on the light apparatus on the other side. It seemed an eternity before we landed a hit and saw the glare vanish. There was now a dark spot some two hundred yards wide along the crest directly in front of us.

Snatching Aien in my arms, I ran as I have never run before in my life. At the same instant, the shadow-men opened fire and I saw the effects of their strange, noiseless weapons.

They were shooting what appeared to be condensed electric current; blue flame lightning bolts that burned, destroyed, obliterated everything with which they came in contact. The discharge was constant, more like machine-guns than rifle fire. They played the bolts across our path as firemen direct a hose.

For a few seconds we dodged back and forth between the flashes of death, playing hide and seek with the rays. It was a hopeless battle.

"It's come!" screamed the doctor suddenly and stopped in his tracks. "Lie down in this hollow, we may have a chance."

Tossing the girl down beside him, I covered her with my body. Behind us, in the valley, I heard a roar more immense and more threatening than anything I had ever heard before. It seemed that the end of the world was come upon us.

I turned and looked toward the cubes. Where our cabin had stood was now a sheet of solid flame reaching high into the heavens. Then the burst of the explosion reached us.

"Pray God that it works, Dana," begged the doctor. "Pray for the future of the earth. Pray for the men of our own race."

It, whatever it was, worked. I felt beneath my feet the stirring of the earth. Slowly it moved at first as a tired demon awakens, then more rapidly, magnificently, resistlessly.

I watched the little plain occupied by the cubes. Beneath them the earth

was cracking and crumbling, twisting their iron frames and upending them as toy blocks are shifted upon their corners. Around the toy cylinder in the center, the workmen were grouped, struck motionless by the frenzy of a world gone insane.

Beneath their very feet the soil was opening, cracking in immense slits that widened into colossal valleys. Deep down in their depths I saw liquid fire, the fires of hell come suddenly to earth. Then the entire plateau tipped crazily, crumpling toward the center. I saw a gigantic funnel formed by swiftly revolving mountains of earth. The funnel became a maelstrom of dirt and rock and metal down which was pouring in a continuous stream the countryside we had known.

Silhouetted sharply for an instant against the background of subterranean fires were the toy men of the cubes and their puny contrivances, one instant visible and then vanished forever as they slid in a crumpled mass into the volcanic fires below.

I heard no noise. We were deafened, all of us, by the initial crash of the doctor's weapon, whatever it was.

The curve of the funnel rim was broadening, reaching up toward us with gigantic, tentacle-like fingers. I felt the earth slide beneath me. I was gripped with the sensation of nausea. Trees and bushes uprooted themselves and fell to earth, or else poised sickeningly with their roots in the air. Down toward the maelstrom we slid onward to the inevitable end.

And then, for perhaps no reason at all, the particular plot of ground some two acres in extent on which we found ourselves remained poised on the very verge of the precipice.

Too much exhausted to think or reason, we somehow staggered to our feet, and, dodging the chunks of metal which yet fell all around us from the skies, we climbed the few hundred yards to the rim of the plateau and half fell down the slope of the mountain toward the green woods, the rivers and the calm safety below. I never remembered when we stopped sliding, to collapse in a tiny glen through which, untroubled by the catastrophe, a stream of clear water trickled quietly.

The last that I recall was a sensation of tumbling and falling down the mountainside accompanied, as I knew vaguely, by my two companions.

CONFUSEDLY, I realized that it was morning, but my muscles, torn and racked by the experiences of the last few days, refused to function immediately. After a long interval of half-awakening, I sat up wearily and commenced to take stock of the ravages of the night. My clothes were torn almost to shreds and they were covered with blood—my own blood, as I well knew after looking at my ripped and torn flesh. I had cut myself in a dozen places as I forced a way through the dense foliage for us in that last mad scramble.

My two companions were in scarcely better condition. The doctor, worn to but a shadow of his former self, muttered and tossed as he slept the sleep of complete exhaustion. I found it difficult to realize that this was the man who a few short hours ago had destroyed a thousand men and saved a world from war.

Of the three of us, Aien, who had gone through the most, had apparently suffered the least. True, her clothes were torn and covered with volcanic dust but her sleep was deep and healthful. I noticed that the dark hair was drawn back carefully to form a frame for her finely chiseled features and that her hands and face were clean. I knew that she must have awakened before the rest of us and bathed herself in the icy waters of the brook.

As I watched her, a queer exotic butterfly fluttered up from the waters to perch for a moment upon one of her tiny relaxed little hands. In the

clear gay sunlight the insect distended and stretched its wings until, alarmed at last by some vagrant breeze, it fluttered away.

The insect to me typified all that the future held for both of us. We had escaped. We were free. Life was good and the earth was young again. I realized that I had never really expected to escape from the city of the cubes. With me, as probably with my companions, it had been a mad gamble in which the cards were stacked before we began.

However, we were not yet completely in the clear. At any moment the remnant of the guards of the rim might discover our hiding-place. I wondered that they had not done so before. Already the sun was high overhead. It was time we were moving.

Aien woke lightly as my hand touched her shoulder. Dr. Frelinghusen was more difficult due to his greater exhaustion. I started to speak to him, and to my surprize found that I was unable to hear my own voice. The immense volume of that last ear-splitting crash had virtually deafened me. I must have made a queer picture as I stood there before them struggling to express my thoughts. However, my companions were too near exhaustion themselves to wonder at my plight. The events of the past night and our subsequent relaxation from the strain had left us all near the breaking-point.

During our hurried descent of the mountain we had, of course, lost our packs and retained only our rifles. Preparation for our journey then was a mere matter of a hurried wash in the brook, and we were ready to start. Personally I had no idea of the directions, but the doctor started off without hesitation and followed the creek bed downstream.

Shortly after noon we entered the Indian village from which a few days before a vaquero had departed to meet me in Lima. The natives were terror-stricken at our approach. No doubt they had reason to be frightened, considering their proximity to the plateau and taking into consideration the fact that they must have witnessed some small part of the night's terrors.

After we had convinced them that we were living and not dead, the old chief welcomed us in great delight. The doctor and he were apparently old friends; in fact, I am not sure that he did not regard our companion as one of the immortals. Few men could have spent the past night on the plateau of Tahunjero and lived to tell the story.

After they had tendered us the customary obeisances, the best that the village afforded was immediately placed at our disposal. Although we were eager to escape at once from the region of our terrible experiences, we decided to put off the start until the next day because of our fagged condition.

We rested, therefore, and on the next morning, with our fatigue partly overcome and with our voices and our hearing rapidly returning to normal, we set out on our long trip to the coast.

DURING the journey, Dr. Frelinghusen was evidently reluctant to speak of the happenings of that last night on the plateau. Again and again when I endeavored to question him as to precisely what had happened, he changed the subject so obviously that I could not but take the hint. I came at last to believe that the virtual execution of so many human beings had preyed on his consciousness and that he would never discuss the subject again.

I was really too much engrossed in my own happiness to wish to open up any subject bringing with it unpleasant memories. For the first time in my life I was learning what the companionship and affection of an ideal woman could mean. Aien and I dwelt in Paradise, and if sometimes she grew sad and her gray eyes would fill

with tears, I understood that even Paradise must have its sorrows and that her thoughts were far away with the loved ones whom she had left forever.

She learned English with amazing rapidity. Before we had left the shelter of the mountains she was able to converse in simple phrases and I knew that before we reached Lima she would pass, except for her soft intonations, as a modern English or American girl.

On the last night in the desert, as we grouped ourselves around the campfire, I determined that we must decide at last on the story which we were to tell the world. Falling in with my plans, the doctor, for the first time, seemed to have forgotten his melancholy and chafed Aien with almost his old jovial manner. The omens were propitious and I decided to begin.

"Doctor," I said, "I suppose you have guessed that Aien and I are to be married as soon as we reach Lima."

"My boy," he replied, "I did indeed guess it. Although I had hoped to adopt her as my ward, I know of no man to whom I would rather trust her. You have my heartiest congratulations."

"Doctor," I asked, "don't you think that it is about time that we decided on what explanation, if any, we are to give? How are you going to relate this marvelous adventure and how will you account for her?" And I gestured at Aien, who was silently watching us.

"Dana, for the past two weeks I have been thinking of that very problem. I don't know. Every time I recall the happenings of that terrible last night, I shudder and long to forget it. I don't know what to say or do."

Now was my opportunity.

"Just precisely what did happen?" I demanded. "It was never quite clear to me. First there was a gigantic explosion and then the earth caved in. What caused it?"

"Enough trinitrotoluol to wreck half New York," he replied. "I suppose you may as well have the complete story.

"When I first saw the plateau nearly four years ago, I had a suspicion that the cubes were hollow. I don't know just what I expected to find in them—a message perhaps from some other earth. I did not expect to find anything like this." He waved his hand toward Aien. "I sent out to the States for some high explosive, expecting to blast the cubes apart atom by atom if it was necessary in order to learn their secret. The TNT I packed in by horseback. It was a hair-raising experience, I assure you.

"I stored the stuff in the cave beneath the cabin. The earth beneath our plateau was a veritable network of tunnels, and I had no difficulty in packing the explosive quite a way down. By the way, Dana, did you ever notice any peculiarity about our plateau?"

I nodded. "Of course I did. As I climbed the mountain for the first time I decided that the whole structure was volcanic in origin."

"You are right. The entire plateau was a roofed-over volcano. It had been roofed over for thousands of years. But the molten lava and volcanic substances were still there, alive and powerful, deep down under the earth."

"So when you exploded your mine the roof caved in, did it?"

"Something like that, although there was another contributing factor as well." He picked up a specimen of tropical fruit shaped and formed somewhat like an orange, and tapped lightly on it with the hilt end of his knife.

"The action was much like this," he explained. "When I hit this fruit a single blow with the hilt, nothing happens. But if I hit it again and

again, repeating my blows always with the same force, the roof structure finally weakens, and at last it all caves in—so.'' And he tossed the pulpy remnants of the fruit aside.

''In similar manner was the action of our cubes. They were giant hammers striking time after time at the breast of old Mother Earth. At last she weakened under the attacks—the earthquake on the last day was an indication of that—and when I help a little with my comparatively tiny mine, behold! the hammer head is buried, absorbed in the breast of the mighty one. Do you see how it occurred, Dana?''

I nodded slowly. It was all very simple now.

''But what are you going to tell the world?'' I asked.

He shook his head. ''We will tell them nothing,'' he said. ''Those foolish ones would never understand. I am too old to waste my last days explaining to idiots. And besides—there is the little one. Would you wish to have her regarded as a freak, a sideshow attraction for the delectation of an interested and amused civilization? No, we will say nothing and go our ways in silence and be happy. Is it not better so?''

He rose to his feet and started to his tent.

''One question more, Doctor,'' I called. ''Answer it if you will, and then we need never mention the mystery again.''

''What is it?''

''Tell me how you could interpret the log of the old inventor? What methods did you use?''

He shook his head. ''Dana,'' he said, ''that is one of the questions whose answers I would wish to know myself. I did not interpret the book. It would be more exact to say that I read it. Dana, the log of the old inventor was written in archaic Sanskrit.''

''What?'' I stared at him in amazed wonder.

''Yes, Dana. I repeat it, the diary was in Sanskrit. Why, I do not know. Perhaps Aien does. Some day we must ask her.''

And he left us to go to his rest.

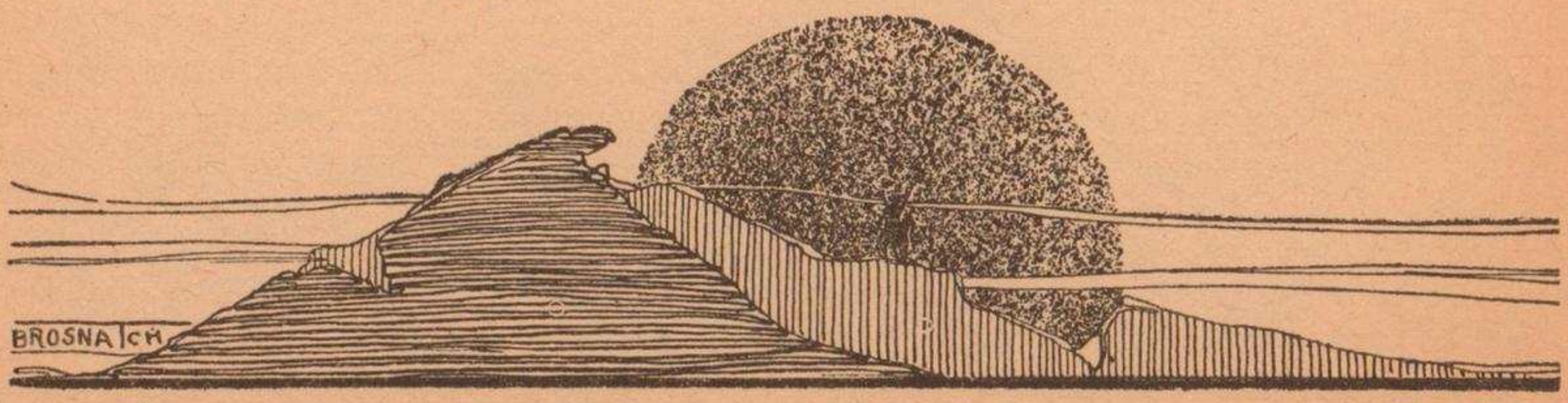
LONG afterward I did ask her and this is what she said:

''My father was a great inventor, yet he worked from the ancient plans of someone who had lived long before. He copied his plans and wrote down his diary in that dead and vanished language of his predecessor, so that none but he might read it.

''The first inventor was a genius who has long been forgotten. The legend relates that he became disgusted with his people and built the first cube—built it and then vanished into space accompanied only by a woman.

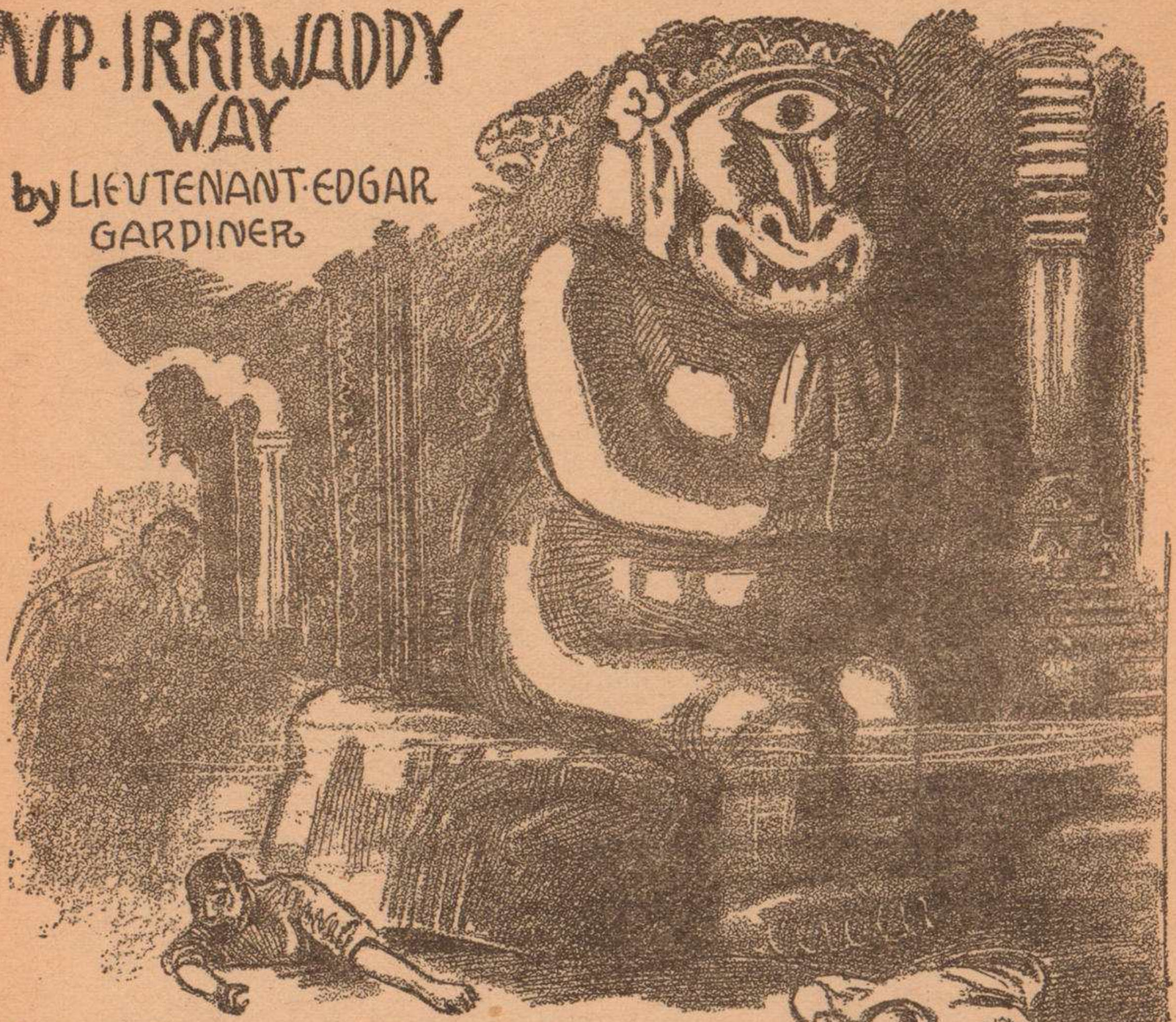
''The name of the inventor,'' she said, ''was Edam, and the woman was called Ev.''

[THE END]



UP·IRRIWADDY WAY

by LIEUTENANT·EDGAR GARDINER



"Too late! There was a soft thud as the idol swung into place."

IT HAD all been a tremendous mistake. From the time we had left Singapore on what was to prove such a terrible chase, I had felt that it was a colossal blunder. But the others had overruled my half-hearted protests, inflamed as they were by money madness and treasure lust. But one thing could they think of—that tremendous heap of rubies, of wealth incalculable, the secret of whose whereabouts was at last in their hands.

What did it matter to them that this was the treasure-house of a god? They didn't believe in heathen gods —not they! Nor in the supernatural. Trickery—that's what it was, nothing else, and this talk of a god of destruction whose very name the natives feared to utter was rot; while the tales about the many who had gone to seek this hidden loot never to return—that was nothing but ignorant superstition — native fancy with no basis in fact. Stuff and nonsense!

What did it matter that as far as they knew its devious trail, their information had come a blood-spattered deadly way? That but gave added proof of its genuineness. Men have ever killed for far less than this dazzling pile—history was full of such cases; and it would be so again.

They were positive of the truth and reliability of their map with its ugly brown stains. They were just

as sure of the information that had been gasped out by that native priest as his life slowly welled from his body, so terribly mutilated by native vengeance just when he had almost won clear away. And that information had fired them with a madness there was no staying, even while it chilled me with grim foreboding. Perhaps I had been in the Orient too long, had seen too much that could not be explained away; perhaps too much sun and raw native liquor.

I was overruled, browbeaten, bulldogged, until I gave in against my better judgment.

The trip up-river had been—well, not exactly a pleasure, but then, not so bad, either. I had done worse many times. Things had gone smoothly—too smoothly, I could see now. We had been led on like rats into a trap.

Step by step we had followed the trail as shown on that gruesome map, and as each item proved correct the hopes of my comrades had risen the higher while, oddly enough, my own spirits had sunk the lower; for I was scared—I, who had shot my way out of some mighty tight places and through some pretty rash adventures—I, who was never so cool as when the odds looked hopeless—here I shivered with dread while things went so smoothly — too smoothly.

We had cut our way through the jungle after leaving the last outpost of civilization, so called, the six of us: white men all; as brave and fearless a crew as you ever saw—and as unprincipled. We had come upon the ruined temple, almost swallowed up by the ever-encroaching jungle, with little or no trouble. It lay just where the map had indicated. And while the rest had jubilated over the easy conquest, I had known nothing but sick dread, a vague terror that was none the less real, oppressive, impending.

Our campfire gleaming redly over the ruined moldering idols ranged round that great room, and on the red-lacquered beams above, seemed to me oddly symbolic. That greatest stone monstrosity of all, seated above us in its niche, seemed a live and sentient thing. It leered at me through the flickering shadows, its one eye following me wherever I moved until I was almost mad.

I begged and pleaded with my comrades to get out while there was yet time, but they only jeered and shouted ribald comments. Forego the loot they had come so far to get? With success just around the corner? Never! To my entreaties that we push on then at once, rifle the cache and go while the night was with us, they turned a deaf ear. Tomorrow was time enough, they argued. No hurry now. It was much the best to wait until daylight before descending below ground in this venerable relic.

At last we lay down, the six of us, and their snores soon proclaimed the others asleep, but the longer I lay the more wide awake I became. Restlessly I tossed and tumbled; then in desperation I got up and crouched above the dying embers. Malevolently that evil image glared down upon us. So sinister it was that I shuddered. When I could stand it no longer I picked up a brand, swung it vigorously overhead until it blazed, and with this torch I clambered into the niche.

What I intended to do up there, I had not the remotest idea: perhaps there was a wild desire to hurl that stone image into the dust—I don't know. What I did instead, was to thrust the blazing brand into the corners and crannies, seeking everywhere for I know not what.

Across the face of the idol I swung the smoking flames, illuminating every hollow above, but saw nothing save the dust of centuries, patched and discolored by the mold of tropic damp. Then, my sanity returning in some measure, with a muttered curse

I turned and was about to throw the brand back to the hard-packed earthen floor, but instead, thought better of it and thrust the torch, with a sardonic humor, into the figure's clasped hands, into a hollow made for the burning of incense.

There! Let him sit once more as he had sat in the heyday of his popularity, with the smoke curling about his Satanic features. But now no devout throng of worshipers groveled on the ground before him. Instead lay five hard-bitten adventurers sleeping the sleep of the just until the morrow, when they would wrest from him his treasures, gathered through the centuries and left behind when his might had declined into obscurity.

A BLOOD-CURDLING scream broke through my musings. One of those five figures raised with a convulsive start and fell back writhing in agony, while the others came to frenzied life with a bound and gathered about him. I came tumbling from the niche in a hurry.

"Wot's th' matter, hi sye?" growled Jeremy Sykes, while the others babbled in excitement not unmixed with fear. The sufferer, however, was beyond answering. A bloody froth flecked his lips, drawn back from his teeth in an animal-like snarl; his limbs threshed wildly as those horrible agonizing tremors passed over him; his face turned a mottled, livid hue.

One glance I took and knew the worst. Of all venomous snakes—and they are myriad in that land—the smallest of them all is the most deadly. Scarce six inches long and red as hell-fire, his bite is the agony of centuries of the pit compressed into a short half-hour: agony so great that sufferers have been known to choose the merciful quickness of the steel in preference, though too often they had no such chance, but bent and writhed in tortures unutterable until the slow, dreadful end came. And, stop! did not the natives give him the same name as this fearsome image above us?

But Jack's paroxysms were growing more violent and his entire body was turning an ugly mottled purple. His eyeballs seemed straining from their sockets and his back bowed as if it must break, while from his lips burst the noise of a soul in torment unutterable. The cold sweat of horror stood damply on my brow and I was sick within.

Another unearthly scream, broken short by a harsh grunted oath as Jeremy Sykes dropped beside him: a flash of steel shone redly up, then down in a shining arc and cheated that dreadful grinning monster behind us of his last full measure of payment.

"God!" breathed Bill Callaghan, passing a shaking hand before his eyes while he drew a shuddering breath. "What hit him?"

I pointed at that grinning image above.

"Hell's bells!" growled Jeremy Sykes. "Nowthin' of the sort. Snake-bite. A little red devil. No cure for it; but an hour or so of what you saw Jack going through. Often enow I've seen it, and twice it was Gord's mercy to pass th' steel between the ribs to end it. Ugh!" And he turned unsteadily away while the others looked at me.

"It's the truth," I affirmed. "Steel is quick and merciful and no less sure. I'd thank anyone for that choice if it ever came to me. Jeremy did the best possible thing."

There was no more sleep for us that night. We sat instead about another blaze which we had built at the other end of the room, furtively eyeing every moving shadow and studiously avoiding the dreadful figure that lay in the half-gloom staring sightlessly up into the niche.

One gone, I ruminated. One. So soon and so terribly. Who would be

next? For that more would follow him I was sure. Deep within me I felt that as surely as I knew that I was still alive. And those deaths, I felt, would be just as terrible as this first one, whatever form they might take.

The others laughed at my forebodings. It was an accident, such as might occur to anyone, anywhere. These old ruins, they pointed out, were overrun with vermin. This land saw frequent violent deaths in strange guises. Why, one in every ten died from the bite of poisonous snakes! I was an old granny, a superstitious fool.

THE quick dawn put an end to our arguing, and as the details stood out more and more plainly in the grayness of that dim interior, the night seemed more and more like a fantastic dream — except for that horrible thing that lay, putrescent already, offensive and swelling, at the far end of the idol room. With the light came the first bit of the day's humid heat and in contrast our trip underground promised relief. We got out the map again and studied it carefully. Above all things we must not get lost in the labyrinth beneath us. How extensive it was we could not tell, nor did we want to know, save as it led us to the treasure we all felt was there.

"Le'see: we go down back of that big idol," said Peter Drew, his stubby forefinger on the map. "We must. They's no other place in this room that fits the plan," he argued as we objected.

"There's no opening there," I protested. "I was up there when—when——"

"Yeah, I know. But it was dark then. You couldn't see nothin'. The mouth of that underground passage just must be there."

To settle the argument I led the way into the niche, and after looking and prodding everywhere, they agreed with me that save for a little grille leading upward toward a dim light no other opening existed.

"Damme, it must be here," Peter insisted.

"Where?" I began. "We have tried everywhere."

"Maybe in the ceiling," he began, and jumped up on the idol's spacious lap to investigate.

"Oh, nonsense!" I began.

"Hey, look out!" shouted Jeremy as the huge stone idol tilted slowly forward.

Peter dropped off to one side, catlike, on all fours, and the idol swung slowly back again.

"You've found it," I shouted in triumph.

"Found what, you fool?" growled Jeremy.

"The opening of the labyrinth. It's under the idol, of course. That big stone god tilts on a balance, and under it is the mouth of the treasure-house. I saw the steps leading down."

"Aw, what bally rot!" from Jeremy again.

"Not at all. It had to be hidden, you know. What better hiding-place than under several tons of stone?"

"But how——"

"You saw how it worked. A man's weight out on the knees of the idol opens the way——"

"And its own weight shuts it again, eh?"

"Certainly it does. One of us has to stay outside to work it while the rest go below. Or perhaps there is some way to move it from the inside. Here, Peter, open it again and I'll go down and try to find out."

Obediently Peter climbed up on his perch again, and slowly the idol tilted forward once more. Down, down, till Peter could stand upon the floor and hold his weight about the figure's neck, leaving a yawning hole through which we might easily enter.

Three times we tried the rocking stone to make sure it would work

without sticking before my companions let me go down gingerly into the darkness. I counted fourteen steps before I reached the bottom, and the matches I lit showed me the corridor sloping slightly downward before me. By their feeble flicker I saw something else—something that made me shout aloud.

"What is ut, Jock?" and Jeremy's shaggy head was thrust into the patch of light that marked the entrance.

"Two skeletons, Jeremy," I returned. "The poor devils must have come into this place and the idol closed behind them, shutting them in to a miserable death," I called as I bent over them. "And wait——"

Into my voice crept such a note of excitement that all but Peter Drew came scrambling down to me. No doubt he, too, would have been there had it not meant the closing of that massive door.

By the flickering light of a candle or two that they had brought with them, my comrades saw the proof that the treasure we had come so far to find was still there.

How long those two had lain there could not be told: a hundred years perhaps, maybe three times that long—long enough to rot away almost every vestige of clothing. Yet one of those two had brought with him from those treasure rooms below indubitable proof that what we sought was still there. Tucked into his girdle perhaps, or in a purse long since gone to dust, he had brought a dozen or so of splendid rubies that now gleamed redly from about the pelvis bones where they had fallen. Each of them was worth a king's ransom. No wonder we shouted and scrambled for the precious bits of living flame.

A hoarse shout broke on our ears—that was Peter Drew! It brought us up those steps in a panicky run, sent us scrambling into the idol room around the base of the idol that even now was settling slowly into place. I felt its cold rough edge graze my shoulders as I scrambled out with Jeremy close behind me.

A muffled curse, and in my swift backward glance I saw that Jeremy had dropped one of his rubies. He swept it up again almost without pausing and was scrambling over the edge. But that momentary pause was fatal. The huge block of stone was swinging downward now at a terrific rate.

"Hurry, Jeremy," I shouted, and grasped his shoulders to drag him from beneath that impending doom. Too late! There was a soft thud as the idol swung into place. A spasm crossed Jeremy's face. I looked in dazed horror at the swift red spot that grew and grew from about his waist where he protruded from between the stones.

Where was Peter Drew, and why had he not held the stone god down away from the opening? I wondered even as I heard the sharp crack of Bill's heavy revolver and something flashed past my shoulder in a vivid streak of light. My swift glance showed Bill lying flat on the floor of the niche as cool as though he were at tiffin, the while he pumped an occasional shot into the light-shot gloom of the big room beyond.

And Peter's failure to keep the idol in place out of the opening was explained by the same glance, for I saw him lying on his face before that grim deity in an attitude of supplication, arms outspread. Poor Peter! His last act in this life! From his back protruded the handles of two of those terrible throwing-knives of which I had seen a few specimens down river.

Poor, poor Peter! *Semper Fidelis* was the motto tattooed upon his massive chest, and that he had been. Always faithful, yes, faithful unto death! With his last breath as his dying grip had loosened he had uttered the warning shout that had

enabled us all to escape from that death-trap.

All? No, not all. There was Jeremy Sykes pinned under that loathsome stone, still alive, still conscious, as I was surprized to discover.

Too well I knew what had happened when that stone settled into place with Jeremy only partly through the opening. How long can a man live when he is mashed into two pieces, I wondered? I had thought perhaps a few moments—surely not as many minutes. Yet Jeremy seemed almost normal in spite of that terrible thing, in spite of that gruesome spreading red flood about him.

"I'm done," he muttered thickly as he caught my eye. "Get these stones—to my wife—you know—address."

I nodded. "If I get out of this alive I'll do it, Jeremy," I promised. The filming eyes lit up joyfully.

"Thanks, old top," he whispered. A deathly grayness was creeping over his features and consciousness was fast departing. Death was coming almost like sleep.

"Get down, you fool," shouted Bill as another streak flashed past me, and once more Bill's service revolver spoke. It was followed by a blood-curdling scream.

"Gutted him. That's two," Bill grunted in satisfaction. "I wish I knew how many more are out there," he added as I crawled up beside him.

"Mois?" I questioned.

"No. We're too far north for their range. Bandit looters from beyond the northern border most likely. Damme, I missed him," as he pumped another shot at a half-seen figure.

A sibilant hiss drew my attention to our rear. Fergus was there beckoning to me and I crawled swiftly backward.

"I think we can get out through here," he whispered, pointing at the little grille to which I had paid such scant attention on our first inspection.

Fergus had thrust it partly aside and he now crawled through it into the gloom. I hesitated to follow into that dimly glowing opening that had swallowed him and now reflected the dim light as he crawled forward, lighting matches as he went, or a candle perhaps. Then the light faded out entirely for a few moments, reappeared once more, and then grew brighter as Fergus' head came into view, disheveled and dirty.

"It leads beyond the temple wall into a thicket," he grinned. "I don't think there is a soul about outside, either. They must all be in here. Tell Bill about it and we'll get going."

"And leave all our outfit?" I began.

"We get away with our lives, perhaps," he pointed out. "Our outfit isn't much good to us if we are all dead, is it?"

He crawled out to Bill's side and they conferred earnestly together for a moment. Then he was back again.

"Come on," he whispered. "Bill will hold them off for a few moments before he follows us."

As I edged around the idol again I bethought me of my promise to Jeremy and took from his stiffening dead hands the jewels that had cost him his life, slipping them into one of the pockets of my shorts.

How silent was the festering jungle, as we crawled out into the light once more! Behind us we heard the muffled reports of two shots, sullen and hollow, and a few moments later Bill rose beside us.

"Got another," he commented briefly. "Now let's get out of here."

We moved as silently and as swiftly as possible toward the river, but we had gone only a few hundred feet when we heard a yell of baffled rage.

"They rushed the niche and found us gone, I guess," said Bill as he in-

creased his pace. "And in mighty scant time those devils will be swarming after us. The trail is plain."

Five minutes passed — five long eternities while we made our way as swiftly and silently as might be toward where we hoped the river lay. Behind us the jungle lay quiet and empty.

"They must have missed us," whispered Fergus.

"Don't ever think it," I retorted. "Those fiends are on our trail, never fear. They're slipping along as silently as shadows and not far away right now. Perhaps they've even got ahead of us, some of them, trying to ring us in." I cast an apprehensive glance through the sun-splashed gloom. We stepped abruptly through a leafy tangle into a path or animal run.

"Thank God!" muttered Bill as he quickened his pace. Fergus and I followed closely on his heels. "We might get away now," he continued.

"If it's an animal trail, yes," I began. "If this leads to a village, no. For it might be that the villagers are the ones who attacked us."

"Speed is what counts now," snapped Fergus, "not talk," and he pushed past Bill.

"Something else counts most of all—something that neither of you has got," I growled as I jerked Fergus back and took the lead myself.

As swiftly as possible I moved forward, yet cautiously, too. Our attackers might be ahead of us and it would be an ideal trick to ambush us, slipping the steel into our defenseless bodies as we brushed past some leafy covert. Not a pleasant thought, that.

Yet, somehow, I didn't think they had passed us. Something within me warned me of danger, yet I was sure that any danger from them was in our rear. But if this path led indeed to a village, there was before us a silent danger more to be dreaded even than that other. So as I slipped along, my eyes were darting everywhere. I stopped at last, so abruptly that Fergus and Bill, crowding me closely, bumped into each other.

"What's the matter?" growled Bill, his voice a mere whisper.

I pointed at the trail before us.

"I don't see a thing but a leaf or two," he added and tried to push by.

Roughly I pulled him back and, stooping, I carefully lifted a large leaf from the path while they eyed me intently. Carefully I picked up the thorn concealed beneath it, with its gummy message of violent death. Carefully I searched the ground for more. There were no more. It was alone.

Bill's face was white, his eyes incredulous. "God! Suppose we had stepped on it," he whispered through stiff lips.

"Death, eh?" Fergus' voice was steady but a glance at his eyes showed that he thoroughly understood the situation.

I nodded none too cheerfully as I went on again more cautiously than ever. Soon the path forked.

"Which way?" asked Bill.

Almost without a pause I turned to to the left. "The other path goes to a village," I whispered. "And it isn't friendly. They want no visitors."

"How do you know?" Fergus was frankly curious.

"You saw that little bamboo lying across the path, didn't you?" I asked, never turning my head. "That is a plain warning. The path is closed to strangers. Beyond it ——"

"More poisoned thorns, eh?" he finished quietly.

"Yes, or worse," I promised.

"This path, now," began Bill.

"Probably runs to the river," I cut in. "And if it's not a game trail there may be a boat. If not——"

"If not," Bill interrupted bruskly, "I've got four more clips of ammunition. How many have you?"

"Six." My eyes never left the trail ahead.

We crossed a glade, and as we entered the jungle again Bill stopped.

"Go on," he directed. "I'll join you in a few minutes. I've had a feeling we were being followed."

"So have I. It's been getting stronger and stronger," said Fergus.

The place was ideal to stop those we were confident were so hot on our trail should they cross the glade openly. Should they skirt it, however—but I did not let my mind dwell on that. Bill was a sharpshooter, and in any event he would not go on the long trail alone.

The path was leading downward into a valley. We must be almost to the river. Our luck was still holding. If there were a boat, now—I heard the crack of Bill's pistol—once—twice—three times—then silence. Fergus stopped.

"I'm going back," he snapped. I laid my hand on his arm.

"No use, lad," I soothed. "Bill's all right. He stopped them, at any rate, whether he got any or not. And they haven't got him, I'm sure. He will be streaking it to us now. If he doesn't——"

I didn't finish, but Fergus' face grew grim as he nodded.

"You're right, Jock. It wouldn't do any good. But if he——" And then Bill was with us again.

"Got another," he jubilated. "Right between the eyes. And pinked another, I think. They're Mongols, just as I thought—raiders from the North."

My face lighted. "Fine," I exclaimed. "And they have a hostile village behind them."

"By Jove, that's right," Fergus grinned. "And this racket is more than likely to bring the villagers out, too."

I nodded as I swiftly took the trail again.

PERHAPS our good luck made us careless; certainly there was little excuse for our running into that ambush. The first I knew of it was seeing one of those flashing throwing-knives streak past me. I ducked instinctively and so escaped the withering shower of slugs and scrap-iron discharged by an old smooth-bore muzzle-loader that let go almost at the same instant. Fergus, just behind, was not so fortunate. His hissing indrawn breath told me he was hit, no less than his stagger. Bill's gun and mine exploded at the same instant, and a shriek answered their reports, but whether it was a death cry or not we couldn't tell.

Fergus sank slowly to the side of the trail and a red tide dyed his tattered shirt. Quickly I stooped and got his arm about my neck, then lifted him bodily the while I swung my gun in my left hand in wide arcs covering the jungle before me.

Bill's eager glances stabbed the green gloom about us, but the jungle was still as death. He moved forward close beside the trail like a shadow, taking advantage of every bit of cover while I followed with my burden as well as I could. Fergus' breath came in painful gasps, but he gritted his teeth and doggedly kept on.

It was utter foolhardiness for us to advance so, but with enemies ahead and behind, desperate measures were necessary. And such a desperate play might succeed through its sheer unexpectedness.

So it proved. Bill got in one more shot at a half-seen figure that was gone again in a flash, and, though we crawled along at a snail's pace, we saw no others. Perhaps we had been ambushed by so few that they had no chance in the face of our bold move. Perhaps our one hit had destroyed their desire for combat at close

quarters; at any rate we saw no more of them just then.

The ground beneath our feet was becoming a quivering jelly, a swampy quagmire that betrayed the river's proximity. The gloom was even more pronounced, with an oppressive quiet in the air, a sullen foreboding. Despite the heat I shivered.

On such treacherous footing I was hard put to go on with Fergus, and after several hundred feet of it I was almost exhausted. But the gloom was lightening; the jungle was changing; we must be almost to the river.

I could go no farther. Rest I must; my breath came in whistling gasps; I streamed perspiration. Chase or no chase, I could go no farther.

Close beside the path was a round rock about waist-high, and a short distance away a number of others offered an ideal resting-place as well as shelter should we be attacked. Bill stopped on the path, his glance darting incessantly about, every sense on the alert, and I carefully eased Fergus onto the nearest rock—not a rock after all, but some kind of spongy vegetable growth such as I had never seen before. Warily I rocked on my feet, too spent to take the few steps that separated this growth from the others. Bill dropped back to us and the lines in his face smoothed themselves momentarily as he smiled.

"We'll make it, old things," he encouraged. "It can't be far now."

Fergus' chin slumped forward onto his chest; his body sagged slowly toward us as I jumped for him. He was perilously close to a collapse, though the Lord knows he had gone through enough to try even a well man. His face was gray, his eyes closed. My arm about his shoulders, I strove to raise him, but he seemed made of lead. Again I heaved—no result. Bill stepped to the other side and we tried together with no better luck.

Then the terrible truth struck home to both of us. Fergus was held fast by that strange vegetable growth on which he sat. His legs seemed half embedded in its rubbery substance. But that was not the worst. All about him, through those plant tissues was a red stain, deepest close to him and fading gradually away.

I think I was the first to understand. Some few carnivorous plants I had seen before, but not of such a size or shape; my experience having been confined to Venus fly-traps and pitcher-plants back in the dim days of my youth.

"We've got to free him from this thing, Bill," I said rapidly. "It's not only holding him fast but it's drawing every drop of blood out of him," and I pointed to that darkening stain.

"God!" gasped Bill as his nimble mind took it all in at a flash. He heaved and tugged till his mighty thews and sinews cracked. As well have tried to pull down a vine-entangled jungle giant bare-handed as to pull that yielding form from the plant's tenacious grip.

"Cut him free with your knife, Bill," I suggested.

"I can't," he groaned. "I lost it crawling out of the temple through the passage."

"I lost mine, too," I admitted hopelessly. Oh, for one of those throwing-knives that had flashed past me not so long ago!

But Bill was heaving and tugging again in a frenzy. In desperation he jumped upon that spongy mass, stooped, and then lifted Fergus with a firm grip under his arms. Just such a heave had I seen him make in Singapore one day when he had lifted the end of a great teakwood timber so they could take the crushed body of a coolie laborer from beneath it. But all in vain: though he

heaved and tugged till I feared for Fergus' body, he never raised him an inch; he merely sank his own feet into the spongy mass to his ankles. And Fergus' legs, I noticed, were now almost buried in that frightful plant, while the red stain had spread through its entire bulk. And Fergus' face and arms were turning a sinister bluish color.

Oppressed by a sudden fear, I thrust my hand within his tattered shirt. I groaned. Fergus was dead. Not the slightest tremor rewarded my exploring fingers pressed over his heart. It was stilled forever.

"He's dead, Bill," I shuddered. "One of those slugs must have got him worse than we thought and he bled internally, or——"

"Or this devilish plant killed him," and then Bill's face became a tragic mask of terror. "It's got me, too," he screamed, while he struggled wildly to free himself from that deadly grip about his ankles. But each violent struggle only sent him the deeper into that yielding mass.

Fergus' legs had vanished entirely into that horrid thing. He was engulfed almost to the waist and sinking slowly ever deeper. Bill had sunk ankle-deep before he discovered he was trapped, and his struggles to free himself speedily sank him almost to his knees.

HELPLESSLY, sick at heart, I watched the hopeless struggle, unable to help in any way. There was nothing I could do bare-handed; no one to whom I could appeal for help. The brigands behind us, the natives behind them—all hostile, all seeking our death.

Bill was the first to recover his nerve. Face to face with a terrible and certain death that had already taken his brother and was about to claim him, he nevertheless refused to yield after his first momentary lapse.

"Go on, Jock," he urged. "You can make the river, perhaps. Take Fergus' gun and ammunition and his rubies. Here's mine." He tossed me three flashing bits of flame. "They're yours, and welcome. I'll hold those devils back when they come as long as I——"

He shuddered. I knew what he meant by that unfinished sentence.

I shook my head in negation.

"Go on, you fool!" he raged. "There's none to mourn me. Good riddance to bad rubbish. The world's the better for me leaving it," and he grinned wryly. "Perhaps I can do a little bit of good now to offset all the bad. Go on, old top, and good luck." So in the end I was persuaded.

Heavy-hearted I went forward, carrying with me the loot of two dead men and that of another who faced horrible death and hopeless odds as I may some day hope to face them, unafraid and smiling.

A gun in each hand, I crept slowly along that shaking, sucking path that threatened each moment to dissolve into abysmal ooze beneath my feet—onward to I knew not what, I knew not where. Death, certain and terrible, was behind me where it had already overtaken all of my comrades in most horrible forms. Would it get me too, I wondered? Would the powerful long arm of that long-forgotten, long-neglected god of destruction reach out even to me? In my heart was a sick dread, and a determination to do my best, whatever the odds.

I made my way through the gloom, my eyes ever ahead, my ears turned backward to where that grim, terrible thing was happening—or was it all over? What a cowardly fool I had been to leave! Yet, perhaps I would have been a greater one to have stayed.

No, it was not all over yet. I heard Bill's pistol cracking spitefully—half a dozen times; then after a pause, another string of shots.

Good old Bill! A man at the last, whatever his faults. Going down like a hero, game to the very last, never giving up, even though the odds were overwhelming.

My mind was engrossed over what was behind me when it should have been most concerned with what lay ahead. That is my only excuse for what happened. The path dissolved suddenly into nothingness; I scrambled madly for another precarious foot-hold; half turned, and began sinking slowly into that deadly muck —sinking to a death no less terrible, no less certain than those others had been.

I felt the muck creeping slowly and steadily upward. Already my thoughts pictured its constricting clutch about my chest, its deadly entry into my throat and lungs. Ugh! What a way to die—unseen, unheeded!

But wait! Perhaps there was a more merciful death even now creeping along that path behind me. I strained my eyes through the semi-gloom, hoping to see the skulking forms of the bandits. Better the merciful crash of a destroying bullet or the stabbing pain of one of those deadly knives than this slow, sucking horror about me.

Knee-deep already, I made no useless moves that might drive me down the faster. Though death seemed certain, I would not give up hope until the last. My guns in my hands, I would go down shooting if the enemy came. If not—well, I would go down anyway, perhaps with a last mercy bullet from my own hand.

What was that movement back there along the trail? Had they caught up so soon? Yet, it couldn't be. It might be monkeys, perhaps, in the trees above the trail; humans were hardly likely to come so.

Dimly through the oppressive gloom I made out a round, brilliant blue globe swaying at the end of a slender stalk and gathering to itself the faint light of that dense growth until it seemed to glow like a monster jewel. While I watched, several more of them appeared, rising above the lush jungle growth and bobbing gracefully above the path I had come. Odd how such trivial things should register on my mind in this extremity.

Slowly I sank into the slime—waist-deep—then more slowly yet until that filthy mess was up about my chest. But so slowly now was I sinking that I could scarce tell it. The minutes dragged endlessly by; each seemed like an eternity.

Would they never come, I wondered, after what seemed years of waiting? Had Bill's last fusillade beaten them off for good? I think I really hoped for the bandits' coming; anything was better than this slow, horrible approach of death, alone and unheeded.

Again and again I twisted my head around to view that path along which I had come, but it was utterly without movement save for the swaying and bobbing of those lustrous blue globes above the rank, steaming jungle growth.

TEN more minutes passed—or perhaps it was an hour—I don't know. The ooze had risen no higher. Though I felt nothing solid beneath my feet, I had failed to sink any deeper; I must be floating in that semi-fluid mess. My heart rose at the discovery, yet my reason told me that it meant nothing: I was helpless unless assistance of some sort arrived. Though I might not suffocate under that filthy ooze, I was doomed no less surely.

I felt, rather than saw, a movement beside the path; my quickened senses warned me that my pursuers had arrived. By straining to the utmost I could swing my arm around so that my gun commanded the path. Carefully I sighted into the thick of that dense growth; blindly I pressed

the trigger, and the spiteful crack of my revolver broke through that brooding oppressive silence, to echo and re-echo against the thick leafy growth that hemmed me in.

I saw the bullet shatter one of those bobbing blue globes; saw the shattered shards drop, followed by a blue smokelike cloud of dust that settled slowly. Again I fired, aiming blindly, and yet a third time, but the only tangible result was the shattering of yet more of those odd things, followed by other clouds of that blue dust that sank slowly out of sight behind that luxuriant jungle growth, spreading as it dropped.

Had I imagined the presence of an enemy? Were my senses giving way under the strain of this terrible ordeal? It would seem so. The jungle was as motionless as ever. Not a sound, not a movement betrayed the proximity of man. Ah, I had it! They hadn't seen me yet; they were trying to locate me.

A scream rang out—wild, inarticulate with fear, with agony. And hard on its echoes the jungle woke to life with a chorus of them; the deathstill growth sprang to motion as half a score of frenzied figures broke out into the path.

It was the end, I told myself grimly, the last desperate charge that must surely overwhelm me. Very well. Let them come. It was at least a relief after all these horrors. I was ready to die. But I would not go alone. I would hold my bullets until I could make them all count. There would be plenty to join me as I took that last long trail.

But it was not the rush of an attack after all. These terror-stricken Chinese half-castes were too utterly demoralized to think of anything but blind flight—flight in any direction in their frenzied efforts to get away from that accursed spot. While I watched I saw two of them pushed headlong from the path into that morass that hedged it so closely, to sink into its depths still struggling madly and screaming eerily at the top of their singsong voices.

In God's name, what had happened there? Another dropped across the path, writhing in agony, and yet another. In all directions they sprang, colliding blindly with the jungle growths, slipping heedlessly off the path to sink into that deadly slime, or dropping in their tracks to lie threshing with pain. One huge, half-naked fiend sprang directly toward me, dropping into the ooze only a few feet away, where he twisted and clawed blindly.

As I watched his death agonies my dazed mind dimly grasped its stupendous horror. My bullets had not gone so wild as I had expected after all. True, I had hit no human body, but I had loosed upon these cutthroats something more deadly for them than mere bullets. Those slowly sinking, spreading blue clouds had dropped upon their naked bodies, unnoticed perhaps, but only so for a few moments.

Dustlike spores they must have been, of some gigantic fungi unknown to science, growing in that almost unknown land; another of those terrible carnivorous plants such as had laid hold of Bill and his brother a short while before—or was it ages ago?

The gleaming yellow body so close to me was stilled now; its struggles were over. Even as I watched, a terrible change was going on—a change that my mind refused almost to believe. Swiftly its color was changing from yellow to blue. Its outlines grew indistinct. The upper part of the torso seemed dissolving into a mass of little tentacles that grew rapidly and stretched upward in a compact group. Higher and higher they rose until they stood a foot above the level of the morass—two feet—three——. And now from among them were pushing up colorless spikes that gleamed whitely as

they rose swiftly. Up, up, up, until only by straining my head backward with all my might could I see their tips.

Their upward growth was stopped, yet they seemed still in motion. The rods were becoming more slender, the tips were thickening rapidly. Now the whiteness of them was changing to a deep glistening blue and the thickened tips were becoming those glistening blue globes I had seen rising above the jungle growth, while the compact mass of tentacles at their base was assuming a wilted, shriveled appearance, to fall over at last, a putrescent mass, upon what had once been a human body vibrant with life. Only upon the path I saw the leg lying of what had so short a time before been a man.

Dimly in the back of my mind some memory was struggling toward the surface of its consciousness. In my school days, in my youth I had watched slimes and molds under the high-powered microscope and had seen those tiny infinitesimal growths complete their life cycle so. But they had been tiny growths, fractional parts of an inch in height—never such monstrosities as these. And their similar upthrust sporangia held in their shells the dustlike spores of another such life circle, even as these blue globes that bobbed about in the air above me.

So far I reasoned, when like a flash, my own danger came to me. These spore-cases bobbing above me so lazily held another such cycle within their gleaming shells. In the fullness of time they would open, dropping another slow-floating, blue, dustlike cloud to settle down, down, down upon me held fast by the ooze beneath them.

In that moment I think I went stark, raving mad, screaming curses at the top of my voice, beating wildly at the viscous unresisting filth that held me there, until at last reason fled.

What happened after that I could dimly reconstruct when, I know not how long after, I woke once more to reason within the high latticework hut of a native village. So weak that the slightest move took prodigious effort, I opened my eyes to the blazing sunlight and stupidly watched a native woman busy at her mud hearth preparing a meal. She turned and smiled as she saw my eyes upon her, calling in her musical voice while the hut shook as someone climbed the ladder without and a man entered; a golden-hued native like the many I have met in that upland country.

For many days I dwelt with them, slowly regaining strength under their ministrations, until at last I could travel again. From that hut, one of the pitiful few that formed the village, under the guidance of the native, I made my way back to the Irriwaddy and the trader's landing.

Of the scene on that jungle path or the ruined temple with its forgotten treasure they could not or would not tell me. Nor would they talk of my rescue. I surmised that the man had come along that path of sucking, treacherous death and had plucked my unconscious body from its slimy embrace, bringing me to the village. Of my guns or the rubies there was no sign; they must have been sucked down into the ooze.

Back once more at the river's edge, I loaded my guide with what was to him a veritable treasure of brass rings and armlets, smiling a return to his thanks while my eyes traveled over the breast of that tawny stream that would carry me away forever from that still powerful though forgotten god whose arm had so nearly taken me.

The GODDESS of the PAINTED PRIESTS

BY DRURY D SHARP



"She forced the nugget into the snake's throat."

MILTON was sweltering on the baked mud roof of a Hopi pueblo; one of those pyramid cities lost in the shimmering heat of the Painted Desert. The snake dance was on. The painted priests were chanting and circling upon the roof below, and he watched the mottled and white bellies of the squirming serpents as they dangled sulkily or whipped savagely about to free themselves from the sharp teeth of the dancers. The white bellies flashed their flag of death—rattlesnakes, big fellows most of them. And Milton watched for them among the mottled bellies of the harmless prairie snakes. They were on the south roof of the ground floor and he was safe enough on the roof of the second floor above them, with only a rude pole ladder from roof to roof. But the sight sickened him, sent chills of revulsion through him, though he had seen their snake dance many times before.

A girl's head came cautiously over the north wall. She was creeping up carefully between the poles of a ladder which projected a few feet above the roof. She was a woman with green eyes and yellow hair and fair cheeks which flamed under the raw sun. He stared as though she

was a mirage or a vision. The last thing he expected to see climbing that wall was a white woman. As she saw him perched upon the parapet of mud bricks she stopped, astonished. She frowned as though disappointed, abandoned her caution and mounted the roof. Both thought themselves pioneers here, one hundred and fifty miles from the iron arteries of the world.

She spoke in a low tone which barely reached him above the pulsing chant beyond the wall.

"Will they let one watch?" she asked, reassuming her movement of caution and crouching below the parapet.

He grinned at her. "Are you afraid? You crept up like a shy ghost."

"I didn't want them to know I was here. I suppose it won't make any difference, now." She glanced at him meaningly.

"Oh, they don't care," he answered carelessly. "I've watched them a good many times. They do have some rites, though, which it would pay to creep up on, if one watched at all."

"I wanted to watch them without their knowing." She was still frowning. "I'm afraid they won't put on the whole show."

"You'll see enough," he affirmed with another grin, "You 'fraid of snakes?"

"No. I'm interested in them."

"Well, there are plenty of them down there," Milton said with a shrug of his gaunt frame. "I never did care much for this kind of a show, yet I always manage to be here each year. Guess I'm queer that way, looking at what I don't like to see. I always took in the snake shows back home. The girl in the glass case, and the big python crawling over her, ugh." He shrugged his shoulders again.

She winced. He studied her keenly.

"Yes, I'm that girl," she admitted, and bit the flesh of her lower lip. "That is why I am here. To find something new. I'm with the circus."

"You?" the question escaped him as an exclamation.

She still crouched under the parapet, peering over at the half-naked snake priests circling with the stamp of feet and the throb of drums. He talked on to make her forget his remark.

"Tell me, I've heard a lot about pythons—can they swallow a man whole, or is that a fable?"

"I don't know," she answered absently, looking with interest on the scene below. "I shouldn't wonder, though; I've seen common prairie snakes no bigger than that one"—she pointed to a snake—"swallow eggs. I saw one with a china egg in its throat one time; it gagged trying to crush it, and then kept swallowing it though its neck swelled out like a toothache."

"There are lots of things about snakes I don't know," he spoke to her again; but she did not hear. She was watching the weird scene below. The drone of the chant vibrated into their ears, the singing of the rattlers whined into their flesh, the glare of the white sun smote their brains, and the white teeth of the brown, naked dancers gleamed whiter clamped upon the scaly throats of the snakes.

Milton was nauseated. The girl did not seem so, but under some unholy spell. Her green eyes followed one large, sinuous serpent as it dangled from the brutelike mouth of a hairy but scrawny priest. Milton, torn between his disgusted abhorrence of snakes and his attraction to this woman who was interested in them, moved nearer her as she peered down upon the door of an open Kiva.

"Say, tell me," he drawled, "am I seeing things? Am I dreaming or awake?"

She thought he was speaking of the snake dance, but his eyes were on her. She did not look up from her downward gaze at the writhing length of that enormous snake in the mouth of the snake priest, but answered him with dreamy lassitude, as though she were only half awake or in a semi-delirium.

"It does seem unreal. See those fangs in his arm. He only shakes it off! He is unharmed! If I could only do that? I *can* handle them, but I must charm them. If I could only handle them like that!"

Milton recoiled involuntarily. She sensed it and turned a smile upon him—a strange, pensive smile which begged that she be not misunderstood. He felt an impulse which was primal, and which the civilized man fought to conquer. He stammered an apology; not exactly an apology, more an explanation.

"I just can't think—of you touching them." He shrugged his shoulders in a slight intimation of his thoughts.

Her eyes softened. She understood, and understanding him she seemed to find something which for the moment fascinated her even more than the twisting snake in the mouth of the priest, yet with a different kind of an influence, not mesmerism, just his awakening concern for her.

"Snakes aren't so bad as you think, when you know them. I felt much as you do, for a while, but they saved the life of one I love, and they have provided means for me when I thought there were no means, so why should I not like them?"

She was defending herself more than the snakes. He did not answer her, but sat in a moody silence listening to the hiss and whir below, his only movement being to change about so that the sun could not strike the same side of his body for long at a time. She was interested in him, and after a while tried to renew her defense.

"Don't you think it's our traditions which take hold of us like that?" she asked.

"Maybe," he answered, "but I believe one would loathe snakes if he had never seen them before."

"Not always," she said, raising a bare arm toward the exotic dancers. "Those men down there worship them!"

He was silent, and they listened to the wail and chant of the priests.

After a while she spoke again. "I wish I could see that huge rattler a little closer. I wish I dared go down close to them."

"Why don't you?" he asked with a quizzical smile.

"I would. But those priests! They look at each other so queerly from their black eyes. I'm afraid of them."

Milton stretched his legs upon the baked roof and then got up.

"Come. I'll go down with you."

THEY walked to the crude pole ladder which led from the roof above to the roof below. She did not tell him her name, nor he tell her his. He was thinking of the marvel that such a woman should exist at all, and wondered not at the lesser marvel that she should be in this particular place. And she was thinking of the snakes, wondering if they who had saved her in one crisis would crush her in the next, would draw a line between her and the man beside her.

He went over the wall first, stepping upon the ancient, sun-cracked rungs of the pole ladder, looking back at her with a smile, and she waited on top until he should step upon the hard clay of the roof below. With his eyes upon her he did not see the nest of snakes which crawled at the foot of the ladder, and looking at him she did not see them either until it was almost too late; and the

priests with their sacred dance and the attendants with their sticks and sacred meal were too devout to let their eyes wander from the back of the man ahead of them. There were dozens of snakes at the base of the ladder, harmless prairie snakes with tapering tails and slim heads, but one of the larger sullen ones had kidney-shaped splotches of brown upon its scaly flesh, and it coiled and lifted the thick wedge-shaped head which denoted the poisonous rattler, and darted its forked tongue and whirred its vibrant rattlers.

The chant was shrill and loud. She leaned over the wall and extended both her hands. She doubted if she could make him understand, and her very fear caught her voice and stifled it to a whisper as she motioned to him.

"Wait! Stop!"

The chant of the dance went on. The priests had not seen nor heard, but Milton had. He turned about upon his narrow perch and saw the wicked, lidless green eyes below him, eyes which held the concentrated venom of a thousand years' enmity with man, not soft, deep green eyes like hers above him. Milton swore under his breath, shivered a little, and climbed back to the roof above. Beside her again he tried to laugh easily, but could not hide his abhorrence of the insidious death he had escaped.

"I'll go first," she said, and was already upon the ladder.

"No you don't," he commanded, looking about the bare roof for a weapon. "That devil has its fangs!"

But she was going down, calmly smiling at him with a pleased assurance of her power.

"Stop!" he cried, leaning over and grasping her hand, his eyes on hers, and said hoarsely, "I'm not a coward. Come on back. I'll go first."

The low walls of the house were not longer than the length of her arm above her head, and by now her feet were very close to the head of the big serpent, but she left her hand in his and descended another rung.

"It's all right," she said, her eyes still holding him. "Let me loose, please. It will strike if I can not see it."

Milton released her hand and stared with a perplexed fear, chilled to his soul. She stepped slowly and sinuously, lithe as the serpents themselves, picked up the big fellow and laid him upon her bare white shoulder, let him circle her white arms and coil about her whiter throat. Twice about her white throat she wound him and let his long brown body fall like a necklace of rusty gold down across her rounded breast and over the glistening sheen of her white dress, its tail weaving back and forth, its ugly head curved forward, sullen and stiff, like carved bronze. There was no hint of bravado in her actions. Every movement was the careless, yet trained action of long custom. She seemed hardly aware she was doing anything out of the ordinary, and she turned her green eyes invitingly to the man upon the roof, with the faint trace of a smile about the corners of her mouth. The bright Arizona sun caught the coils of her yellow hair, and the dry breath of the desert breeze wrapped her skirt close about her knees, and there was something about her which caught the imagination of the white man above and the copper men below.

A vibrant calm fell upon the worshipers, a calm more violent than the stamp of their feet or the throb of their drums, or the undertone of hissing snakes. And then priest and attendants, slowly, with upstretched arms and adoring faces, sank to their shaking knees, and prostrated themselves among the serpents.

"Akkii! Akkiii!" they groaned, bare bronze backs toward the white noon sun.

Something had happened for which they had long waited and prayed. That bright American girl with the great snake about her neck and the white silk of her dress shimmering in the sunshine, appeared to them as some angel manifest from heaven, a fair goddess of the snakes, their messengers to those who reign above.

MILTON looked down in astonished, frozen amazement, half believing he had witnessed some marvel conjured by the priests below. There was something about this hot, dazzling sunshine which gave credence to the unreal. It wrought great lakes which vanished at approach, it built cities of walls and towers upon the bare and vacant table-lands, it mixed mystery with reality, and here was this girl, fair under a sun which withered and burned the flesh, coiled about with the snake-angels of the demon-worshipers below. So he stood there very much as spellbound as the priests, who were prostrate upon the lower roof with great snakes writhing and whipping about upon the hot, baked floor, whipping and coiling about, trying to release themselves from the clenched teeth of the priest and the outstretched hands of attendants, the whir of their rattlers high-pitched and shrill. Yet not a brown face raised from the floor and not an outstretched hand upon that blistering roof so much as twitched as fangs sank into lean, muscular arms.

The grizzled old priest who had led the ceremonies rose slowly with his head low toward the ground, as though not daring a second look at the vision. She stood like some goddess of fine marble, with hair of spun gold and arms and face of alabaster. Even then not one moved other than the majestic old priest. The girl was transfixed more with amazement than any idea of having struck an attitude of proud superiority, while he, bowing low, spread wide his hands in a gesture of abjection and worship, all the other bare copper backs prostrate under the burning sun.

With slow, august grace the old man retreated, one brown leg thrust back, the other bent in genuflection, the grace and precision of long-accustomed ceremonies, but also with an added touch of fear, wonder, worship! Backward, backward, step upon slow adoring step, until he reached the mouth of a rounded Kiva with a panel of fine polished granite before its door.

With a cry of high-pitched wailing, sad, yet with a tone of final, culminating triumph, a cry more wild and unforgettable in that unarticulated Hopi tongue, he swept back the Kiva door, and there tumbled into the sunlight such a hoard of dull, gleaming, yellow gold as caught the goddess' breath and left Milton gaping upon the roof.

And there were jewels, blue turquoises and red rubies, and sapphires and opals which sparkled and ran fire under the sharp sunlight; hand-wrought Navajo bracelets, and heavy crude necklaces of turquoise, great silver earrings and armlets, and golden anklets and bracelets of a curious antique Spanish pattern, bracelets with great blood rubies and scintillating diamonds; and there were long ropes of matched pearls, and old coins, and gold nuggets and dull heavy yellow dust; the long accumulation of long years of war and barter and search; several hundredweight of sparkling, gleaming, flaming treasure!

Milton and the girl were too astonished to take in its meaning. Some hazy, dull idea that she was being worshiped had overpowered her, some idea that all this was intended for her, though it seemed more the wild delirium of the intolerable glaring sun than reality. Even then it never occurred to her what it might mean—

that it threatened her—that an influence was at work which might enslave her and destroy the man upon the roof.

The old priest, singing his wild chant, was now being echoed by the prostrate men. His brown, withered hands dived into the hoarded treasure and scattered basket after basket full at her feet in slow unison with his weird song. Gleaming, sparkling, glowing under the naked sun the various treasures fell about her, heaping upon her slippered feet and mounting her silken legs, and formed a pedestal of jewels and fine gold.

Something touched her now, something she could not explain. Realizing she was the central actor of a tremendous drama, she lifted her face toward heaven and smiled, a quaint, charming little smile, her eyes bright and her cheeks all aflame. And still the hoarded treasure rained at her feet, and Milton upon the wall became uneasy, for he knew this could not last. He knew, too, he had seen something the Hopi would never let be known beyond the walls of their pueblo. She was safe enough at present, but when she failed to vanish and take their offering with her would they allow her to leave as flesh and blood? Would they? He knew that they would not. He knew when she did not vanish into heaven with their gifts they would begin to be troubled, and to doubt, and like all men to destroy that which they had worshiped. As for himself—but he did not think of himself. She was down there, she who was so lovely, coiled about with snakes and half buried in gold. And then his eyes took in the significance of that treasure. No more long pilgrimages across the hostile desert; she would no longer have to feel the crawl of snakes across her silky shoulders. She could leave the snakes to the heathen priest. They could live! They? That brought back the hint she had dropped him. At least it had seemed a hint to him, a barrier she had raised that he might govern his heart. "Snakes saved the life of one I love." That sentence! It had stung him before she was in this danger, and danger had roused something long peaceful years never arouse.

THE old priest had now prostrated himself upon the roof again and she was extricating herself from the heap of treasure, gently uncoiling the big snake from her white throat and placing him, a tawny coil, upon the yellow gold and the blue turquoise and the white silver. Then with a lithe grace she went quickly up the ladder and took refuge behind Milton upon the higher roof. She was afraid of those bare, white-toothed snake priests. She did not trust the power she had exerted over these heathen men.

"Oh!" she cried and sank limply behind Milton. "Wasn't it terrible?"

"It was very beautiful—and unreal," he said as he gazed at the tumbled treasure with its goddess gone.

"Yes, unreal," she assented.

"That stuff down there! That!" He pointed below. "It must be worth almost anything. I had no idea they had gold! So much gold!"

Then he thought of her and forgot the treasure.

"You'd better go now. Hurry. If they find you're flesh and blood they'll kill you."

She made an odd little gesture of compliance which caught at Milton's heart, but she said, "Come on, let's go together. I believe I need an escort."

There was something in his eyes she did not understand.

"I can't go just yet," he said, knowing full well the Hopi would never let him go while their treasure was left rejected upon the roof. Then,

as she looked at him puzzled, he added, "I haven't finished my trading."

"You practical man," she laughed, "to finish trading when a goddess demands your service. Very well, is it good-bye then?"

"Yes, good-bye," he said hastily, afraid she might wait too long.

"Good-bye," and then as she started over the wall she blew him a kiss and said softly, "I shall remember you, always."

She waved him a farewell as she descended the ladder and left him her smile as a last picture, just over the parapet of the roof.

He struggled with an impulse to follow her, and conquered. There was no way but for him to remain. They would not let him go to tell the clans to the east and the west and the south of their treasure and its shame. He must stay; for if he left with her, their runners would hunt him down and find her also, and find she was no goddess after all, and he would fight but that could not save her. There was only one way to save her and that was by surrendering himself. So he sat thinking, waiting for the storm to break below and the painted priest to leap upon him and kill him. He thought of her alone out there on the thirsty desert, slowly taking her way across the miles back to the circus for which she had risked the little known Hopi lands. He wondered if she would think of him as she said she would, always!

And then, he saw her face again, there above the parapet. At first he thought it the heat that had wrought that face there, her face, which he had never expected to see again. She smiled and then drew a puzzled frown between her eyes.

"I forgot," she whispered. "Where is the well? I have no water."

"You haven't water?" he exclaimed alarmed.

"Only about a gallon," she answered. "Is it that bad? You look positively scared."

He sat thinking hard.

"The trader told me there was plenty of water at the pueblo," she said, defending her lack of foresight.

"There is. But not for you."

"Not for me?"

"They must not know you need water. Goddesses do not come with water kegs for the return trip. I can't get it for you, either. They might think I was trying to get away."

He bit his lip hastily, but it was out, he had told her. She understood instantly why he had not gone. Her act had made him prisoner. She came back quickly upon the roof, fear in her own eyes now. She caught hold of his arm, whispering tensely: "What is it? What are you hiding? They will kill you! They'll kill you because of what you saw down there! I know it! You can't fool me, man. Tell me the truth! I'll not go until you tell me the truth!"

He only shook his head and said, "I'm only afraid for you. They must not find you. You must go."

"Then you come, too," she insisted. "What am I saying? We can't go, either of us. We should die of thirst."

"Look!" he pointed toward the southeast. "See that gully in the red sand, just beyond the soapweed clump?"

She shaded her eyes from the glare of the sun.

"Yes."

"Up that gulch two miles you will find my burros loaded with water and food. Take them and go quickly. I will follow with your burros and meet you at Tres Piedras within a week. This is your only chance. Hurry! They won't look for you. If I am here they will suspect nothing."

"But you?" she questioned look-

ing at him closely, her eyes telling what her lips would not say.

"Me?" he said as though he had just thought of himself. "Oh, I know these *hombres*—I trade with them."

"But you said they would not let you go!"

"I'll fool them."

"How?"

"I have a plan," he lied.

"Why did you hide your burros?" she asked with new suspicion.

"I didn't hide them. There's a little shinery brush up that gulch. I left the burros there to save feed."

He drew her back quickly from where she was standing near the wall. "Keep low!" he whispered a caution to her.

The grizzled old priest had ventured to raise his head from the blistering mud bricks, and hesitated with his head poised in air as though listening for a flutter of angel's wings, and then he guardedly risked a glance toward the heaped treasure and then a full gaze of astonishment. She had vanished as she had come, but his old face gathered wrinkles of worry into its seams. He began a chant of wailing, waking the seemingly dead acolytes, swaying his old head toward the mass of treasure as he chanted. Milton understood what it meant. They were wailing because their treasure had been refused. Hardly knowing he was thinking aloud he said, more to himself than the girl, "If we only had some way to get rid of that stuff! If we only had some way!"

"I've gotten you into trouble," breathed the girl as she crouched beside him. "I never dreamed of such a climax. You get away. It was my fault. See if you can't escape. If they come up here I can startle them for a while."

"Escape? Say!" He laughed with a bold fearlessness. "Do I look that kind?"

She was repentant now. "Please go!" She begged. "It was my fault. Go! Leave me to undo it."

"If we only had some way of getting rid of that stuff, we could go together. If we only had some means of lugging it off, all of that blasted stuff, carry it off in such a way as to make them think it was sucked up into heaven or taken by their angels. You could go and I would follow you. They would want me to go then so that I might tell the unbelievers to the south and east of what I had seen, but if we can't get rid of that stuff they will never let us go. They would kill you if I went with you, for they would hunt me down. You will have to go on alone, and let me have my chance when you are gone."

"Listen! Listen!" she exclaimed, her words drowned by the clamor below. "They're going crazy. Listen!"

THE mysterious appearance and disappearance of the girl, her strange power over the snakes, had set the dancers on fire. The crisis for which they had waited for centuries was upon them. The great day long looked for had come. Prophecy was fulfilled, legend was verified. Their music grew fevered and wild, their dance waxed violent and fierce. Throbbing, pulsing sobbed their drums; pleading, beseeching wailed their chant; calling, calling back the angel who had given them a visitation; praying with their dance for her return; praying with their most furious and fervid dance for her to return and accept their gifts, their long-accumulated treasure against this time; and then they prostrated themselves, hoping when they arose to find their treasure gone.

"I must go back," she whispered.

"What?" he exclaimed, not trying to hide his fear for her.

"I must go back. I have a plan." That was all she would say.

"You must not." He was firm, but he asked, "What is your plan?"

She did not tell him. He might not consent. If she failed and they killed her, he would be free. She would not have his blood upon her hands. She had a plan, a bold, foolish plan. It might make away with the gold and jewels—those dear, terrible jewels, and that gold. Yet, there was many hundredweight of it. Gold is so very heavy. She could not carry it away; that would be impossible, but she had a plan, a plan that had come to her as she spoke of angels.

Every head there below was close against the ground, and again she descended the ladder. Milton protested, but she went ahead and he dared not call out or try to detain her, but he stood where she had left him like an image of stone, watching her as she picked up the stupefied serpent where it lay hot and blinded by the sun, still coiled upon the heap of treasure. She put the snake carefully to one side and stooping down lifted necklace after necklace and bracelet after bracelet; cheap silver ones from the Navajo tribes to the east, and costly fabulous ones from rich caravans which had journeyed from the west coast; heavy gold ones from the defeated Conquistadores who had become lost upon this Painted Desert; strings of matched pearls and heavy turquoise and beads of pure gold. She covered her arms and ankles and slipped them about her neck until there remained not one bracelet or necklace left. Then she stretched down her arms and lifted the big snake and placed him upon her shoulders.

Milton still stood perplexed and petrified. He thought her purpose was to take the necklaces and bracelets and leave the heavy gold and the heaps of rare jewels. He knew that would not do. They would find her upon the painted sands weighted with her ornaments, and they would never let him go as long as the gold and jewels were left, for the vision had refused their greatest gifts, their own gold and blood rubies picked from their sacred mountains, and she had taken the handiwork of the hated Navajo and the spoils of the more hated Spaniard. No, they would not let him go. But that mattered little. He would have thrown himself in the midst of those vile, poisonous snakes if it would free her.

Still she stood waiting. Why did she not go quickly to the ladder on the other side of the wall which led to the ground below? Why did she not hurry to get across the great burning sand and reach the gulch he had shown her? He was of half a mind to call to her, to urge her to run, though he knew that would not do. They would hear him and kill her before she could get away. Tensely he leaned over and wondered what she had in mind.

And then he heard the long rise of a queer sound, rising in a thin weird key, throbbing like the beat of drums, quivering like a cry; louder it grew, rising and rising, sobbing and wailing in the same thin key. The prostrate worshipers heard it and their rigid muscles grew stiffer until they seemed like petrified images of stone. The snakes of the big Kiva heard it, too, and poked puzzled heads from its door as the staccato plaint kept on.

Milton looked at the girl in astonishment. In her mouth was some kind of a reed pipe and she gazed steadily ahead of her toward the door of the snake Kiva with the same dazed look he had seen upon her face as she had watched the snakes from over the wall. Milton began to feel somewhat hypnotized himself as the queer sound went on.

FROM out the Kiva door one mammoth snake drew its seemingly interminable coil, and after it came

another, and they glided toward the girl upon the pile of precious stones and metal; another and another, dozens of them, hundreds of them, and still they came from the Kiva, more and more of them, and on they glided with that sinuous, sidewise sweep, crawling over the prostrate men, on and on to the foot of her golden throne.

Milton stared in wonder, fear, horror! What could she do? What *could* she do, against that oncoming reptilian army? But even as he despaired, he saw her do a peculiar thing. She passed her hand before her very much as a hypnotist would do, and the big prairie snake ahead stopped with a puzzled stupor, raised its head from the earth in a rigid metallic-seeming arch, and then opened its yellow mouth and hissed, darting its tongue in and out with lightninglike rapidity. She reached down and lifted it with one hand, and with the other lifted a nugget of gold the size of a marble; then, grasping the sides of its mouth, she forced the nugget into the snake's throat and with her fingers outside its neck gently massaged the bulge until the snake had swallowed it. And this she did again and again in the hushed silence which fell upon that lone pueblo in the vacancy of desert and clear sky, a silence that was broken only by the creepy rasp of snake bellies over the hard baked roof. The white-bellied rattlers she charmed but laid in a stupefied heap to one side, grasping the harmless prairie snakes to make the cache for her gold.

When one snake's sides were distorted with gold and rubies and pearls and sapphires and turquoise, she laid it in a heap and picked another of the larger prairie snakes and repeated her methods. She did not hurry, for she was handling death. Rattlers were coiled or crawling all about her, and yet the pile diminished very slowly. If those priests looked up! If they found her feeding their treasure to the snakes! What would they do? Would they rise and kill her? Milton had no idea and he fretted as time dragged on.

The old priest began to grow uneasy, too, with grim silence about him. He stirred, he poised his head in air again, he was about to rise. The girl saw him. She dropped the big snake in a twisting heap at her feet. Milton clenched his teeth. She ought not to have done that. She ought to have placed the snake about her. That is what had startled them before. Milton gripped the ladder as the grizzled head of the priest slowly turned toward the treasure heap. She must do something at once. And she did. She placed the reed pipe in her mouth and blew a note, long, wild, high. The old man dropped as though hit by a bolt from heaven.

"*Akkii! Akkiii!*" he groaned and flattened his face to the roof.

She lifted her snake again and went unhurriedly on, yet with the swiftness of precision. Her eyes fell upon a pigeon-blood ruby. It was larger than any Milton had ever seen, and he knew that she coveted it, for she reached down and placed it to one side and kept on with her labor until there was left but a handful of yellow dust, which she swept up carefully and placed in one of those tough, round, waterproof baskets the Hopi weaves from the strong fiber of the yucca leaf, and into the basket she dropped the great ruby and picked up the basket and took the snake from her shoulders and went swiftly down the ladder to the ground, beckoning Milton to follow her where she had gone on the trail to the gulch. From his perch above, Milton saw her vanish behind a large drift of maroon sand, and then he went below.

The big snakes were heaped upon one another, sluggish with their

weight of precious stones and much heavier gold.

"My brothers," Milton said.

The prostrate men arose, looking quickly toward the heap of snakes and where had lain the heap of treasure. There was a shout, a scream of triumph, a babble of dancing joy, an ecstasy of religious exultation. It was some time before they would listen to him, circling in their frenzied dance, flinging handfuls of sacred meal toward the heap of snakes, dancing, dancing, round and round, but finally he made them hear him and commanded their attention. Then he began in slow, solemn speech.

"My brothers," he spoke in the Hopi tongue, and they settled upon their tucked-under legs as in a daze, or dream, or weary exhaustion. "I have seen. And now I go to tell the Navajo and the Laguna and the Acoma that there is a true people with a true worship. And that I have seen with my own eyes that she has come and accepted of your gifts, and such as she has not taken with her she has left in the belly of the snakes, her angels, so that when they carry your messages for rain and long life she may know that they come from your pueblo and not from another. And when your name is heard among the Eagle clan to the east, or the Water clan to the south, or the Bear clan to the north, they shall have my witness. And now, my brothers, I go, and may peace be unto you."

And when Milton overtook her below the sand dune and had smiled at her triumphantly and tenderly he said: "And now the snakes have saved the life of one you love, and the life of one who loves you; but what can the one do who loves you, without your love?"

And she laughed a little happy laugh and said to him, "The one I love, sir, is you."

And he looked at her bewildered and said:

"But you told me they had saved one you love even before they had saved me?"

And she laughed more happily and said, "The other one, you goose, was myself."

SONNET

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Empress with eyes more sad and aureate
Than sunset ebbing on a summer coast,
What gold chimera lovest thou the most—
What gryphon, with emblazoned wings elate,
Or dragon straying from the dim estate
Of kings that sway the continents uttermost
Of old Saturnus? Or what god, or ghost,
Or spatial dæmon, for thy spirit's mate
Art fain to choose? . . . Howbeit, in thy heart,
Though void as now to vision and desire
The days and years deny thee, shall abide
The passion of the impossible, the pride
Of lust immortal for the monstrous ire
And pain of love in scarlet worlds apart.

A Short and Eery Story Is

THE DAMSEL AND HER CAT

By DAVID H. KELLER

IT ALL happened in the fall of 1270.

The Damsel Susanne had developed a sickness that frightened her parents and drove Friar Sinistrari to extra hours of devotion. She would retire as usual in the evening, and, after some hours had passed, there would come a cry from her as though she had suffered from a nightmare in her sleep. Going to her daughter's room, the mother would find her in a deep sleep and very white, with little beads of perspiration on her face. Moisture gathered on a mirror held before her mouth but she could not be seen to breathe. This way she would stay for hours, often till the first dawn of day, and then she would sigh deeply, grow roses in her cheeks and fall into a natural sleep from which she would awake by noon. These periods of deep unconsciousness, hours of stupor, came at first a week apart, then twice a week, and finally every night. During the daytime the damsel lost her buoyancy and light heart and became listless.

The duke, her father, was poor. Fortunately for him the forests were full of deer and the rivers abundant with fish. Grain was raised by the vassals, and firewood was plenty. Everyone contributed toward the welfare of the little community. There was but little gold, and few jewels, some dresses that had been worn for three generations, plenty of armor, and at least some degree of security. The very poverty of the duke and the isolated position of his castle kept at a distance the robber bands that roamed over France during those lawless centuries.

The duke and his Lady Arabella, however, considered themselves rich in one respect, and that was in the possession of their daughter. She was not only a well-behaved young lady, but she had some degree of beauty and in addition was intelligent enough to learn to read and write, a most unusual accomplishment in those days for a woman. The old friar was proud of her, as she was the only pupil of his old age. He was almost enthusiastic over her scholastic attainments and frequently spoke of her wisdom.

In 1270 Susanne was seventeeen years old. Life must have seemed very quiet to her during those years, and no doubt she took long breaths and sighed deeply when the friar told her tales of Paris and the French court. I presume that she thought nothing ever happened in Aragon—and just when the child was ready to die from the very sameness of her life, the cat had come to the castle.

There is no doubt that this was a very unusual cat in every way. She was much larger than the average cat, and striped like a tiger. The eyes were yellow and at night shone like large stars. During the entire time the cat was at the castle she was never seen to eat; while she often

sat on the table at mealtime, not even the choicest titbit was fine enough to tempt her appetite. As soon as this cat came to the castle all the other cats left, at once, and their absence was not a cause for concern, for all the rats and mice left at the same time.

The cat came and went according to no rule or reason and seemed to have no trouble in going anywhere she wished to, even though the doors were closed and the windows locked. She was never seen in the small chapel. Her favorite room was that occupied by the Damsel Susanne, and she seemed fonder of that child than of any other person in the castle. She would lie for hours at a time on the floor, watching Susanne, her eyes first narrow slits in the yellow and then deep pits of a peculiar green.

The damsel liked the cat, and for that reason the animal was tolerated. Friar Sinistrari protested from the first and said that it would end in some horrible disaster, but the damsel cried and the Lady Arabella looked concerned and the duke said that he saw nothing of harm in a cat; so it ended in the cat's staying. Yet in the fall of the year the damsel was ill more often than ever.

To add to the worries of Duke Jacobus Hubelaire, strange tales began to come to the castle. First a goose was found dead with blood coming from little punctate holes in the neck; then little lambs were somehow killed during the night and their bodies sucked dry of blood; and finally a child was taken from its crib and the torn and lifeless body left in a thicket near the grief-stricken parents' hut.

The common folk were dependent on the duke for protection, so it was natural that they send a delegation to him telling him what they feared and asking him for help. They were no cowards though they were serfs, and the tale they told to the duke, his lady and the friar was no story to tell to little children.

To put it briefly, their tale was this—that several of them had seen a woman wandering through the woods on the nights when the lambs and the baby had been slain. It was the opinion of those who had seen her most clearly in the moonlight that the woman had the dress and general appearance of the Damsel Susanne. At this statement the duke swore, the Lady Arabella fainted, and the friar crossed himself. The nobility in the castle assured the serfs that they must be mistaken, as they were sure that on these nights the damsel had been asleep in her bed—not only asleep, but so deeply asleep that she could not be aroused.

For a wonder the simple folk believed the duke and his lady. They left the castle convinced that their eyes had betrayed them. The friar went at once to his room, where he spent long hours in study and prayer, nor did he neglect to fast, to purge, and to drink large amounts of water mingled with the juice of limes. Then the secret was revealed to him by merciful Saint Anthony.

What he realized was this:

When the cat was in the room with the damsel, she was always awake or sleeping peacefully. On occasions when the damsel was in her deep and deathlike stupor the cat was never to be seen. When she roused from this deep sleep the cat was always in the room, crouched in one corner or hidden back of a chest. In some way the cat was associated with the strange sickness of the girl. Another fact was evident. The child had been perfectly well before the cat came. Also the killing of the animals and the child had all happened since the coming of the cat.

If the cat could be killed, then the whole trouble would stop. At least Friar Sinistrari hoped so. Unfortunately, the thinking about killing the animal and the actual kill-

ing of it were two separate things. There was no doubt about its having nine lives; perhaps it had ninety. Secretly the duke offered a gold piece as a reward for the killing of the cat; everyone wanted the money and tried to earn it, but when they saw the cat they were weaponless, and when they had their weapons ready the cat was never to be seen.

Then another lamb was killed, and the very next night an attempt was made to take a baby out of the cradle. This time the mother was watching and when her baby cried she sprang forward in its defense. She saw a woman in white picking the baby up. There was a struggle, and finally the intruder fled. The mother was sure that it was another woman who had tried to rob her. She had scratched the thief's neck and, the next morning, while telling the story to the duke and the friar, showed them the blood, still under her fingernails.

The duke tried to comfort her, but all the time he and the friar were looking sidewise at each other, and as soon as they could do so they went to the room of the damsel. She had passed through another hard night, one that was worse than usual, but when they saw her she was sleeping naturally. There was a red spot on the sheet, and when they turned her head they saw several long red scratches on her neck.

The cat sat as usual up on the window-sill, leisurely washing her face.

The duke was not a coward but at the sight of the scratches he turned pale and started to gnaw upon his fingers. The friar thought harder than ever, but all he could say was to repeat the statement that they should kill the cat, at which statement the animal disappeared through the window and was seen no more that day.

But the Damsel Susanne was whiter than her usual wont that dinner-time, and against the pallor of her face her red lips blushed. Friar Sinistrari had something on his mind, it seemed, something that he dared not speak to the damsel's father. None the less, he made two suggestions: first, that from then on the damsel be watched constantly, and second, that a lamb be tied as a decoy and a bait in the grass circle of the dark wood in back of the castle. He advised that all the people hide themselves in a great circle around this lamb and watch in the full of the moon for whatever might come to kill the lamb and suck its blood.

His advice and argument were so good that the duke promised him that no matter who came for the lamb, they would kill him in any manner the friar considered best. The friar went to the blacksmith and had a long talk with him, and all that day the smith toiled at his forge.

That night the lamb was tied in the middle of the bare circle. No tree or shrub grew there—only a small green grass—and all around the edge were mushrooms. The simple peasants, shivering but at the same time determined to do what they could to rid the place of this horrid pest, hid in the thick wood some distance away. They were told to come to the circle when they heard the screech of the great horned owl.

The Damsel Susanne complained of being tired and went went to bed earlier than usual. In the next room, looking through holes bored in the wooden partition, watched the duke and the friar. The window was open and the night was still; there was no breeze, and the candle by the bed burned without a flicker. Just as they were growing tired, the moon came above the trees and shone into the room. There was now

light from three sources—the moon, the candle, and the fire on the hearth. They had no trouble in seeing the cat come through the open window and jump up on the bed. They had no trouble at all in seeing the great green globes of the cat's eyes as it leaned over the damsel and seemed to suck the breath of life from her. Friar Sinistrari had to hold the duke to keep him from rushing into the room. Then, with one jump, the cat disappeared through the window. When they reached the room, Susanne seemed as though touched by the hand of death. Leaving her in the care of her mother and the aged nurse, the duke ran out of the castle, followed as rapidly as possible by the old friar. A few men-at-arms joined them in their hurried walk to the bare circle. There they joined the blacksmith and the others who were waiting.

The full moon, just above the tree-tops, was like a harvest moon, yellow like an orange, round as a ball and large as a bushel basket. It seemed to rest on the top of the pines, flooding the circle with light. In the middle of the spot the white lamb baaed uneasily.

Then the woman appeared.

The duke gasped. The friar prayed. Every peasant who saw what was to be seen crossed himself, for the woman was the Damsel Susanne, but her eyes were yellow globes in the moonlight. She glided over to the lamb and struck it with her left hand. A feline cry echoed through the wood, and then, without further pause, the woman seized the lamb, bit it in the neck and started to suck the blood. Once she raised her head to listen, and her lips were red in the moonlight.

Out of the stillness came the hooting of an owl!

From every side the peasants gathered to form a complete circle, greatly afraid but determined to do the thing they had been asked to do. They carried axes and hoes and sharpened stakes, and a few had spears and swords. The circle finally was three deep with determined men.

Too late the woman realized that she was surrounded. She glided away from the dead lamb, and her face was covered with blood and hate. Several times she jumped savagely at different portions of the encircling ring only to be met by the threatening hedge of weapons. Then the friar whispered to the smith, and he shouted an order to close upon the woman.

To the duke's credit he kept silent; he had promised to keep silent and not interfere, but his face disclosed the feeling in his heart to find that this woman, this fiend from hell, was his daughter. Closer and closer the threatening ring of peasants pressed, and finally a few of the bravest jumped and bore the woman to the ground under their weight. The blacksmith had her by the throat, but not before she had drawn blood from his arm.

The friar called for the brazier of glowing charcoal. In it, white-hot, was a brand in the shape of a cross. Shaking with excitement, the old man managed to control himself long enough to say earnestly, "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost;" then he took the handle of the brand in his hands and pressed it against the skull of the woman, just above and between the eyes—pressed it with all his strength. . . .

The woman writhed beneath the weight of those above her. All the powerful strength of the smith was barely enough to hold her head to the ground. Shriek after shriek filled the air as the hot crucifix burned its way into her brain and into her soul, searing and destroying the very centers of her life.

And to the horror of all, to the

surprize and amazement of those who held her, she changed suddenly in shape, and when she died, it was not the Damsel Susanne they held, but a twisted cat.

The duke was brave, but for all his bravery he fainted.

When he came to his senses, he found that a large fire had been built and the cat was searing amid the flames. There was nothing to do but to stumble back to the castle.

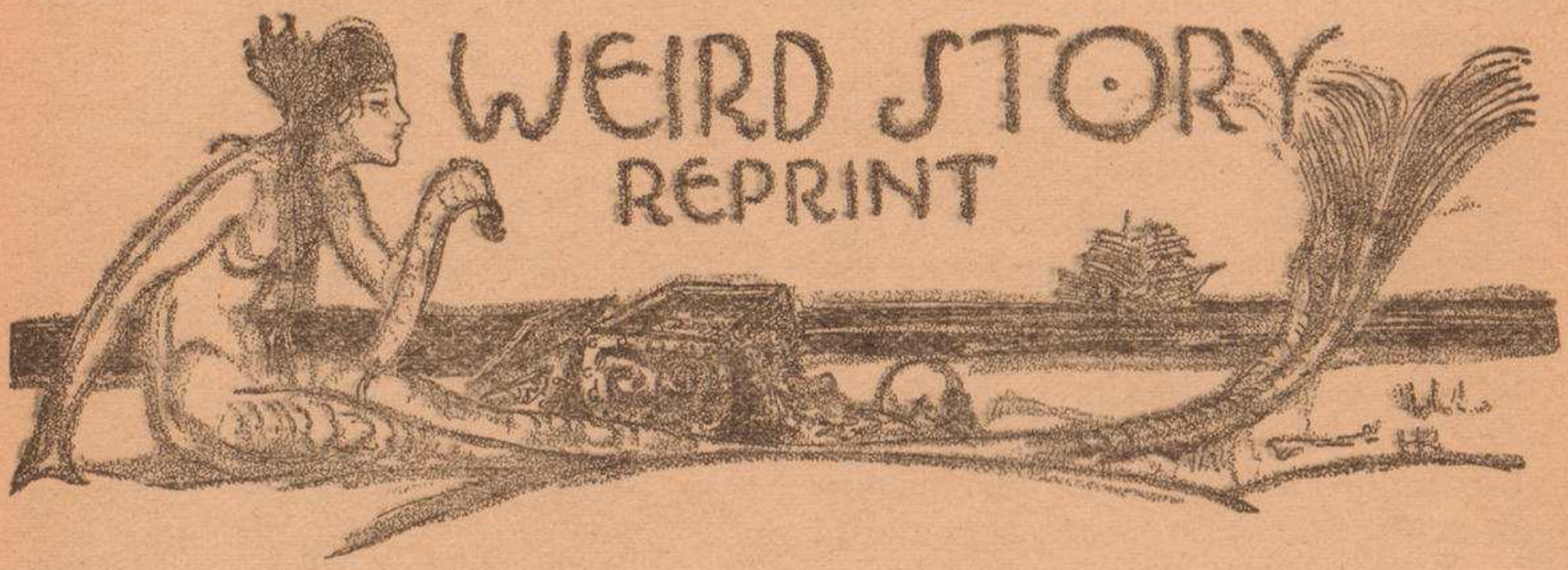
The Lady Arabella told her husband that she had sat by the side of her daughter holding a golden cross in her hands and praying. At a certain time the damsel had screamed, sat up in bed, and then dropped backward. The mother and the old nurse thought she was dead, but her regular breathing soon showed the return of life. The rest of the night they spent in the bedroom, one on each side of their beloved daughter, holding her hands.

The morning dawned, a lovely rose.

The damsel, waking, called for food. When milk was brought to her she drank it eagerly but complained that it hurt her to swallow. Then she fell asleep.

In the daylight they saw a red cross on her forehead.

On her neck were the livid marks of fingertips.



The Diamond Lens*

By FITZ-JAMES O'BRIEN

1. *The Bending of the Twig*

FROM a very early period of my life the entire bent of my inclinations had been towards microscopic investigations. When I was not more than ten years old, a distant relative of our family, hoping to astonish my inexperience, constructed a simple microscope for me, by drilling in a disk of copper a small hole, in which a drop of pure water was sustained by capillary attraction. This very primitive apparatus, magnifying some fifty diameters, presented, it is true, only indistinct and imperfect forms, but still sufficiently wonderful to work up my imagination to a preternatural state of excitement.

Seeing me so interested in this rude instrument, my cousin explained to me all that he knew about the principles of the microscope, related to me a few of the wonders which had been accomplished through its agency,

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* This story, published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1858, was the first of the great weird-scientific stories. It won immediate popularity for the author—a popularity which continued unbroken until his death in the Civil War.

and ended by promising to send me one regularly constructed, immediately on his return to the city. I counted the days, the hours, the minutes, that intervened between that promise and his departure.

Meantime I was not idle. Every transparent substance that bore the remotest resemblance to a lens I eagerly seized upon, and employed in vain attempts to realize that instrument, the theory of whose construction I as yet only vaguely comprehended. All panes of glass containing those oblate spheroidal knots familiarly known as "bull's eyes" were ruthlessly destroyed, in the hope of obtaining lenses of marvelous power. I even went so far as to extract the crystalline humor from the eyes of fishes and animals, and endeavored to press it into the microscopic service. I plead guilty to having stolen the glasses from my Aunt Agatha's spectacles, with a dim idea of grinding them into lenses of wondrous magnifying properties — in which attempt it is scarcely necessary to say that I totally failed.

At last the promised instrument came. It was of that order known as Field's simple microscope, and had cost perhaps about fifteen dollars. As far as educational purposes went, a better apparatus could not have been selected. Accompanying it was a small treatise on the microscope— its history, uses, and discoveries. I comprehended then for the first time the *Arabian Nights Entertainments*. The dull veil of ordinary existence that hung across the world seemed suddenly to roll away, and to lay bare a land of enchantments. I felt towards my companions as the seer might feel towards the ordinary masses of men. I held conversations with nature in a tongue which they could not understand. I was in daily communication with living wonders, such as they never imagined in their wildest visions. I penetrated beyond the external portal of things, and roamed through the sanctuaries. Where they beheld only a drop of rain slowly rolling down the window-glass, I saw a universe of beings animated with all the passions common to physical life, and convulsing their minute sphere with struggles as fierce and protracted as those of men. In the common spots of mold, which my mother, good housekeeper that she was, fiercely scooped away from her jam pots, there abode for me, under the name of mildew, enchanted gardens, filled with dells and avenues of the densest foliage and most astonishing verdure, while from the fantastic boughs of these microscopic forests hung strange fruits glittering with green, and silver and gold.

It was no scientific thirst that at this time filled my mind. It was the pure enjoyment of a poet to whom a world of wonders has been disclosed. I talked of my solitary pleasures to none. Alone with my microscope, I dimmed my sight, day after day and night after night, poring over the marvels which it unfolded to me. I was like one who, having discovered the ancient Eden still existing in all its primitive glory, should resolve to enjoy it in solitude, and never betray to mortal the secret of its locality. The rod of my life was bent at this moment. I destined myself to be a microscopist.

Of course, like every novice, I fancied myself a discoverer. I was ignorant at the time of the thousands of acute intellects engaged in the same pursuit as myself, and with the advantage of instruments a thousand times more powerful than mine. The names of Leeuwenhock, Williamson, Spencer, Ehrenberg, Schultz, Dujardin, Schacht and Schleiden were then entirely unknown to me, or if known, I was ignorant of their patient and wonderful researches. In every fresh specimen of cryptogamia which I placed beneath my instrument I believed that I discovered wonders of which the world was as yet ignorant.

I remember well the thrill of delight and admiration that shot through me the first time that I discovered the common wheel animalcule *(Rotifera vulgaris)* expanding and contracting its flexible spokes, and seemingly rotating through the water. Alas! as I grew older, and obtained some works treating of my favorite study, I found that I was only on the threshold of a science to the investigation of which some of the greatest men of the age were devoting their lives and intellects.

As I grew up, my parents, who saw but little likelihood of anything practical resulting from the examination of bits of moss and drops of water through a brass tube and a piece of glass, were anxious that I should choose a profession. It was their desire that I should enter the counting-house of my uncle, Ethan Blake, a prosperous merchant, who carried on business in New York. This suggestion I decisively combated. I had no taste for trade; I should only make a failure; in short, I refused to become a merchant.

But it was necessary for me to select some pursuit. My parents were staid New England people, who insisted on the necessity of labor; and therefore, although, thanks to the bequest of my poor Aunt Agatha, I should, on coming of age, inherit a small fortune sufficient to place me above want, it was decided that, instead of waiting for this, I should act the nobler part, and employ the intervening years in rendering myself independent.

After much cogitation I complied with the wishes of my family, and selected a profession. I determined to study medicine at the New York Academy. This disposition of my future suited me. A removal from my relatives would enable me to dispose of my time as I pleased without fear of detection. As long as I paid my Academy fees, I might shirk attending the lectures if I chose; and, as I never had the remotest intention of standing an examination, there was no danger of my being "plucked." Besides, a metropolis was the place for me. There I could obtain excellent instruments, the newest publications, intimacy with men of pursuits kindred with my own—in short, all things necessary to insure a profitable devotion of my life to my beloved science. I had an abundance of money, few desires that were not bounded by my illuminating mirror on one side and my object-glass on the other; what, therefore, was to prevent my becoming an illustrious investigator of the veiled worlds? It was with the most buoyant hope that I left my New England home and established myself in New York.

2. The Longing of a Man of Science

My first step, of course, was to find suitable apartments. These I obtained, after a couple of days' search, in Fourth Avenue; a very pretty second-floor unfurnished, containing sitting-room, bedroom, and a smaller apartment which I intended to fit up as a laboratory. I furnished my lodgings simply, but rather elegantly, and then devoted all my energies to the adornment of the temple of my worship. I visited Pike, the celebrated optician, and passed in review his splendid collection of microscopes—Field's Compound, Hingham's, Spencer's, Nachet's Binocular (that founded on the principles of the stereoscope), and at length fixed upon that form known as Spencer's Trunnion Microscope, as combining the greatest number of improvements with an almost perfect freedom from tremor. Along with this I purchased every possible accessory—draw-tubes, micrometers, a *camera-lucida*, lever-stage, achromatic condensers, white cloud illuminators, prisms, parabolic condensers, polarizing apparatus, forceps, aquatic boxes, fishing-tubes, with a host of other articles, all of which

would have been useful in the hands of an experienced microscopist, but, as I afterwards discovered, were not of the slightest present value to me. It takes years of practise to know how to use a complicated microscope. The optician looked suspiciously at me as I made these wholesale purchases. He evidently was uncertain whether to set me down as some scientific celebrity or a madman. I think he inclined to the latter belief. I suppose I was mad. Every great genius is mad upon the subject in which he is greatest. The unsuccessful madman is disgraced and called a lunatic.

Mad or not, I set myself to work with a zeal which few scientific students have ever equaled. I had everything to learn relative to the delicate study upon which I had embarked—a study involving the most earnest patience, the most rigid analytic powers, the steadiest hand, the most untiring eye, the most refined and subtile manipulation.

For a long time half my apparatus lay inactively on the shelves of my laboratory, which was now most amply furnished with every possible contrivance for facilitating my investigations. The fact was that I did not know how to use some of my scientific implements—never having been taught microscopics—and those whose use I understood theoretically were of little avail, until by practise I could attain the necessary delicacy of handling. Still, such was the fury of my ambition, such the untiring perseverance of my experiments, that, difficult of credit as it may be, in the course of one year I became theoretically and practically an accomplished microscopist.

During this period of my labors, in which I submitted specimens of every substance that came under my observation to the action of my lenses, I became a discoverer—in a small way, it is true, for I was very young, but still a discoverer. It was I who destroyed Ehrenberg's theory that the *Volvox globator* was an animal, and proved that his "monads" with stomachs and eyes were merely phases of the formation of a vegetable cell, and were, when they reached their mature state, incapable of the act of conjugation, or any true generative act, without which no organism rising to any stage of life higher than vegetable can be said to be complete. It was I who resolved the singular problem of rotation in the cells and hairs of plants into ciliary attraction, in spite of the assertions of Mr. Wenham and others, that my explanation was the result of an optical illusion.

But notwithstanding these discoveries, laboriously and painfully made as they were, I felt horribly dissatisfied. At every step I found myself stopped by the imperfections of my instruments. Like all active microscopists, I gave my imagination full play. Indeed, it is a common complaint against many such, that they supply the defects of their instruments with the creations of their brains. I imagined depths beyond depths in nature which the limited power of my lenses prohibited me from exploring. I lay awake at night constructing imaginary microscopes of immeasurable power, with which I seemed to pierce through all the envelopes of matter down to its original atom. How I cursed those imperfect mediums which necessity through ignorance compelled me to use! How I longed to discover the secret of some perfect lens, whose magnifying power should be limited only by the resolvability of the object, and which at the same time should be free from spherical and chromatic aberrations, in short from all the obstacles over which the poor microscopist finds himself continually stumbling! I felt convinced that the simple microscope, composed of a single lens of such vast yet perfect power, was possible of construction. To attempt to bring the compound microscope up to such a pitch would have been commencing at the wrong

end; this latter being simply a partially successful endeavor to remedy those very defects of the simple instrument, which, if conquered, would leave nothing to be desired.

It was in this mood of mind that I became a constructive microscopist. After another year passed in this new pursuit, experimenting on every imaginable substance — glass, gems, flints, crystals, artificial crystals formed of the alloy of various vitreous materials—in short, having constructed as many varieties of lenses as Argus had eyes, I found myself precisely where I started, with nothing gained save an extensive knowledge of glass-making. I was almost dead with despair. My parents were surprized at my apparent want of progress in my medical studies (I had not attended one lecture since my arrival in the city), and the expenses of my mad pursuit had been so great as to embarrass me very seriously.

I was in this frame of mind one day, experimenting in my laboratory on a small diamond—that stone, from its great refracting power, having always occupied my attention more than any other—when a young Frenchman, who lived on the floor above me, and who was in the habit of occasionally visiting me, entered the room.

I think that Jules Simon was a Jew. He had many traits of the Hebrew character: a love of jewelry, of dress, and of good living. There was something mysterious about him. He always had something to sell, and yet went into excellent society. When I say sell, I should perhaps have said peddle; for his operations were generally confined to the disposal of single articles—a picture, for instance, or a rare carving in ivory, or a pair of duelling-pistols, or the dress of a Mexican *caballero*. When I was first furnishing my rooms, he paid me a visit, which ended in my purchasing an antique silver lamp, which he assured me was a Cellini—it was handsome enough even for that—and some other knickknacks for my sitting-room. Why Simon should pursue this petty trade I never could imagine. He apparently had plenty of money, and had the *entrée* of the best houses in the city—taking care, however, I suppose, to drive no bargains within the enchanted circle of the Upper Ten. I came at length to the conclusion that this peddling was but a mask to cover some greater object, and even went so far as to believe my young acquaintance to be implicated in the slave-trade. That, however, was none of my affair.

On the present occasion, Simon entered my room in a state of considerable excitement.

"*Ah! mon ami!*" he cried, before I could even offer him the ordinary salutation, "it has occurred to me to be the witness of the most astonishing things in the world. I promenade myself to the house of Madame—how does the little animal—*le renard*—name himself in the Latin?"

"Vulpes," I answered.

"Ah! yes—Vulpes. I promenade myself to the house of Madame Vulpes."

"The spirit medium?"

"Yes, the great medium. Great heavens! what a woman! I write on a slip of paper many of questions concerning affairs the most secret—affairs that conceal themselves in the abysses of my heart the most profound; and behold! by example! what occurs? This devil of a woman makes me replies the most truthful to all of them. She talks to me of things that I do not love to talk of to myself. What am I to think? I am fixed to the earth!"

"Am I to understand you, Monsieur Simon, that this Mrs. Vulpes replied to questions secretly written by you, which questions related to events known only to yourself?"

"Ah! more than that, more than that," he answered, with an air of some alarm. "She related to me

things—— But," he added, after a pause, and suddenly changing his manner, "why occupy ourselves with these follies? It was all the biology, without doubt. It goes without saying that it has not my credence.—But why are we here, *mon ami?* It has occurred to me to discover the most beautiful thing as you can imagine—a vase with green lizards on it, composed by the great Bernard Palissy. It is in my apartment; let us mount. I go to show it to you."

I followed Simon mechanically; but my thoughts were far from Palissy and his enameled ware, although I, like him, was seeking in the dark a great discovery. This casual mention of the spiritualist, Madame Vulpes, set me on a new track. What if this spiritualism should be really a great fact? What if, through communication with more subtile organisms than my own, I could reach at a single bound the goal, which perhaps a life of agonizing mental toil would never enable me to attain?

While purchasing the Palissy vase from my friend Simon, I was mentally arranging a visit to Madame Vulpes.

3. The Spirit of Leeuwenhoek

Two evenings after this, thanks to an arrangement by letter and the promise of an ample fee, I found Madame Vulpes awaiting me at her residence alone. She was a coarse-featured woman, with keen and rather cruel dark eyes, and an exceedingly sensual expression about her mouth and under jaw. She received me in perfect silence, in an apartment on the ground floor, very sparely furnished. In the center of the room, close to where Mrs. Vulpes sat, there was a common round mahogany table. If I had come for the purpose of sweeping her chimney, the woman could not have looked more indifferent to my appearance. There was no attempt to inspire the visitor with awe. Everything bore a simple and practical aspect. This intercourse with the spiritual world was evidently as familiar an occupation with Mrs. Vulpes as eating her dinner or riding in an omnibus.

"You come for a communication, Mr. Linley?" said the medium, in a dry, businesslike tone of voice.

"By appointment—yes."

"What sort of communication do you want?—a written one?"

"Yes—I wish for a written one."

"From any particular spirit?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever known this spirit on this earth?"

"Never. He died long before I was born. I wish merely to obtain from him some information which he ought to be able to give better than any other."

"Will you seat yourself at the table, Mr. Linley," said the medium, "and place your hands upon it?"

I obeyed—Mrs. Vulpes being seated opposite to me, with her hands also on the table. We remained thus for about a minute and a half, when a violent succession of raps came on the table, on the back of my chair, on the floor immediately under my feet, and even on the window-panes. Mrs. Vulpes smiled composedly.

"They are very strong tonight," she remarked. "You are fortunate." She then continued, "Will the spirits communicate with this gentleman?"

Vigorous affirmative.

"Will the particular spirit he desires to speak with communicate?"

A very confused rapping followed this question.

"I know what they mean," said Mrs. Vulpes, addressing herself to me; "they wish you to write down the name of the particular spirit that you desire to converse with. Is that so?" she added, speaking to her invisible guests.

That it was so was evident from the numerous affirmatory responses. While this was going on, I tore a slip

from my pocket-book, and scribbled a name, under the table.

"Will this spirit communicate in writing with this gentleman?" asked the medium once more.

After a moment's pause, her hand seemed to be seized with a violent tremor, shaking so forcibly that the table vibrated. She said that a spirit had seized her hand and would write. I handed her some sheets of paper that were on the table, and a pencil. The latter she held loosely in her hand, which presently began to move over the paper with a singular and seemingly involuntary motion. After a few moments had elapsed, she handed me the paper, on which I found written, in a large, uncultivated hand, the words:

He is not here, but has been sent for.

A pause of a minute or so now ensued, during which Mrs. Vulpes remained perfectly silent, but the raps continued at regular intervals. When the short period I mention had elapsed, the hand of the medium was again seized with its convulsive tremor, and she wrote, under this strange influence, a few words on the paper, which she handed to me. They were as follows:

I am here. Question me.
LEEUWENHOEK.

I was astounded. The name was identical with that I had written beneath the table, and carefully kept concealed. Neither was it at all probable that an uncultivated woman like Mrs. Vulpes should know even the name of the great father of microscopics. It may have been biology; but this theory was soon doomed to be destroyed. I wrote on my slip—still concealing it from Mrs. Vulpes—a series of questions, which, to avoid tediousness, I shall place with the responses, in the order in which they occurred:

I.—Can the microscope be brought to perfection?

SPIRIT.—Yes.

I.—Am I destined to accomplish this great task?

SPIRIT.—You are.

I.—I wish to know how to proceed to attain this end. For the love which you bear to science, help me!

SPIRIT.—A diamond of one hundred and forty carats, submitted to electro-magnetic currents for a long period, will experience a rearrangement of its atoms *inter se*, and from that stone you will form the universal lens.

I.—Will great discoveries result from the use of such a lens?

SPIRIT.—So great that all that has gone before is as nothing.

I.—But the refractive power of the diamond is so immense, that the image will be formed within the lens. How is that difficulty to be surmounted?

SPIRIT.—Pierce the lens through its axis, and the difficulty is obviated. The image will be formed in the pierced space, which will itself serve as a tube to look through. Now I am called. Good-night.

I can not at all describe the effect that these extraordinary communications had upon me. I felt completely bewildered. No biological theory could account for the *discovery* of the lens. The medium might, by means of biological *rapport* with my mind, have gone so far as to read my questions, and reply to them coherently. But biology could not enable her to discover that magnetic currents would so alter the crystals of the diamond as to remedy its previous defects, and admit of its being polished into a perfect lens. Some such theory may have passed through my head, it is true; but if so, I had forgotten it. In my excited condition of mind there was no course left but to become a convert, and it was in a state of the most painful nervous exaltation that I left the medium's house that evening. She accompanied me to the door, hoping that I was satisfied. The raps fol-

lowed us as we went through the hall, sounding on the balusters, the flooring, and even the lintels of the door. I hastily expressed my satisfaction, and escaped hurriedly into the cool night air. I walked home with but one thought possessing me—how to obtain a diamond of the immense size required. My entire means multiplied a hundred times over would have been inadequate to its purchase. Besides, such stones are rare, and become historical. I could find such only in the regalia of Eastern or European monarchs.

4. The Eye of Morning

THERE was a light in Simon's room as I entered my house. A vague impulse urged me to visit him. As I opened the door of his sitting-room unannounced, he was bending, with his back toward me, over a carcel lamp, apparently engaged in minutely examining some object which he held in his hands. As I entered, he started suddenly, thrust his hand into his breast pocket, and turned to me with a face crimson with confusion.

"What!" I cried, "poring over the miniature of some fair lady? Well, don't blush so much; I won't ask to see it."

Simon laughed awkwardly enough, but made none of the negative protestations usual on such occasions. He asked me to take a seat.

"Simon," said I, "I have just come from Madame Vulpes."

This time Simon turned as white as a sheet, and seemed stupefied, as if a sudden electric shock had smitten him. He babbled some incoherent words, and went hastily to a small closet where he usually kept his liquors. Although astonished at his emotion, I was too preoccupied with my own idea to pay much attention to anything else.

"You say truly when you call Madame Vulpes a devil of a woman," I continued. "Simon, she told me wonderful things tonight, or rather was the means of telling me wonderful things. Ah! if I could only get a diamond that weighed one hundred and forty carats!"

Scarcely had the sigh with which I uttered this desire died upon my lips, when Simon, with the aspect of a wild beast, glared at me savagely, and, rushing to the mantelpiece, where some foreign weapons hung on the wall, caught up a Malay creese, and brandished it furiously before him.

"No!" he cried in French, into which he always broke when excited. "No! you shall not have it! You are perfidious! You have consulted with that demon, and desire my treasure! But I shall die first! Me! I am brave! You can not make me fear!"

All this, uttered in a loud voice trembling with excitement, astounded me. I saw at a glance that I had accidentally trodden upon the edges of Simon's secret, whatever it was. It was necessary to reassure him.

"My dear Simon," I said, "I am entirely at a loss to know what you mean. I went to Madame Vulpes to consult her on a scientific problem, to the solution of which I discovered that a diamond of the size I just mentioned was necessary. You were never alluded to during the evening, nor, so far as I was concerned, even thought of. What can be the meaning of this outburst? If you happen to have a set of valuable diamonds in your possession, you need fear nothing from me. The diamond which I require you could not possess; or, if you did possess it, you would not be living here."

Something in my tone must have completely reassured him; for his expression immediately changed to a sort of constrained merriment, combined, however, with a certain suspicious attention to my movements. He laughed, and said that I must bear with him; that he was at certain mo-

ments subject to a species of vertigo, which betrayed itself in incoherent speeches, and that the attacks passed off as rapidly as they came. He put his weapon aside while making this explanation, and endeavored, with some success, to assume a more cheerful air.

All this did not impose on me in the least. I was too much accustomed to analytical labors to be baffled by so flimsy a veil. I determined to probe the mystery to the bottom.

"Simon," I said, gayly, "let us forget all this over a bottle of Burgundy. I have a case of Lausseure's *Clos Vougeot* downstairs, fragrant with the odors and ruddy with the sunlight of the Côte d'Or. Let us have up a couple of bottles. What say you?"

"With all my heart," answered Simon, smilingly.

I produced the wine and we seated ourselves to drink. It was of a famous vintage, that of 1848, a year when war and wine throve together—and its pure but powerful juice seemed to impart renewed vitality to the system. By the time we had half finished the second bottle, Simon's head, which I knew was a weak one, had begun to yield, while I remained calm as ever, only that every draft seemed to send a flush of vigor through my limbs. Simon's utterance became more and more indistinct. He took to singing French *chansons* of a not very moral tendency. I rose suddenly from the table just at the conclusion of one of those incoherent verses, and, fixing my eyes on him with a quiet smile, said: "Simon, I have deceived you. I learned your secret this evening. You may as well be frank with me. Mrs. Vulpes, or rather one of her spirits, told me all."

He started with horror. His intoxication seemed for the moment to fade away, and he made a movement towards the weapon that he had a short time before laid down. I stopped him with my hand.

"Monster," he cried, passionately, "I am ruined! What shall I do? You shall never have it! I swear by my mother!"

"I don't want it," I said; "rest secure, but be frank with me. Tell me all about it."

The drunkenness began to return. He protested with maudlin earnestness that I was entirely mistaken—that I was intoxicated; then asked me to swear eternal secrecy, and promised to disclose the mystery to me. I pledged myself, of course, to all. With an uneasy look in his eyes, and hands unsteady with drink and nervousness, he drew a small case from his breast and opened it. Heavens! How the mild lamplight was shivered into a thousand prismatic arrows, as it fell upon a vast rose-diamond that glittered in the case! I was no judge of diamonds, but I saw at a glance that this was a gem of rare size and purity. I looked at Simon with wonder, and—must I confess it?—with envy. How could he have obtained this treasure? In reply to my questions, I could just gather from his drunken statements (of which, I fancy, half the incoherence was affected) that he had been superintending a gang of slaves engaged in diamond-washing in Brazil; that he had seen one of them secrete a diamond, but, instead of informing his employers, had quietly watched the negro until he saw him bury his treasure; that he had dug it up and fled with it, but that as yet he was afraid to attempt to dispose of it publicly—so valuable a gem being almost certain to attract too much attention to its owner's antecedents—and he had not been able to discover any of those obscure channels by which such matters are conveyed away safely. He added, that, in accordance with the Oriental practise, he had named his diamond with the fanciful title of "The Eye of Morning."

While Simon was relating this to me, I regarded the great diamond at-

tentively. Never had I beheld anything so beautiful. All the glories of light, ever imagined or described, seemed to pulsate in its crystalline chambers. Its weight, as I learned from Simon, was exactly one hundred and forty carats. Here was an amazing coincidence. The hand of destiny seemed in it. On the very evening when the spirit of Leeuwenhoek communicates to me the great secret of the microscope, the priceless means which he directs me to employ start up within my easy reach! I determined, with the most perfect deliberation, to possess myself of Simon's diamond.

I sat opposite to him while he nodded over his glass, and calmly revolved the whole affair. I did not for an instant contemplate so foolish an act as a common theft, which would of course be discovered, or at least necessitate flight and concealment, all of which must interfere with my scientific plans. There was but one step to be taken—to kill Simon. After all, what was the life of a little peddling Jew, in comparison with the interests of science? Human beings are taken every day from the condemned prisons to be experimented on by surgeons. This man, Simon, was by his own confession a criminal, a robber, and I believed on my soul a murderer. He deserved death quite as much as any felon condemned by the laws: why should I not, like government, contrive that his punishment should contribute to the progress of human knowledge?

The means for accomplishing everything I desired lay within my reach. There stood upon the mantelpiece a bottle half full of French laudanum. Simon was so occupied with his diamond, which I had just restored to him, that it was an affair of no difficulty to drug his glass. In a quarter of an hour he was in a profound sleep.

I now opened his waistcoat, took the diamond from the inner pocket in which he had placed it, and removed him to the bed, on which I laid him so that his feet hung down over the edge. I had possessed myself of the Malay creese, which I held in my right hand, while with the other I discovered as accurately as I could by pulsation the exact locality of the heart. It was essential that all the aspects of his death should lead to the surmise of self-murder. I calculated the exact angle at which it was probable that the weapon, if leveled by Simon's own hand, would enter his breast; then with one powerful blow I thrust it up to the hilt in the very spot which I desired to penetrate. A convulsive thrill ran through Simon's limbs. I heard a smothered sound issue from his throat, precisely like the bursting of a large air-bubble, sent up by a diver, when it reaches the surface of the water; he turned half round on his side, and, as if to assist my plans more effectually, his right hand, moved by some mere spasmodic impulse, clasped the handle of the creese, which it remained holding with extraordinary muscular tenacity. Beyond this there was no apparent struggle. The laudanum, I presume, paralyzed the usual nervous action. He must have died instantly.

There was yet something to be done. To make it certain that all suspicion of the act should be diverted from any inhabitant of the house to Simon himself, it was necessary that the door should be found in the morning *locked on the inside*. How to do this, and afterwards escape myself? Not by the window; that was a physical impossibility. Besides, I was determined that the windows *also* should be found bolted. The solution was simple enough. I descended softly to my own room for a peculiar instrument which I had used for holding small slippery substances, such as minute spheres of glass, etc. This instrument was nothing more than a long slender handvise, with a very powerful grip, and a considerable leverage, which last was accidentally owing to the shape

of the handle. Nothing was simpler than, when the key was in the lock, to seize the end of its stem in this vise, through the keyhole, from the outside, and so lock the door. Previously, however, to doing this, I burned a number of papers on Simon's hearth. Suicides almost always burn papers before they destroy themselves. I also emptied some more laudanum into Simon's glass—having first removed from it all traces of wine—cleaned the other wine-glass, and brought the bottles away with me. If traces of two persons drinking had been found in the room, the question naturally would have arisen, Who was the second? Besides, the wine-bottles might have been identified as belonging to me. The laudanum I poured out to account for its presence in his stomach, in case of a post-mortem examination. The theory naturally would be, that he first intended to poison himself, but, after swallowing a little of the drug, was either disgusted with its taste, or changed his mind from other motives, and chose the dagger. These arrangements made, I walked out, leaving the gas burning, locked the door with my vise, and went to bed.

Simon's death was not discovered until nearly 3 in the afternoon. The servant, astonished at seeing the gas burning—the light streaming on the dark landing from under the door—peeped through the keyhole and saw Simon on the bed. She gave the alarm. The door was burst open, and the neighborhood was in a fever of excitement.

Everyone in the house was arrested, myself included. There was an inquest; but no clue to his death beyond that of suicide could be obtained. Curiously enough, he had made several speeches to his friends the preceding week, that seemed to point to self-destruction. One gentleman swore that Simon had said in his presence that "he was tired of life." His landlord affirmed that Simon, when paying him his last month's rent, remarked that "he should not pay him rent much longer." All the other evidence corresponded—the door locked inside, the position of the corpse, the burnt papers. As I anticipated, no one knew of the possession of the diamond by Simon, so that no motive was suggested for his murder. The jury, after a prolonged examination, brought in the usual verdict, and the neighborhood once more settled down into its accustomed quiet.

5. Animula

THE three months succeeding Simon's catastrophe I devoted night and day to my diamond lens. I had constructed a vast galvanic battery, composed of nearly two thousand pairs of plates—a higher power I dared not use, lest the diamond should be calcined. By means of this enormous engine I was enabled to send a powerful current of electricity continually through my great diamond, which it seemed to me gained in luster every day. At the expiration of a month I commenced the grinding and polishing of the lens, a work of intense toil and exquisite delicacy. The great density of the stone, and the care required to be taken with the curvatures of the surfaces of the lens, rendered the labor the severest and most harassing that I had yet undergone.

At last the eventful moment came; the lens was completed. I stood trembling on the threshold of new worlds. I had the realization of Alexander's famous wish before me. The lens lay on the table, ready to be placed upon its platform. My hand fairly shook as I enveloped a drop of water with a thin coating of oil of turpentine, preparatory to its examination—a process necessary in order to prevent the rapid evaporation of the water. I now placed the drop on a thin slip of glass under the lens,

and throwing upon it, by the combined aid of a prism and a mirror, a powerful stream of light, I approached my eye to the minute hole drilled through the axis of the lens. For an instant I saw nothing save what seemed to be an illuminated chaos, a vast luminous abyss. A pure white light, cloudless and serene, and seemingly limitless as space itself, was my first impression. Gently, and with the greatest care, I depressed the lens a few hair's-breadths. The wondrous illumination still continued, but as the lens approached the object a scene of indescribable beauty was unfolded to my view.

I seemed to gaze upon a vast space, the limits of which extended far beyond my vision. An atmosphere of magical luminousness permeated the entire field of view. I was amazed to see no trace of animalculous life. Not a living thing, apparently, inhabited that dazzling expanse. I comprehended instantly that, by the wondrous power of my lens, I had penetrated beyond the grosser particles of aqueous matter, beyond the realms of infusoria and protozoa, down to the original gaseous globule, into whose luminous interior I was gazing, as into an almost boundless dome filled with a supernatural radiance.

It was, however, no brilliant void into which I looked. On every side I beheld beautiful inorganic forms, of unknown texture, and colored with the most enchanting hues. These forms presented the appearance of what might be called, for want of a more specific definition, foliated clouds of the highest rarity; that is, they undulated and broke into vegetable formations, and were tinged with splendors compared with which the gilding of our autumn woodlands is as dross compared with gold. Far away into the illimitable distance stretched long avenues of these gaseous forests, dimly transparent, and painted with prismatic hues of unimaginable brilliancy. The pendent branches waved along the fluid glades until every vista seemed to break through half-lucent ranks of many-colored drooping silken pennons. What seemed to be either fruits or flowers, pied with a thousand hues, lustrous and ever varying, bubbled from the crowns of this fairy foliage. No hills, no lakes, no rivers, no forms animate or inanimate, were to be seen, save those vast auroral copses that floated serenely in the luminous stillness, with leaves and fruits and flowers gleaming with unknown fires, unrealizable by mere imagination.

How strange, I thought, that this sphere should be thus condemned to solitude! I had hoped, at least to discover some new form of animal life—perhaps of a lower class than any with which we are at present acquainted, but still, some living organism. I found my newly discovered world, if I may so speak, a beautiful chromatic desert.

While I was speculating on the singular arrangements of the internal economy of Nature, with which she so frequently splinters into atoms our most compact theories, I thought I beheld a form moving slowly through the glades of one of the prismatic forests. I looked more attentively, and found that I was not mistaken.

Words can not depict the anxiety with which I awaited the nearer approach of this mysterious object. Was it merely some inanimate substance, held in suspense in the attenuated atmosphere of the globule? or was it an animal endowed with vitality and motion? It approached, flitting behind the gauzy, colored veils of cloud-foliage, for seconds dimly revealed, then vanished. At last the violet pennons that trailed nearest to me vibrated; they were gently pushed aside, and the form floated out into the broad light.

It was a female human shape. When I say human, I mean it possessed the outlines of humanity—but there the analogy ends. Its adorable

beauty lifted it illimitable heights beyond the loveliest daughter of Adam.

I can not, I dare not, attempt to inventory the charms of this divine revelation of perfect beauty. Those eyes of mystic violet, dewy and serene, evade my words. Her long, lustrous hair following her glorious head in a golden wake, like the track sown in heaven by a falling star, seems to quench my most burning phrases with its splendors. If all the bees of Hybla nestled upon my lips, they would still sing but hoarsely the wondrous harmonies of outline that enclosed her form.

She swept out from between the rainbow-curtains of the cloud-trees into the broad sea of light that lay beyond. Her motions were those of some graceful naiad, cleaving, by a mere effort of her will, the clear, unruffled waters that fill the chambers of the sea. She floated forth with the serene grace of a frail bubble ascending through the still atmosphere of a June day. The perfect roundness of her limbs formed suave and enchanting curves. It was like listening to the most spiritual symphony of Beethoven the divine, to watch the harmonious flow of lines. This, indeed, was a pleasure, cheaply purchased at any price. What cared I, if I had waded to the portal of this wonder through another's blood? I would have given my own to enjoy one such moment of intoxication and delight.

Breathless with gazing on this lovely wonder, and forgetful for an instant of everything save her presence, I withdrew my eye from the microscope eagerly—alas! As my gaze fell on the thin slide that lay beneath my instrument, the bright light from mirror and from prism sparkled on a colorless drop of water! There, in that tiny bead of dew, this beautiful being was forever imprisoned. The planet Neptune was not more distant from me than she. I hastened once more to apply my eye to the microscope.

Animula (let me now call her by that dear name which I subsequently bestowed on her) had changed her position. She had again approached the wondrous forest, and was gazing earnestly upwards. Presently one of the trees—as I must call them—unfolded a long ciliary process, with which it seized one of the gleaming fruits that glittered on its summit, and, sweeping slowly down, held it within reach of Animula. The sylph took it in her delicate hand and began to eat. My attention was so entirely absorbed by her, that I could not apply myself to the task of determining whether this singular plant was or was not instinct with volition.

I watched her, as she made her repast, with the most profound attention. The suppleness of her motions sent a thrill of delight through my frame; my heart beat madly as she turned her beautiful eyes in the direction of the spot in which I stood. What would I not have given to have had the power to precipitate myself into that luminous ocean, and float with her through those groves of purple and gold! While I was thus breathlessly following her every movement, she suddenly started, seemed to listen for a moment, and then cleaving the brilliant ether in which she was floating, like a flash of light, pierced through the opaline forest, and disappeared.

Instantly a series of the most singular sensations attacked me. It seemed as if I had suddenly gone blind. The luminous sphere was still before me, but my daylight had vanished. What caused this sudden disappearance? Had she a lover or a husband? Yes, that was the solution! Some signal from a happy fellow-being had vibrated through the avenues of the forest, and she had obeyed the summons.

The agony of my sensations, as I arrived at this conclusion, startled me. I tried to reject the conviction that my reason forced upon me. I

battled against the fatal conclusion—but in vain. It was so. I had no escape from it. I loved an animalcule!

It is true that, thanks to the marvelous power of my microscope, she appeared of human proportions. Instead of presenting the revolting aspect of the coarser creatures, that live and struggle and die, in the more easily resolvable portions of the water-drop, she was fair and delicate and of surpassing beauty. But of what account was all that? Every time that my eye was withdrawn from the instrument, it fell on a miserable drop of water, within which, I must be content to know, dwelt all that could make my life lovely.

Could she but see me once! Could I for one moment pierce the mystical walls that so inexorably rose to separate us, and whisper all that filled my soul, I might consent to be satisfied for the rest of my life with the knowledge of her remote sympathy. It would be something to have established even the faintest personal link to bind us together—to know that at times, when roaming through those enchanted glades, she might think of the wonderful stranger, who had broken the monotony of her life with his presence, and left a gentle memory in her heart!

But it could not be. No invention of which human intellect was capable could break down the barriers that nature had erected. I might feast my soul upon her wondrous beauty, yet she must always remain ignorant of the adoring eyes that day and night gazed upon her, and, even when closed, beheld her in dreams. With a bitter cry of anguish I fled from the room, and, flinging myself on my bed, sobbed myself to sleep like a child.

6. The Spilling of the Cup

I AROSE the next morning almost at daybreak, and rushed to my microscope. I trembled as I sought the luminous world in miniature that contained my all. Animula was there. I had left the gas-lamp, surrounded by its moderators, burning, when I went to bed the night before. I found the sylph bathing, as it were, with an expression of pleasure animating her features, in the brilliant light which surrounded her. She tossed her lustrous golden hair over her shoulders with innocent coquetry. She lay at full length in the transparent medium, in which she supported herself with ease, and gamboled with the enchanting grace that the nymph Salmacis might have exhibited when she sought to conquer the modest Hermaphroditus. I tried an experiment to satisfy myself if her powers of reflection were developed. I lessened the lamplight considerably. By the dim light that remained, I could see an expression of pain flit across her face. She looked upward suddenly, and her brows contracted. I flooded the stage of the microscope again with a full stream of light, and her whole expression changed. She sprang forward like some substance deprived of all weight. Her eyes sparkled and her lips moved. Ah! if science had only the means of conducting and reduplicating sounds, as it does the rays of light, what carols of happiness would then have entranced my ears! what jubilant hymns to Adonis would have thrilled the illumined air!

I now comprehended how it was that the Count de Gabalis peopled his mystic world with sylphs—beautiful beings whose breath of life was lambent fire, and who sported forever in regions of purest ether and purest light. The Rosicrucian had anticipated the wonder that I had practically realized.

How long this worship of my strange divinity went on thus I scarcely know. I lost all note of time. All day from early dawn, and far into the night, I was to be found peering through that wonderful lens. I saw no one, went nowhere, and scarce allowed myself sufficient time for my

meals. My whole life was absorbed in contemplation as rapt as that of any of the Romish saints. Every hour that I gazed upon the divine form strengthened my passion—a passion that was always overshadowed by the maddening conviction, that, although I could gaze on her at will, she never, never could behold me!

At length, I grew so pale and emaciated, from want of rest and continual brooding over my insane love and its cruel conditions, that I determined to make some effort to wean myself from it. "Come," I said, "this is at best but a fantasy. Your imagination has bestowed on Animula charms which in reality she does not possess. Seclusion from female society has produced this morbid condition of mind. Compare her with the beautiful women of your own world, and this false enchantment will vanish."

I looked over the newspapers by chance. There I beheld the advertisement of a celebrated *danseuse* who appeared nightly at Niblo's. The Signorina Caradolce had the reputation of being the most beautiful as well as the most graceful woman in the world. I instantly dressed and went to the theater.

The curtain drew up. The usual semicircle of fairies in white muslin were standing on the right toe around the enameled flower-bank, of green canvas, on which the belated prince was sleeping. Suddenly a flute is heard. The fairies start. The trees open, the fairies all stand on the left toe, and the queen enters. It was the Signorina. She bounded forward amid thunders of applause, and, lighting on one foot, remained poised in air! Heavens! was this the great enchantress that had drawn monarchs at her chariot-wheels? Those heavy muscular limbs, those thick ankles, those cavernous eyes, that stereotyped smile, those crudely painted cheeks! Where were the vermeil blooms, the liquid expressive eyes, the harmonious limbs of Animula?

The Signorina danced. What gross, discordant movements! The play of her limbs was all false and artificial. Her bounds were painful athletic efforts; her poses were angular and distressed the eye. I could bear it no longer; with an exclamation of disgust that drew every eye upon me, I rose from my seat in the very middle of the Signorina's *pas-de-fasination*, and abruptly quitted the house.

I hastened home to feast my eyes once more on the lovely form of my sylph. I felt that henceforth to combat this passion would be impossible. I applied my eye to the lens. Animula was there—but what could have happened? Some terrible change seemed to have taken place during my absence. Some secret grief seemed to cloud the lovely features of her I gazed upon. Her face had grown thin and haggard; her limbs trailed heavily; the wondrous luster of her golder hair had faded. She was ill!—ill, and I could not assist her! I believe at that moment I would have gladly forfeited all claims to my human birthright, if I could only have been dwarfed to the size of an animalcule, and permitted to console her from whom fate had forever divided me.

I racked my brain for the solution of this mystery. What was it that afflicted the sylph? She seemed to suffer intense pain. Her features contracted, and she even writhed, as if with some internal agony. The wondrous forests appeared also to have lost half their beauty. Their hues were dim and in some places faded away altogether. I watched Animula for hours with a breaking heart, and she seemed absolutely to wither away under my very eye. Suddenly I remembered that I had not looked at the water-drop for several days. In

fact, I hated to see it; for it reminded me of the natural barrier between Animula and myself. I hurriedly looked down on the stage of the microscope. The slide was still there—but, great heavens! the water-drop had vanished! The awful truth burst upon me; it had evaporated, until it had become so minute as to be invisible to the naked eye; I had been gazing on its last atom, the one that contained Animula—and she was dying!

I rushed again to the front of the lens, and looked through. Alas! the last agony had seized her. The rainbow-hued forests had all melted away, and Animula lay struggling feebly in what seemed to be a spot of dim light. Ah! the sight was horrible: the limbs once so round and lovely shriveling up into nothings; the eyes—those eyes that shone like heaven—being quenched into black dust; the lustrous golden hair now lank and discolored. The last throe came. I beheld that final struggle of the blackening form—and I fainted.

When I awoke out of a trance of many hours, I found myself lying amid the wreck of my instrument, myself as shattered in mind and body as it. I crawled feebly to my bed, from which I did not rise for months.

They say now that I am mad; but they are mistaken. I am poor, for I have neither the heart nor the will to work; all my money is spent, and I live on charity. Young men's associations that love a joke invite me to lecture on optics before them, for which they pay me, and laugh at me while I lecture. "Linley, the mad microscopist," is the name I go by. I suppose that I talk incoherently while I lecture. Who could talk sense when his brain is haunted by such ghastly memories, while ever and anon among the shapes of death I behold the radiant form of my lost Animula!

MOON MOCKERY

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

I walked in Tara's Wood one summer night,
And saw, amid the still, star-haunted skies,
A slender moon in silver mist arise,
And hover on the hill as if in fright.
Burning, I seized her veil and held her tight:
An instant all her glow was in my eyes;
Then she was gone, swift as a white bird flies,
And I went down the hill in opal light.

And soon I was aware, as down I came,
That all was strange and new on every side;
Strange people went about me to and fro,
And when I spoke with trembling mine own name
They turned away, but one man said: "He died
In Tara Wood, a hundred years ago."

THE EYRIE



"IT IS with pleasure," writes C. M. B. S., from Havre, France, "that I note you have included *Ooze, Penelope,* and *An Adventure in the Fourth Dimension* in your book-publication of A. G. Birch's novel, *The Moon Terror.* I read these 'yarns' in the early issues of WEIRD TALES, and have not forgotten them—who in the name of 'horned toads' could? When I read Rud's yarn *(Ooze)* I was on board a ship bound for Vera Cruz, Mexico, loaded with dynamite and gunpowder for use in a 'forthcoming' presidential inauguration down there, and a pair of gun-boats had been a trifle too industrious in our vicinity. To top off all that, one of the crew went 'cuckoo' and tried to blow up the ship. We also had some very heavy weather at the time. In the midst of it all I read Mr. Rud's yarn and got the thrill of my life. I also experienced a really thrilling nightmare shortly after. If there is anything I like better than a really weird yarn, it is a nightmare of the first order. Why I like it is something that I can not explain. It is nature, I suppose, for me to like anything that is adventurous. I have been that way all my life, and am now close to sixty years of age. Prior to my twelfth year nightmares frightened me, but since that time I have always enjoyed them. I get a most pleasing 'kick' out of my struggle with them. 'Riding' nightmares and reading weird tales really helped me practise self-control in a practical manner. In all my reading of such stories as *The Moon Terror* and the other three, I have never encountered anything that ever beat them in their particular line. Rud is great in creating monsters. Starrett's *Penelope* can, to my idea, be given a dual interpretation. I do not know whether others see it that way or not, but to me it seems a story within a story—one side of it humor and the other side satire, yet both sides fantastic. It is clever, and, alone, easily worth the price of the book. . . . Wright, with ten thousand husky citizens of Jupiter imprisoned within a soap-bubble, etc., came darned near wrecking a ship—the whole crew laughed for two weeks over it! A man with an imagination like his should surely enjoy life—provided someone does not crown him in self-defense. His yarn is enough to give one apoplexy from laughing. . . . Birch

is good reading for one's enemy at bedtime; that is, if one does not really love his enemy, for chances of frightening him to death are extremely good."

Writes Henry Kuttner, Jr., of San Francisco: "Although only in high school, yet I am a regular reader of your magazine, and whenever our 'gang' gets together to tell ghost stories, WEIRD TALES always comes in handy. I consider *The Brass Key*, by Hal K. Wells, the best story in your latest issue (February). Is he any relation to H. G. Wells? My second choice is *A Witch's Curse*, by Paul Ernst. That kept me on pins and needles throughout. When our cat entered the room and jumped on my lap, I was nearly frightened out of my wits. Edmond Hamilton and Seabury Quinn are my favorite authors."

"A few lines to express my appreciation of your magazine, WEIRD TALES," writes W. F. Macleod, of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. "I have been a constant reader of it for nearly four years and read every number from cover to cover. I think Lovecraft and Seabury Quinn are hard to beat anywhere, both for style of English and general treatment of subjects. The former's command of English and descriptive powers are truly remarkable."

Arlin C. Jones, of St. Louis, writes to the Eyrie: "Anyone should be given due credit when serving a purpose in this world. And beyond the semblance of a doubt you are. You are, in your way, enabling the tired business man to relinquish his care and thoughts of this world of reality, and to drift into the world of the so-called unreal. It's just like having a soothing ointment applied when your finger is cut. I have read WEIRD TALES about three years, and during that time have brought quite a few new converts. I hope you keep up the splendid work. WEIRD TALES is a radical departure from any magazine on the stands. It has science filtered through it, and its stories are so put together that they seem plausible. I surely did enjoy *The Brass Key;* I particularly admired the manly attitude of Foo-Chong. It was an unpleasant way of seeking revenge, but he had such a businesslike way of going about it."

"I love best the really *weird* stories," writes Mrs. Z. P. Gustafson, of Miami, Florida, "witches, werewolves, vampires, incubi, specters and cadavers. I want my horrors to be strictly supernatural. I advise Seabury Quinn to make Jules de Grandin a little less sure of himself—it spoils the story to have him so flippant and matter of fact, and so confident. Otherwise his stories are excellent. Please have more poetry by Robert E. Howard."

Writes William D. Bain, of Indianapolis: "I know of no other publication that compares with your magazine for clean, fascinating stories, and can recommend no better antidote for brain fag than an hour with WEIRD TALES."

"I was surprized that nobody commented in the Eyrie on *The Mystery in Acatlan,*" writes J. C. C., of Chicago. "I consider it one of the best stories I have ever read in W. T. My favorite authors are Quinn and Price. *Saladin's*

(Continued on page 566)

FUTURE ISSUES

A WEALTH of fascinating stories is scheduled for early publication in WEIRD TALES, the unique magazine. The brilliant success of WEIRD TALES has been founded on its unrivaled, superb stories of the strange, the grotesque and the terrible—gripping stories that stimulate the imagination and send shivers of apprehension up the spine—tales that take the reader from the humdrum world about us into a deathless realm of fancy—marvelous tales so vividly told that they seem very real. WEIRD TALES prints the best weird fiction in the world today. If Poe were alive he would undoubtedly be a contributor. In addition to creepy mystery stories, ghost-tales, stories of devil-worship, witchcraft, vampires and strange monsters, this magazine also prints the cream of the weird-scientific fiction that is written today—tales of the spaces between the worlds, surgical stories, and stories that scan the future with the eye of prophecy. Among the amazing tales in the next few issues will be:

THE HOUSE OF GOLDEN MASKS, *by Seabury Quinn*

Weird and terrible were the tortures meted out to the masked maidens in that sinister House of the Golden Masks—a daring adventure of the little French scientist, Jules de Grandin.

THE DEATH TOUCH, *by Chester L. Saxby*

Frozen in the ice they found Yardley, there in the southern wastes, and his cold, clutching fingers sapped the vital magnetism from the bodies of the crew, leaving them white as leprosy.

DEMON DOOM OF N'YENG SEN, *by Bassett Morgan*

The author of "The Devils of Po Sung" returns again to the South Seas for another gripping tale of brain-transplantation and horrors unspeakable.

THE THING IN THE HOUSE, *by H. F. Scotten*

A combination of de Maupassant's "Horla," Bierce's "Damned Thing" and Crawford's invisible creature in "The Upper Berth," this fearsome monster wrought dreadful havoc before it was brought to bay.

WITHIN THE NEBULA, *by Edmond Hamilton*

Three beings from different corners of the Galaxy—an Earth-man from our own solar system, a plant-man from Capella, and a tentacle-man from Arcturus—start out on the strangest expedition in all literature as the great nebula expands and menaces the universe with fiery destruction.

THE SHADOW OF A NIGHTMARE, *by Donald Wandrei*

Tucked away in a corner of the Himalayas was a strange country, inhabited entirely by madmen; and from a manuscript that found its way to the outer world from this Country of the Mad stalked forth nightmare and horror.

THE LAUGHING THING, *by G. G. Pendarves*

Eldred Werne signed away his estates to Jason Drewe, and then died, but the terrific manifestations at the manor showed that he wielded more power dead than alive—a powerful ghost-story.

THESE are but a few of the many super-excellent stories in store for the readers of WEIRD TALES. To make sure of getting your copy each month, and thus avoid the embarrassment of finding your favorite news stand sold out, just fill out the coupon below and let us send it right to your home. That's the safest way.

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(Continued from page 564)

Throne-Rug was a beautiful story. I wish you would reprint *The Wind That Tramps the World*—I have heard so much about it.''

Lewis D. Taylor, of Guntersville, Alabama, writes to the Eyrie: ''Our 'gang' are all lovers of the unusual and we always look forward to WEIRD TALES. After we read it, we gather and discuss the stories. We are very fond of those that tell of battles between inhabitants of the earth and other planets, using weapons of a far-advanced science. We eagerly devour the stories of experiments in science and would like to see some stories featuring radio and signals to other planets. There is only one feature of the magazine that we do not like, and that is: the occasional stories dealing with torture. We get no pleasure at all from reading stories of deliberate punishment and torture such as *The Justice of the Czar* and *The Copper Bowl.*''

''I have read two or three issues of WEIRD TALES and would not do without this extraordinary publication,'' writes Alfred Oelfke, of Fort Wayne, Indiana. ''In the few copies I have read some of the best stories I have seen printed. The tale by Eli Colter, *The Vengeance of the Dead,* is indeed a great story. Friends have told me that you once published the Chinese story, *The Wind That Tramps the World.* As I have heard a great deal about this wonderful story, I sincerely ask you, if at all possible, to reprint it.''

Readers, which story do you like best in this issue? Your favorite story in the February issue, as shown by your votes, was Hal K. Wells' grim story of spiders and Chinese retribution, *The Brass Key. The Devil-People,* by Seabury Quinn, and *The Star-Stealers,* by Edmond Hamilton, were your second and third choice.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE APRIL WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1) _____	_____
(2) _____	_____
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The Devil's Rosary

(Continued from page 454)

Perchè il sangue è la vita—how you say? Da blood, he are da life; I not lika for carry heem aroun'."

"Howly Mither, is it blood ye're afther givin' me ter hold onto?" exclaimed Nora in rising horror. "Ye murtherin' dago, come back 'ere an' take yer divilish——"

But P. Grasso, dealer in live poultry, had cranked his decrepit flivver into a state of agitated life and set off down the street, oblivious of the choice insults which Mrs. McGinnis sent in pursuit of him.

"Sure, Dr. Trowbridge, sor," she confided as she entered the consulting-room, the lard tin held at arm's length, " 'tis th' fine gintleman Dr. de Grandin is entirely; but he do be afther doin' some crazy things at times. Wud ye be afther takin' charge o' this mess o' blood fer him? 'Tis meself as wouldn't touch it wid a fifthy-foot pole, so I wouldn't, once I've got it out o' me hands!"

"Well," I laughed as I espied a trim little figure turning into my front yard, "here he comes now. You can tell him your opinion of his practises if you want."

"Ah, Docthor, darlin', ye know I'd niver have th' heart to scold 'im," she confessed with a shamefaced grin. "Sure, he's th'——"

The sudden hysterical cachinnation of the office telephone bell cut through her words, and I turned to the shrilling instrument.

For a moment there was no response to my rather impatient "Hello?"; then dimly, as one entering a darkened room slowly begins to descry objects about him, I made out the hoarse, ralelike rasp of deep-drawn, irregular breathing.

"Hello?" I repeated, more sharply.

"Dr. Trowbridge," a low, almost breathless feminine voice whispered

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over the wire, "this is Haroldine Arkright. Can you come right over with Dr. de Grandin? Right away? Please. It—it's *here!*"

"Right away!" I called back, and wheeled about, almost colliding with the little Frenchman, who had been listening over my shoulder.

"Quick, speed, haste!" he cried, as I related her message. "We must rush, we must hurry, we must fly, my friend! There is not a second to lose!"

As I charged down the hall and across the porch to my waiting car he stopped long enough to seize the lard tin from beside my desk and two bulky paper parcels from a hall chair, then almost trod on my heels in his haste to enter the motor.

5

"Not here, *Monsieur,* if you please," de Grandin ordered as he surveyed the living-room where Arkright and his daughter awaited us. "Is there no room without furniture, where we can meet the foeman face to face? I would fight over a flat terrain, if possible."

"There's a vacant bedroom on the next floor," Arkright replied, "but——"

"No buts, if you please; let us ascend at once, immediately, right away!" the Frenchman interrupted. "Oh, make haste, my friends! Your lives depend upon it, I do assure you!"

About the floor of the empty room de Grandin traced a circle of chicken's blood, painting a two-inch-wide ruddy border on the bare boards, and inside the outer circle he drew another, forcing Haroldine and her father within it. Then, with a bit of rag, he wiped a break in the outside line, and opening one of his paper parcels proceeded to scatter a thin layer of soft, white wood-ashes over the boards between the two circles.

"Now, *mon vieux,* if you will assist," he turned to me, ripping open the second package and bringing to light a tin squirt-gun of the sort used to spray insecticide about a room infested with mosquitoes.

Dipping the nozzle of the syringe into the blood-filled lard tin, he worked the plunger back and forth a moment, then handed the contrivance to me. "Do you stand at my left," he commanded, "and should you see footprints in the ashes, spray the fowl's blood through the air above them. Remember, my friend, it is most important that you act with speed."

"Footprints in the ashes——" I began incredulously, wondering if he had lost his senses, but a sudden current of glacial air sweeping through the room chilled me into silence.

"Ah! of the beautiful form is *Mademoiselle,* and who was I to know that cold wind of Tibetan devils would display it even more than this exquisite *robe d'Orient?*" said de Grandin.

Clad in a wondrous something, she explained fright had so numbed her that dressing had been impossible.

"When did you first know they were here?" de Grandin whispered, turning his head momentarily toward the trembling couple inside the inner circle, then darting a watchful glance about the room as though he looked for an invisible enemy to materialize from the air.

"I found the horrible red ball in my bath," Haroldine replied in a low, trembling whisper. "I screamed when I saw it, and Daddy got up to come to me, and there was one of them under his ash-tray; so I telephoned your house right away, and——"

"*S-s-st!*" the Frenchman's sibilant warning cut her short. "*Garde à vous,* Friend Trowbridge! *Fixe!*" As though drawing a saber from its scabbard he whipped the keen steel sword blade from his walking-stick and swished it whiplike through the air. "The cry is still '*On ne passe pas!*' my friends!"

There was the fluttering of the

tiny breeze along the bedroom floor, not like a breeze from outside, but an eery, tentative sort of wind, a wind which trickled lightly over the door-sill, rose to a blast, paused a moment in reconnaissance, then crept forward experimentally, as though testing the strength of our defenses.

A light, pit-pattering noise, as though an invisible mouse were circling the room, sounded from the shadows; then, to my horrified amazement, there appeared the print of a broad, naked foot in the film of ashes de Grandin had spread upon the floor!

Wave on wave of goose-flesh rose on my arms and along my neck as I watched the first print followed by a second, for there was no body above them, no sign nor trace of any alien presence in the place; only, as the keys of a mechanical piano are depressed as the strings respond to the notes of the reeling record, the smooth coating of ashes gave token of the onward march of some invisible thing.

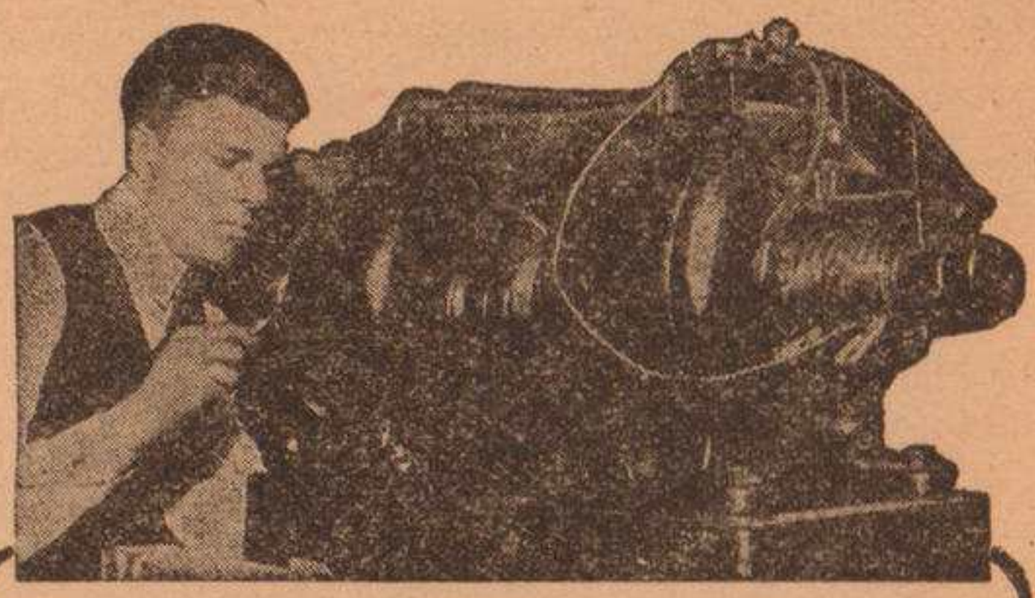
"Quick, my friend, shoot where you see the prints!" de Grandin cried in a shrill, excited voice, and I thrust the plunger of my pump home, sending out a shower of ruddy spray.

As invisible ink takes form when the paper is held before a flame, there was suddenly outlined in the empty air before us the visage of——

"*Sapristi!* 'Tis Yama himself, King of Hell! God of Death! *Holà, mon brave,*" de Grandin called almost jocularly as the vision took form wherever the rain of fowl's blood struck, "it seems we meet face to face, though you expected it not. *Nom d'un porc,* is this the courtesy of your country? You seem not overjoyed to meet me.

"Lower, Friend Trowbridge," he called from the corner of his mouth, keeping wary eyes fixed upon the visitant, "aim for his legs; there is a trick I wish to show him."

Obediently, I aimed the syringe at



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"THE MOON TERROR"

the footless footprints in the ashes, and a pair of broad, naked feet sprang suddenly into view.

"*Bien,*" the Frenchman commended, then with a sudden forward thrust of his foot engaged the masked Mongolian's ankle in a grapevine twist and sent the fellow sprawling to the floor. The blue and gold horror that was the face of Yama came off, disclosing a leering, slant-eyed lama.

"Now, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin remarked, placing his sword-point against the other's throat directly above the palpitating jugular vein, "I damn think perhaps you will listen to reason, *hein?*"

The felled man gazed malignantly into his conqueror's face, but neither terror nor surrender showed in his sullen eyes.

"*Morbleu,* he is a brave savage, this one," de Grandin muttered, then lapsed into a wailing, singsong speech the like of which I had never heard.

A look of incredulous disbelief, then of interest, finally of amazed delight, spread over the copper-colored features of the fallen man as the little Frenchman progressed. Finally he answered with one or two coughing ejaculations, and at a sign from de Grandin rose to his feet and stood with his hands lifted above his head.

"Monsieur Arkright," the Frenchman called without taking his eyes from his captive, "have the goodness to fetch the *Pi Yü* Stone without delay. I have made a treaty with this emissary of the lamas. If you return his treasure to him at once he will repair forthwith to his lamasery and trouble you and yours no more."

"But what about my wife, and my children these fiends killed?" Arkright expostulated. "Are they to go scotfree? How do I know they'll keep their word? I'm damned if I'll return the *Pi Yü!*"

"You will most certainly be killed if you do not," de Grandin returned coolly. "As to your damnation, I am a sinful man, and do not presume to pronounce judgment on you, though I fear the worst unless you mend your morals. Come, will you return this man his property, or do I release him and bid him do his worst?"

Muttering imprecations, Arkright stepped across the barrier of blood, left the room and returned in a few minutes with a small parcel wrapped in what appeared to be thin plates of gold.

De Grandin took it from his hand and presented it to the Tibetan with a ceremonious bow.

"*Ki lao yeh hsieh ti to lo,*" the yellow man pressed his clasped hands to his breast and bowed nearly double to the Frenchman.

"*Parbleu,* yes, and Dr. Trowbridge, too," my little friend returned, indicating me with a wave of his hand.

The Tibetan bent ceremoniously toward me as de Grandin added, "*Ch'i kan.*"

"What did he say?" I demanded, returning the Asiatic's salute.

"He says, 'The honorable, illustrious sir has my heartfelt thanks,' or words to that effect, and I insist that he say the same of you, my friend," de Grandin returned. "Name of a small green pig, I do desire that he understand there are two honorable men in the room besides himself.

"*En avant, mon brave,*" he motioned the Tibetan toward the door with his sword, then lowered his point with a flourish, saluting the Arkrights with military punctilio.

"Mademoiselle Haroldine," he said, "it is a great pleasure to have served you. May your approaching marriage be a most happy one.

"Monsieur Arkright, I have saved your life, and, though against your will, restored your honor. It is true you have lost your gold, but self-respect is a more precious thing. Next time you desire to steal, permit that I suggest you select a less vengeful victim than a Tibetan brotherhood. *Parbleu,* those savages they have no sense of humor at all! When a man robs

them, they take it with the worst possible grace."

"*PIPE d'un chameau*"—Jules de Grandin brushed an imaginary fleck of dust from the sleeve of his dinner jacket and refilled his liqueur glass—"it has been a most satisfactory day, Friend Trowbridge. Our experiment was one grand, unqualified success; we have restored stolen property to its rightful owners, and I have told that Monsieur Arkright what I think of him."

"U'm," I murmured. "I suppose it's all perfectly clear to you, but I'm still in the dark about it all."

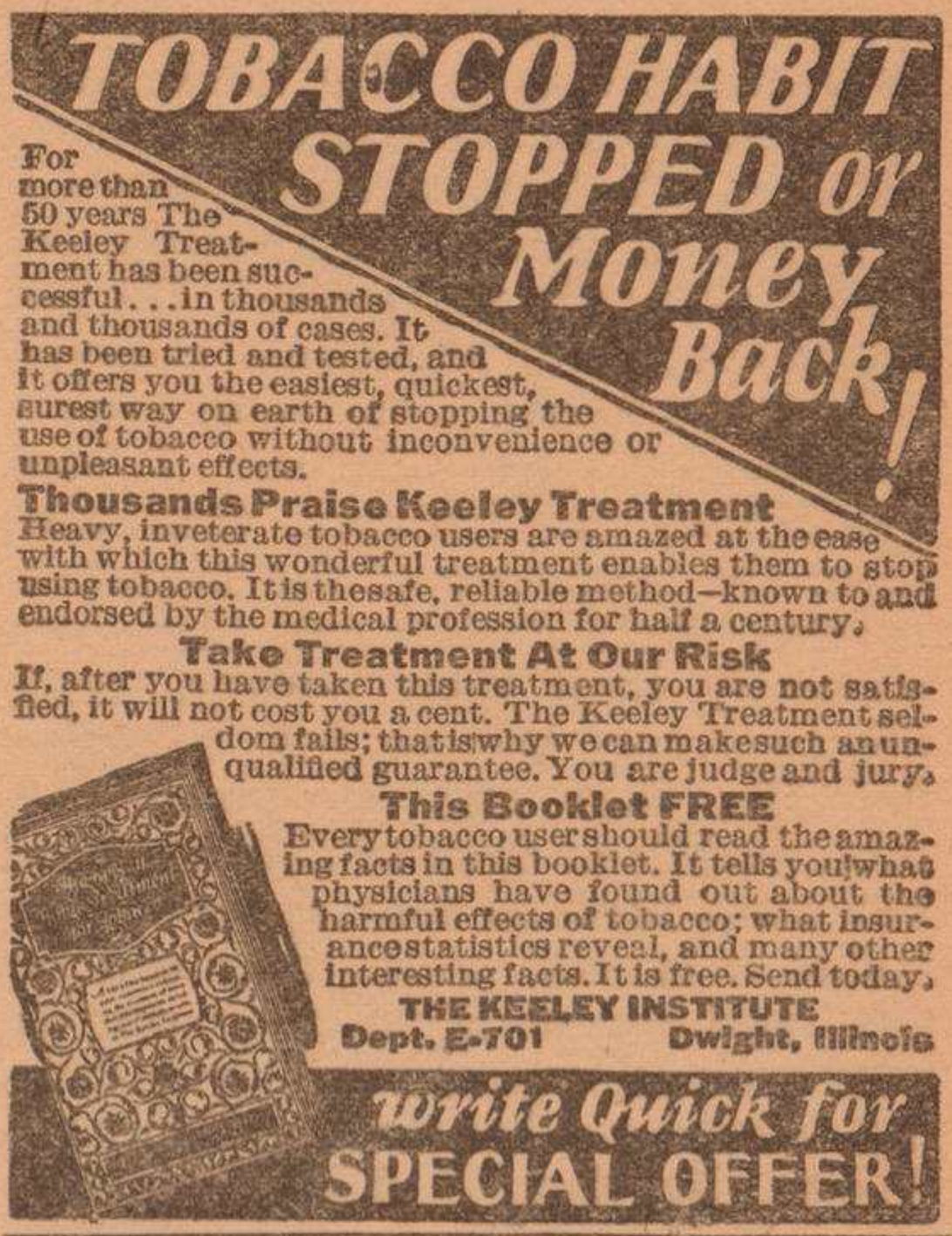
"Perfectly," he agreed with one of his quick, elfin smiles. "Howeverly, that can be remedied. Attend me, if you please:

"When first we interviewed Mademoiselle Haroldine and her father, I smelt the odor of Tibet in this so strange business. Those red beads, they could have come from but one bit of jewelry, and that was the rosary of a Buddhist monk of Tibet. Yes. Now, in the course of my travels in that devil-infested land, I had seen those old lamas do their devil-dances and command the elements to obey their summons and wreak vengeance on their enemies. 'Very well,' I tell me, 'if this be a case of lamas' magic, we must devise magic which will counteract it.'

"'Of course,' I agree with me. 'For every ill there is a remedy. Men living in the lowlands know cures for malaria; those who inhabit the peaks know the cure for mountain fever. They must do so, or they die. Very well, is it not highly probable that the Mongolian people have their own safeguards against these mountain devils? If it were not so, would not Tibet completely dominate all China?'

"'You have right,' I compliment me, 'but whom shall we call on for aid?'

"Thereupon I remember that my old friend, Dr. Feng Yuin-han, whom





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I have known at the Sorbonne, is at present residing in New York, and it is to him I send my message for assistance. *Parbleu,* when he comes he is as full of wisdom as a college professor attempts to appear! He tells me much in our nighttime interview before you arrive from your work of increasing the population. I learn from him, for instance, that when these old magicians of the mountains practise their devil's art, they automatically limit their powers. Invisible they may become, yes; but while invisible, they may not overstep a pool, puddle or drop of chicken blood. For some strange reason, such blood makes a barrier which they can not pass and across which they can not hurl a missile nor send their destroying winds or devastating lightning-flashes. Further, if chicken blood be cast upon them their invisibility at once melts away, and while they are in the process of becoming visible in such circumstances their physical strength is greatly reduced. One man of normal lustiness would be a match for fifty of them half visible, half unseen because of fresh fowl's blood splashed on them.

"*Voilà,* I have my grand strategy of defense already mapped out for me. From the excellent Pierre Grasso I buy much fresh chicken blood, and from Dr. Feng I obtain the ashes of the mystic camphor tree. The blood I spread around in an almost-circle, that our enemy may attack us from one side only, and inside the outer stockade of gore I scatter camphor wood ashes that his footprints may become visible and betray his position to us. Then, inside our outer ramparts, I draw a second complete circle of blood which the enemy can not penetrate at all, so that Monsieur Arkright, but most of all his so charming daughter, may be safe. Then I wait.

"Presently comes the foe. He circles our first line of defenses, finds the break I have purposely left, and walks into our trap. In the camphor wood ashes his all-invisible feet leave visible footprints to warn of his approach.

"With your aid, then, I do spray him with the blood as soon as his footprints betray him, and make him visible so that I may slay him at my good convenience. But he are no match for me. *Non,* Jules de Grandin would not call it the sport to kill such as he; it would not be fair. Besides, is there not much to be said on his side? I think so.

"It was the cupidity of Monsieur Arkright and no other thing which brought death upon his wife and children. We have no way of telling that the identical man whom I have overthrown murdered those unfortunate ones, and it is not just to take his life for his fellows' crimes. As for legal justice, what court would listen believingly to our story? *Cordieu,* to relate what we have seen these last few days to the ordinary lawyer would be little better than confessing ourselves mad or infatuated with too much of the so execrable liquor which your prosperous bootleggers supply. Me, I have no wish to be thought a fool.

"Therefore, I say to me, 'It is best that we call this battle a draw. Let us give back to the men of the mountains that which is theirs and take their promise that they will no longer pursue Monsieur Arkright and Mademoiselle Haroldine. Let there be no more beads from the Devil's rosary scattered across their path.'

"Very good. I make the equal bargain with the Tibetan; his property is returned to him and——

"My friend, I suffer!"

"Eh?" I exclaimed, shocked at the tragic face he turned to me.

"*Nom d'un canon,* yes; my glass is empty again!"

Don't fail to read the next adventure of Jules de Grandin:
"The House of Golden Masks," by Seabury Quinn

The Hermit of Chemeketa Mountain

(Continued from page 477)

nition a simple matter in spite of the terrible condition of the body.

The big stranger, taking mysterious articles from his pockets, knelt down beside the body, and in a minute arose with prints of the victim's fingers, which he compared with papers in his possession, after which he announced that the man was a desperate criminal, for whom a considerable reward was offered, "dead or alive." He intimated that Borlitz would be entitled to a share in the reward, but Matt crossed himself fervently, and vowed he would have none of it.

But regardless of whether or not the man was a criminal with a price on his head, and may have richly deserved his fate, one serious feature could not be overlooked. This was that the hermit's dogs had suddenly become a serious menace to the community, and something would have to be done about it.

The committee which was formed to call on the hermit that afternoon included the big detective, the town doctor, the postmaster, several of the older and more influential men of the village, and last, but by no means least, the priest. Indeed, several of those on the committee vowed they would not so much as enter the forest unless he were with them, and even then it is said that charms, warranted to counteract the effects of the evil eye if judiciously employed, were secretly carried by several members of the committee.

But, at any rate, they started, bravely enough at first; the big detective, who scoffed at their fears, led the way, with the priest walking beside him to show him the trail. As they advanced up the mountain the conversation became quieter; a noise in the thicket, or the sudden rustle of

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a bird overhead, would result in an effort on the part of the group to keep more closely together, and the man of God at the head of the band was called on more frequently for spiritual reassurance. This he gave, willingly enough; but it was noted that on one or two occasions, as they drew near the hermit's place, his voice may have trembled a little, and he was observed to cross himself quite frequently, and with possibly a little more fervor than usual.

Nearing the cabin one of the group picked up a revolver, with six empty shells in the chambers. This was passed from hand to hand, and at least one of the group claimed to have seen it in the dead man's possession.

They at last came out on the little clearing, and paused at the dilapidated fence. The detective had volunteered to do the talking, since he claimed to be undismayed by the prospect of facing the hermit's evil eye, and also since he was especially interested in the death of the man he had come to the village to seek. There was no protest at his taking the lead in the negotiations.

There was no one in sight in the little cleared space surrounding the cabin, and the thing that impressed itself almost immediately on the minds of all present was the absence of the dogs. Invariably on the approach of strangers they had always charged up to the fence, threatening annihilation to trespassers, but now there was no sign of them whatever. Nor of the hermit himself.

The detective called a couple of times from where they stood at the fence, and receiving no answer, announced that he was going in. He climbed the fence, walked across the field, and disappeared behind the shack. A moment later he reappeared and motioned to the group to come to him, and, after some hesitation, with two or three of the bolder ones leading the way, the committee crossed the field.

As they arrived at the cabin the detective silently pointed to the ground, and there, cold in death, lay the bodies of the hermit and his two dogs. They were not a pretty sight; the birds had discovered them.

The doctor, after an examination of the bodies, said that they had all three been shot; the hermit apparently at close range, as the bullet had passed clear through the body and was found in his clothing. He showed it to them, and the detective, who knew about such things, said that it had undoubtedly been fired from the revolver they had found on the trail. And the doctor said that from the condition of the bodies they had been dead at least three or four days!

WHEN he returned to the big city by the sea the detective reported to his superiors that the man he sought had been killed on Chemeketa Mountain by timber wolves which had harassed the community for a few days previously. But if you go to Matt Borlitz, or Stanislaus Mathewzewiski, or even Gorgas Pichutzki, when he is sober, they will tell you that it had been fifteen years since a timber wolf had been seen in the country, and that there never has been one seen there since. And besides, timber wolves leave tracks, and howl, and there never was a track left or a sound made by the three phantom beasts who terrorized the village until they killed the murderer of the hermit and his two dogs.

The three phantoms have never been seen since. That was insured, however, when they buried the hermit and his two dogs. There is one sure way of keeping in its grave the body of a dead man who takes the form of a beast and roams the woods at night, or of a vicious wolf-dog which will not stay dead, and this was done. You will not be able to learn who did it, but before the graves were filled there was driven through the heart of each of them and deep into the ground beneath a long wooden stake.

The World-Wrecker

(Continued from page 464)

with a movable dome. It makes an ideal place for observation. You must come up and see it one day."

"Daytime is my busy time, unfortunately," said he; "besides, the stars don't twinkle then. Can not I come tonight—now?"

"Now?" She appeared startled by the cool suggestion.

"Why not? It's a perfect night for star-gazing. I'm simply longing for a close-up of Venus."

"If you had the merest smattering of the science in which you profess to be so interested," she told him severely, "you would know that Venus is not on view except just before sunrise or just after sunset."

"No?" was his imperturbable comment. "Then Jupiter will do. Good old Jupiter—'Twinkle, twinkle little Jupe.' I'm just crazy to see him do it! Come now, just let me have one little peep. You've already told me that Professor Merrivale is away in the Midlands, and I'm sure he will not object, considering that I saved him from his own gas-attack. Please say 'yes'."

Half serious, half bantering, he stuck to his point while the car whirled them eastward, but it was not until they had mounted Blackheath Hill and were crossing the dark stretch of moor that she signified a reluctant assent.

Avoiding the main entrance of Tudor Towers, Terry drew up before a narrow postern door at the base of one of the corner turrets, whose sham battlements were crowned with a bulbous dome. Alma opened the door with her pass-key, but it was Terry who led the way up the winding staircase, guided by a mere pinpoint of light from his electric torch.

"What's that?" She clutched his wrist as she breathed the startled

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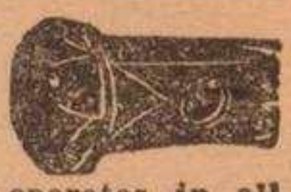
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question. From the darkness above there came a faint, irregular clicking noise.

With a whispered order for her to remain where she was, Terry kicked off his shoes and crept up the remaining stairs to where an oblong of gray among the velvety blackness told of an open door. Terry pocketed his torch and peered cautiously in.

It was a large, circular room, filled with strange machines and chemical apparatus. A shaded lamp burnt at the farther end, its pool of light falling like a halo on the high, bald head of Professor Merrivale as he sat working at a small typewriter.

Warily, his stocking feet making no sound, Terry approached the crouching figure and looked over its shoulder, reading the words that were forming beneath the clicking keys. And what he saw caused a gasp of amazement to escape his lips.

Like a flash the professor spun round and leapt toward him, his skinny hands fastening upon his throat.

"So, you sneaking spy, I've got you!" the old man hissed.

Terry, without apparent effort, released himself and stepped back a pace. The light glinted along a revolver barrel as he raised his hand level with the other's breast.

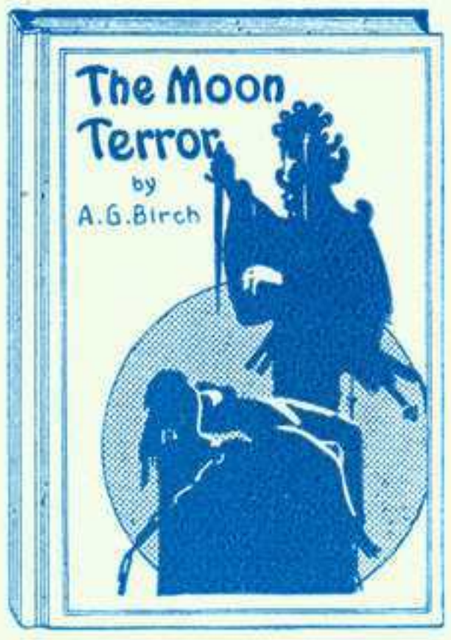
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Hard on his words there came a flash of violet fire leaping across the room, blinding, dazing in its intensity. Terry staggered, and the weapon was wrenched from his grasp as though by the hand of an invisible giant.

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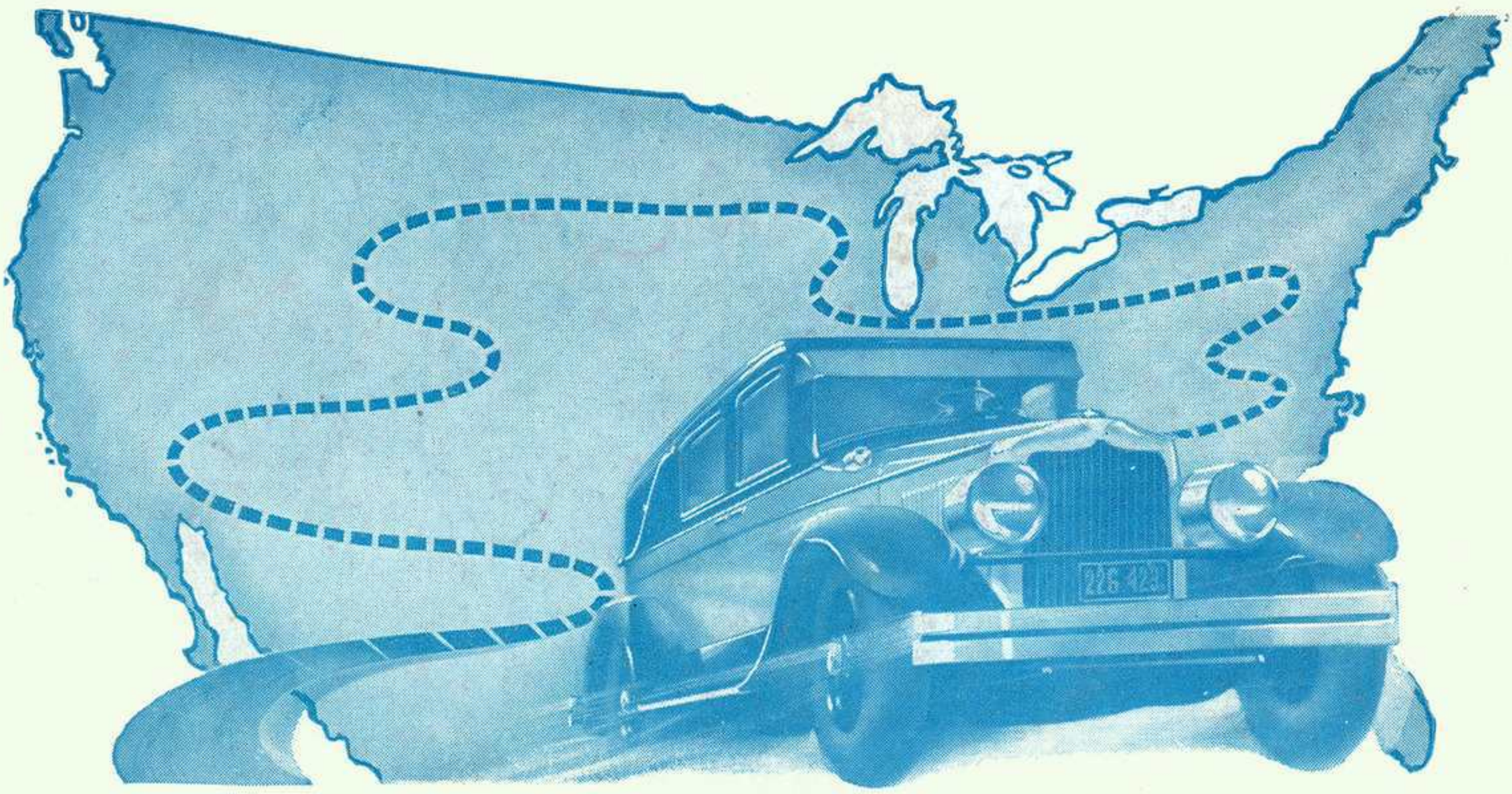
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