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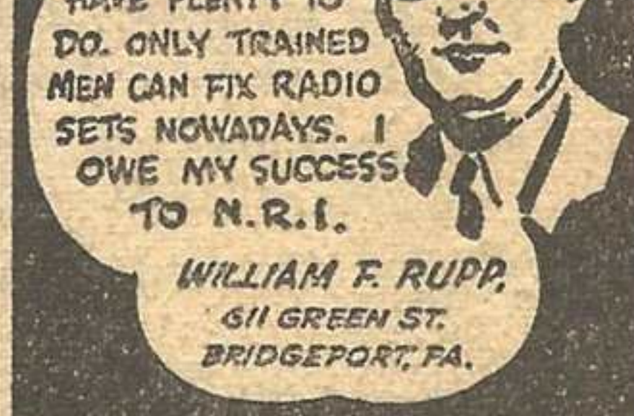
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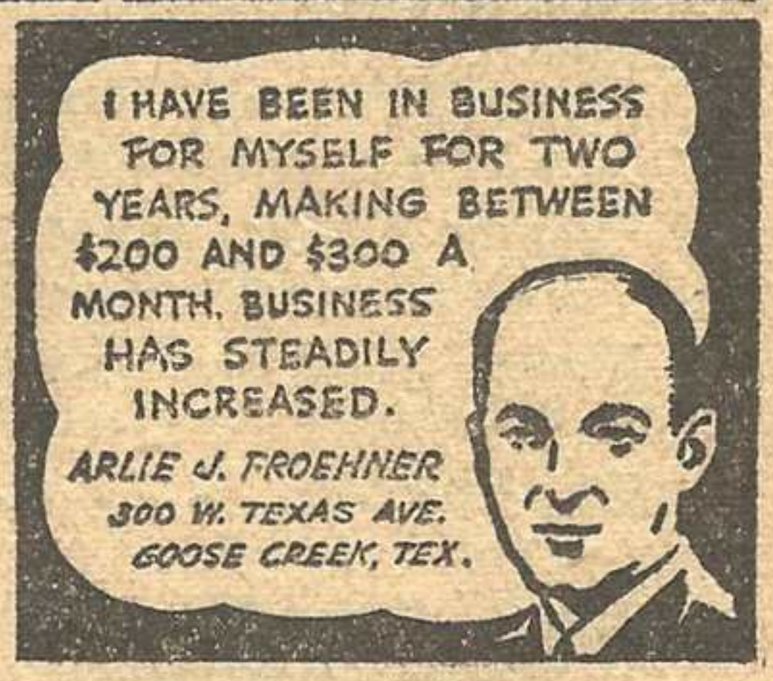
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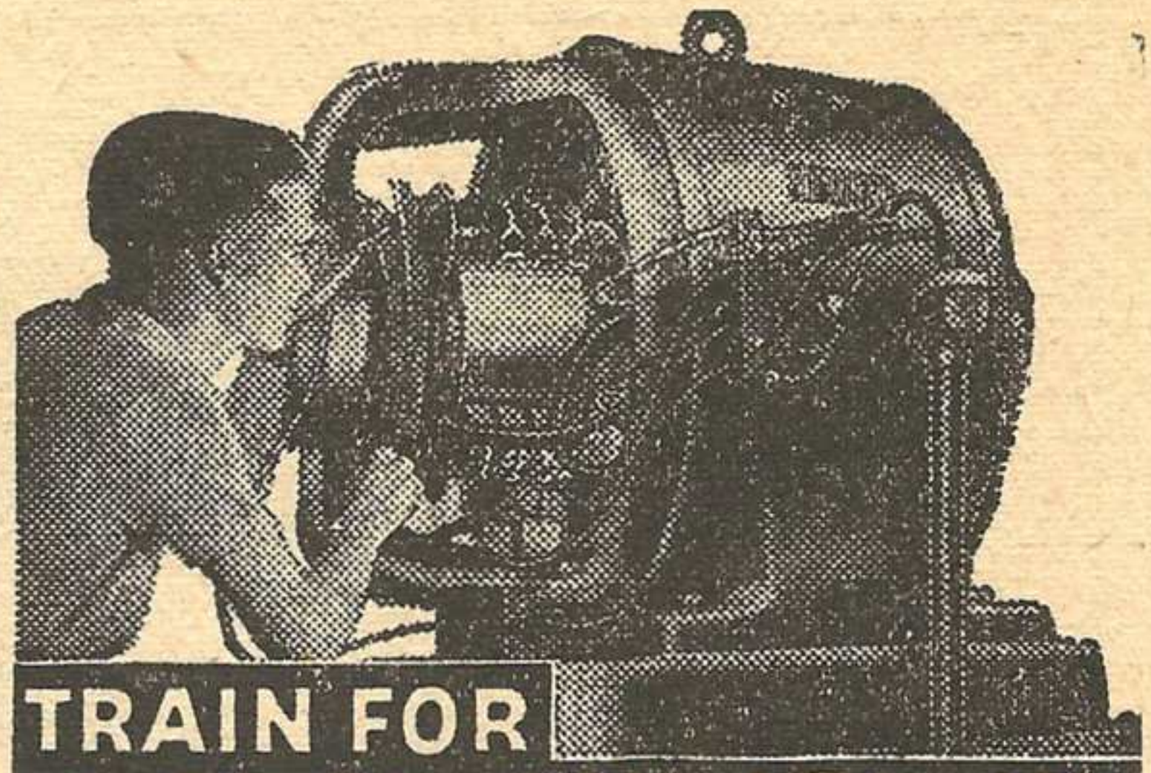
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"The tree sprang into his path to stop him."

Glamour

By SEABURY QUINN

An unusual and uncanny story—who, or what, was that Lucinda Lafferty who lured men to the destruction of their immortal souls?

THE wind tramped round and round the fieldstone walls of the clubhouse, muttering and moaning; seemingly it maundered threats and wailed pleas alternately. Rain sweated on the recessed windows, glazing them with black opacity until the mullioned panes gave back distorted mirrorings of the gunroom, vague and indistinct as oil paintings smeared with a rag before they had a

chance to dry. In the eight-foot fireplace beech and pine logs piled in alternating layers upon the hammered iron firedogs blazed a roaring holocaust and washed the freestone floor and adz-cut oaken beams of the ceiling with ruddy light. From the radio a bass voice bellowed lustily:

"Then all of my days I'll sing the praise
Of brown October ale . . ."

Harrigan felt like a cat in a strange alley. Newly come to Washington as a member of the scientific staff of the Good Roads Bureau, he had permitted himself to be talked into joining the Izaac Walton Gun and Rod Club, being assured he would find some kindred spirits there. "None o' your dam' lily-fingered pen-pushers an' desk-hoppers there," Jack Bellamy had told him. "They're men like you an' me, son. Two-fisted, hairy-chested sportsmen, capable o' handlin' liquor or an argument like gentlemen. Lawyers, bankers, doctors, scientists; not a Gov'ment clerk in a carload of 'em."

Used to outdoor life and with some experience with both rod and gun, Harrigan had risen eagerly to the bait, but already he began to have his doubts. The station wagon from the club had met him at Vienna Junction, depositing him on the clubhouse porch a little after five. Bellamy, whom he had expected to meet him, had not shown up; there was no one there he knew, and the members gathered in small cliques at dinner and in the gunroom afterward. No one but the white-jacketed colored waiter seemed aware of his existence, and he only when an upraised finger signaled orders for a fresh mug of old musty.

"New feller here?" The booming challenge at his elbow startled him. "Didn't remember seein' you before. My name's Crumpacker, Judge Lucius Q. Crumpacker. What's yours? Mind if I sit by you?"

The big man dropped into the vacant hickory chair between Harrigan and the fire-warmed hearth and beckoned to the waiter. "Double Scotch and soda, Jake," he ordered. "You know my brand—and no ice, remember. When I want ice-water with a little whisky in it I'll tell you."

He lit a cigar which seemed almost half a yard in length, blew a series of quick, angry smoke rings like the pompons of exploding shrapnel, and turned again to Harrigan, bushy eyebrows working up and down like agitated caterpillars.

"Had a dev'lish mean experience this evenin'," he confided in a voice that sounded somehow like an angry mastiff's growl. "Ordered off an old hag's land. 'Pon my word, I was. We ought to run the old hadrian out o' the county. She has no business here, ought to be in the poorhouse, or jail. Devilish old virago." He worried at the end of his cigar until it flattened and unraveled like a frayed-out rope, then flung the ruin in the fire and lit another stogie. "Umph. Land wasn't posted, either."

"But I thought all that was taken care of," ventured Harrigan as the silence lengthened. "I was told the club had made arrangements with the local land owners to let us shoot on their land for a stipulated yearly fee and a guarantee to reimburse them for any damages they might sustain."

"Right. Quite right. There is such an arrangement, and by its terms the yokels have a right to post their land whenever they get tired of takin' money from us, but that old scold down by Gunpowder Creek refuses either to post her land or sign a contract with us. She's got nothing but a weed-patch and a flock o' moultin' hens. You could ride a regiment o' cavalry across her place, and all you'd trample would be goldenrod and ragweed, but the old she-devil won't let one of us set foot across her line. She's the last one of a family that settled here in 1635, and though there's nothing but the cellar and chimneys

of the old mansion left she still puts on the high and mighty air with us and treats us like a lot o' trespassers and interlopers.

"Her place adjoins the Spellman farm. Spellman's glad enough to collect from us for the shootin'-rights, and I'd flushed up a covey his side of the line. Must have been a dozen birds in it. I knocked down four of 'em and saw 'em take covert in the next field. That would be her briar-patch.

"Maybe I had no business trespassin', for after all we've no agreement with her, but she'd not posted signs, either. So Xerxes —that's my wire-haired setter—and I just kept on goin'. We'd walked two-three hundred yards across her mangy patch o' crab-grass when Xerxes started actin' queerly. First he'd run around in circles, as if he had the scent o' something; then he'd come lopin' back to me with his tail down, and look up in my face with that peculiar questionin' way dogs have, and when I'd tell him to go smell 'em out he'd run off for a little distance, then start circlin' back again.

"Then he did a thing no well-trained bird dog ever does, gave tongue and rushed at something. Sir, you could have knocked me over with a stalk o' rye-straw. There he was, the best bird dog in seven counties, actin' like a damned coon dog. I followed him and found him belly-down before a patch o' briar bushes, barkin' and whinin' and growlin', as if he didn't quite know whether he was more frightened or angry.

"I POKED my gun into the bushes, for I thought perhaps he'd run a skunk to cover, though usually a polecat won't give ground for man or devil. Well, sir, what d'ye think I saw?" He paused rhetorically and drew a deep draft from the bubbling amber liquid in his glass; then, as Harrigan raised politely questioning brows:

"A cat, sir. A dam' old mangy green-eyed tabby-cat crouchin' in the heart o' those blackberry vines and lookin' poisoned darts and daggers at my dog. I hate cats like the Devil hates the Scriptures—thievin', slinkin', skulkin' bird-killers! So I pushed the vines away still farther and bent down to get a better aim at it. I was goin' to let the beast have both barrels, but—believe it or doubt me, sir, it faded out o' sight!"

"Cats are wonderfully agile," Harrigan agreed as Judge Crumpacker looked at him, obviously awaiting comment.

"This one wasn't," Crumpacker exploded. "This beast didn't slink away. It vanished. One second it was there, lookin' at us like a basilisk, and next moment there was nothin' there, but——"

Again he paused to take refreshment from his now half-empty glass, and: "But just as that dam' feline disappeared we heard a rustlin' in the patch o' briars to our left, and there, lookin' twice as poisonous as any cat, was old Lucinda Lafferty."

"Lucinda Lafferty?" echoed Harrigan. "You mean——"

"Precisely, sir. She's the old hag who owns that patch o' worthless land. I don't believe that she has half a dozen teeth in both her jaws, but she was fairly grindin' those she had when we turned round and saw her, and if her eyes weren't flashin' fire I never saw the light o' hell in human optics. And I've been on the bench for thirty years, passin' sentence on the most desperate criminals ever brought to justice."

"So she threatened you with suit for trespass?"

"Not she. She knew she'd never have a chance before a court or jury in this county. The country folk don't bear with *her* kind round here. She cursed me."

"She swore at you?"

Judge Crumpacker was stout, gray-haired and ruddy-faced. In his red-suede waistcoat and tan flannel shirt, with corduroy trousers thrust into high-topped boots, he looked the perfect picture of a Georgian

innkeeper from a Jeffery Farnol novel, or, perhaps, a Regency three-bottle man. Harrigan had a momentary, slightly comic mental picture of a slattern farm-shrew pouring billingsgate upon him. But the other's answer swept the vision away.

"I said exactly what I meant. She cursed me. Aimed a skinny finger at me and called down maledictions on my head. It may be that her lack of teeth prevented her articulatin' clearly, but it seemed as if she interjected words in heathen gibberish between the English as she cursed me.

"Xerxes was absolutely terrified. I've had that dog for five years, raised and trained him from a pup, and I never saw him lower his tail for anything before, not even when he ran across a rattlesnake or bobcat, but today his spirit seemed to fail him utterly, and he whined and put his tail between his legs and shrank against me like a mongrel cur. I tell you, sir, it almost made me believe what they say about that devilish old hadrian—the way she looked at us, the threats she made, the uncouth jargon that she spewed at us—Jake!" He crooked his finger to the attendant. "Another of the same, and see you put some whisky in it this time. What say? What do they say about her?" he turned back to Harrigan. "Why, damme, sir, they say that she's a witch!"

Harrigan had difficulty keeping a straight face. Abetted by the potent Scotch, galled by the memory of his wounded *amour-propre,* the dignified old gentleman was working himself into a towering passion. "A witch?" Harrigan repeated. "How's that, sir?"

"A witch," Judge Crumpacker reiterated. "Precisely, sir; a witch. Judge Petterson dismissed a case against her only last term of court when a neighbor sued her on a charge of malicious mischief, alleging that she'd caused his pigs to die by overlooking them. The pigs were dead, there was no doubt about that. Apparently a herd of forty fine swine were dead of poison, but the veterinary who examined them could find no trace of any known hogbane, and they couldn't prove that old Lucinda had access to the pens. Indeed, the testimony was that she had never been upon her neighbor's land, but merely stood out in the road before his house and called a ban down on the swine for rooting in her garden several days before. There's no doubt about her malice, but the statutes of this state ignore the possibility of witchcraft, so she had to be discharged. There's not a Negro in the county who will pass her place at night, and most of the white folks prefer going around the other way after dark. If she'd lived two hundred years ago she'd have been hanged long before this, or sold as a slave in Barbados or Jamaica."

Absent-mindedly he reached for his glass, found none, and raised a querulous complaint:

"Jake, confound you, where's my drink?"

" 'Scuse me, Jedge y'honor, suh," the servitor appeared around the corner of the bar, his face a study in embarrassment and latent fear, "Ah didn't mean ter be slow erbout fetchin' yuh yo' licker, but Joseph jest now called me to de kennels, suh, an' tole me ter tell yuh—what Ah means, suh, is——"

"Yes?" The red in Judge Crumpacker's ruddy cheeks grew almost magenta. "What the devil are you drivin' at?"

"Jedge, y'honor, suh, hit's erbout yo' dawg, suh, please; he's done gone an'——"

"What's he done? I saw him locked up in the kennel myself, and saw that he had food and water. He's not hungry, and he never goes out foraging. Don't tell me that he's gotten loose and stolen something from the kitchen——"

"Oh, no, suh. He ain't stole nothin', Jedge y'honor, suh. He's daid!"

"What?" The question snapped as sharply as a whip. "How?"

"Pizened, Jedge y'honor, suh." The Negro swallowed hard and nodded solemnly. His eyes appeared to be all whites. "Ah heerd as how yuh an' him wuz on ole Mis' Lucindy's place this evenin'——"

"Come on—out o' my way!" the judge burst in, and, Harrigan and Jake behind him, stamped out to the long shed behind the clubhouse where members' dogs were quartered.

JAKE had not been guilty of an overstatement. The pointer, a big, rangy dog, lay on its side, legs stiff, lips curled back and foam-flecked, eyes bulging almost from their sockets. Its sides and stomach were distended till the skin was stretched like drum-parchment about them.

"I left him less than half an hour ago," Crumpacker almost sobbed. "He was well and healthy then, just finishing his dinner. Poor old Xerxes—poor old pal!"

"He might have picked up something in the fields this afternoon," soothed Harrigan. "Dogs often——"

"Not this one, sir," Crumpacker thundered. "I've had my eye on him all day. He's eaten nothing but the food I gave him, and I brought that up with me—*ha!*"

"What is it, sir?" asked Harrigan, but even as he asked he knew the answer. There was a feeling of malaise about him, a sort of prickling of the short hairs on his neck, and a chilly, eery feeling, as of horripilation, on his forearms.

"That infernal old Lucinda Lafferty—that devilish old witch. This is her doing! She killed my poor dog just as she killed her neighbor's swine, by witchcraft. She got away with it that time; Petterson dismissed the case against her, but this time she has me to deal with. I'll track her down and brand her for the foul sorceress she is or die in the attempt. By Gad, I will, sir!"

It might have been a foraging crow disturbed in his foray in the clubhouse kitchen yard, or routed by their voices from the shelter he had taken in the kennel shed. Whatever it was, there came a sudden flapping of strong wings against the shadows, and a hoarse, derisive croak of laughter as something took flight from the overhanging roof into the soot-black darkness of the rain-drenched night.

MORNING came with bright, cool air and sunlight sparkling on wet trees and grass. Harrigan was among the first at breakfast, but early as he was he found Judge Crumpacker finishing his ham and eggs as he came in the breakfast room. Apparently the judge had not had a good night, for his face was lined and puffy and there was a sort of gray, unhealthy pallor underneath his ruddiness. The contrast reminded Harrigan of rouge smeared on a corpse. The old man's eyes were swollen, too. If he had been a woman Harrigan would have thought he had been crying.

"Mornin'," rumbled Crumpacker, nodding as he looked up from his plate. "Ready to go with me?" He filled a tumbler a third full of whisky from the bottle at his elbow, and drained it at a gulp. "I want somebody with me when I have a showdown with that old hag." His hand was just a thought unsteady as he replenished his glass. Some of the whisky slopped across the rim and settled in a little puddle on the polished table.

Harrigan was on the point of refusing. He had come up here to shoot, not listen to the maunderings of a bibulous old gaffer. Then, abruptly, "Yes, sir, of course," he returned. The choleric old judge had worked himself into a state of sustained, choking anger, he was roweled by a spur of rage and hate, and in the last three minutes he had drunk enough neat liquor to fuddle anyone. It would be inviting murder to permit him to accost a poor old woman by himself in this condition.

They walked along the surfaced road

until they reached the Spellman farm, then cut across a wide brown field set with long rows of corn-shocks like the tepees of an Indian encampment, and jeweled with plump golden pumpkins.

"Ought to be some rabbits here," the judge remarked. "Little devils like to hang around the shocks—here, Xerxes, smell 'em out, boy—oh!" The exclamation was almost a wail, the mourning of a man for his old hunting-comrade, and the look that followed it was grim and hard and merciless as a bared knife.

The rail fence separating Spellman's farm from the next land was ruinous, overgrown with creepers, fallen almost away in some places. The field beyond was a fitting complement. Turf which had not felt a plow in twenty years gave way to bramble patches, and these in turn were choked by rank growths of ragweed, goldenrod and burdock. Devil's-pitchfork bushes grew waist high, and the barbed seed-stalks clung to their trousers like a swarm of parasites as they pushed through them.

Beyond the orchard lot of gnarled and dying apple trees they found the owner's shack, a single-story, two-room structure of unpainted clapboards stained a leprous gray by long exposure to the weather. The door sagged drunkenly on rusted, broken hinges; several of the window-lights were broken and the holes were stuffed with wadded burlap sacking. The two planks of the stoop were warped until their edges curled up like old boot-soles, and water from the rain of last night gathered in their concavities. The kitchen yard was littered with tin cans, discarded, broken pots and dishes, scraps of rag, a rotting mattress and a broken, rust-eaten bed spring. Stark as a skeleton of the dead past, two ivy-smothered, moss-grown chimneys reared their broken tops from crumbling foundations and a cellar overgrown with sumac, all that remained of the once-noble mansion whither Washington and Jefferson had come as guests and General Lee and Stonewall Jackson had been entertained. Fire, neglect and ruthless time had laid it in the dust as low as Nineveh and Tyre. The bloodless hand of utter, abject poverty lay on everything, and yet there was a brooding, threatening quality of silence there. Almost, it seemed to Harrigan, the place was waiting. . . . What it waited for he had no idea, but that it was something violent, tragic and abrupt he was sure.

Crumpacker strode through the rubble littering the yard and beat upon the weather-blasted door with his gun-butt. The rotting panels sagged and shivered at the impact, and a hollow, vibrant booming echoed through the empty shack. Otherwise there was no answer.

"By Gad, I'll stand here hammerin' till the old crone comes, or knock her devilish door in!" Crumpacker declared, but Harrigan broke in with a relieved laugh.

"No use, Judge; can't you see the door's closed with a hasp and padlock, and the lock's been fastened on the outside? Whoever lives here has gone out and locked the door behind—good Lord!"

Around the rusted, tangled wire of the hen-coop had come a great dog, almost large as a mastiff, but heavy-furred, like a collie or shepherd. Obviously, half a dozen breeds or more combined to make its lineage; just as obviously it combined the worst features of each. Mange had eaten at its pelt until it showed bald patches of blue hide between the matted, flea-infested hair; its tail was stubby as a terrier's; its paws were disproportionately large and armed with long, cruel, curving claws which might almost have been a bear's; its eyes were small and deeply pitted in its wide face, rheumy with distemper, and its mouth combined the wideness of the bulldog's with the heavy-toothed long jaw of the Alaskan husky. It made no sound, but stood there snarling silently, black lips curled back in a

ferocious grin, long, yellowed fangs exposed, and a look of absolutely devilish malevolence in its sunken eyes.

"Ha?" Crumpacker turned at Harrigan's ejaculation. "Hers, of course. Like mistress like dog, eh what?" He brought his gun up slowly, cradling the barrels in the crook of his left arm as he snapped back the hammers with his right thumb. "Maybe she loves the lousy beast. I hope so. Let's see how she'll like seein' it dead——"

The brute glared at him balefully, and showed no sign of fear as he raised the gun to take deliberate aim, but Harrigan jumped forward. "No, Judge, no!" he shouted. "Your quarrel is with her, not with this poor brute. It hadn't anything to do with Xerxes' death——"

Crumpacker's jaw set truculently. For the first time Harrigan saw all the latent, vengeful cruelty which the usually jovial ruddy countenance concealed. These were the features of a "hanging judge," a man who found a grim pleasure in sentencing other men to die.

"Her quarrel was with me, not my dog," he answered harshly. "I'm goin' to blow that ugly beast to hell. Stand aside, sir."

The roar of both barrels discharged in quick succession was like the bellow of a field gun, and Harrigan fell stumbling back, shocked, blinded, all but deafened by the blaze of fire and detonation of the discharge, but in the instant Judge Crumpacker fired he had thrust his hand out, driving up the shotgun muzzle and sending the charge through the overhanging branches of a sassafras tree. As the shot went whistling and crashing through the brilliant red and green leaves the big dog turned and trotted around the corner of the house, moving, for all its size, with catlike quietness.

Crumpacker glared at Harrigan. Bitter, rageful hatred smoldered in his eyes, making the brown pupils glow like tarnished garnets. "Damme, sir, men have been shot for less impertinence!" he burst out. Then, seeming to cool as suddenly as he had blazed, "Never mind; perhaps you're right, lad. My quarrel's with the old woman, not her dog. I reckon anger made me childish for a moment." He shook his heavy shoulders in disgust. "Come on, let's leave this filthy hole."

THEY recrossed Spellman's well-kept land and came out on the highroad just as a small roadster swung around the bend.

"Good morning, Judge; good morning, sir," the driver called as he brought his car to a halt. "Give you a lift back to the club?"

"Yes, thank you, we'd appreciate it, Doctor," Crumpacker answered as he introduced Harrigan.

Dr. Clancy was a man in early middle life, somewhere between forty-five and fifty, Harrigan surmised, smooth-skinned, clean-shaven, with a youthfulness and vigor which denied the nests of little wrinkles at the corners of his eyes and the streak of white that ran with startling contrast through his smoothly brushed black hair. His eyes were blue and kind and very knowing—"true Irish eyes" thought Harrigan—but there was an indefinable something about him which was puzzling. Men without women—priests, explorers, sailors, some soldiers—bear the mark of their denial stamped on them. Dr. Clancy seemed to have it. He would have seemed more properly attired in a Roman collar and black cassock vest, rather than the corduroys and flannel shirt he wore. The little satchel on the seat beside him seemed more like a small suitcase than a medicine kit, too, but . . .

He broke his idle speculations off, for Judge Crumpacker had been pouring out the story of his grievances to Dr. Clancy, not omitting his suspicions of witchcraft, and Dr. Clancy was not laughing. "Be-

cause the law does not admit a thing is no reason for denying its existence," he was saying. "Lee Deforest was threatened with prosecution for fraud when he introduced the ionic current detector for radio, and there are many people who remember when the Patent Office refused to consider applications for heavier than air flying-machines, just as it rejects claims for perpetual motion devices today. The Lafferty family's history is not good. The founder of the local branch was prosecuted twice for cruelty to his Negroes, and finally deported from the colony on a charge of trafficking with Satan. An ancestress of theirs was burned as a witch in England in the reign of James I. Miss Lucinda was a noted beauty in her day, but though she had three romances none of them was ever consummated. All three engagements were broken, and all three lovers died shortly after their estrangement—each in exactly the manner she had foretold."

Harrigan laughed. "You think that she's a witch, too? Perhaps the cat the Judge saw yesterday was really Miss Lucinda—" The seriousness of the other's face halted him.

"The Lord forbid that I make any accusations of that kind lightly," Dr. Clancy answered, "but if we admit for the sake of argument that she has the power of witchcraft she might have been the cat, or even the strange mongrel that you saw today."

"Lycanthropy?" laughed Harrigan incredulously. "You mean you really think that there are people who can change to bestial form at will—in the Twentieth Century?"

Dr. Clancy drew his brows down in a thoughtful frown. "No, I wouldn't quite say that," he returned. "It might be due to what the mediæval churchmen called glamour, the power to mislead the beholder. The line between witchcraft and magic, and that between magic and the prestidigitator's mumbo-jumbo, is far from sharply drawn. Every mythology tells of fairy gifts — chests of jewels or money which the recipient gloats over at night, and finds nothing but withered leaves or worthless stones next morning. That's silly, childish superstition, you say. Perhaps. But what about the Indian jugglers' rope trick? Hundreds of credible witnesses testify to having seen a rope thrown up into the air and apparently hanging there on nothing, but so securely fastened that a man could climb it. Yet on one or two occasions when motion pictures have been surreptitiously taken of the trick the films showed nothing happening——"

"I get it," Harrigan broke in. "Fakery. Mass, or at least multiple, hypnotism."

Dr. Clancy nodded assent. "Whichever you prefer to call it. Magic, mesmerism, hypnotism. Terminology varies with the times, but facts remain the same. These things were understood in the East long before Mesmer introduced his theory of animal magnetism. Probably much longer than we suspect in the West, too. However, that's unimportant, really. The fact is that if it's possible for a Hindoo fakir to make people think they see a rope suspended from infinity it's quite as possible for someone in the West to make a person think he's looking at a cat when none is there, or at a dog when he is really looking at a woman. You know how Sir Walter Scott puts it:

"'It had much of glamour might
To make a lady seem a knight.'

"Glamour—or hypnotism, if you prefer a modern scientific term—might quite as easily make an ugly old woman appear to be a dog or cat."

"But d'ye think Judge Crumpacker's dog could have been hypnotized into thinking that he saw a witch-cat?" Harrigan persisted.

"Or made to die, apparently from

poison, through the power or suggestion?" added Crumpacker.

"I don't *think* anything," responded Dr. Clancy. "I'm only guessing, and taking the most charitable view. I'd rather think that old Lucinda Lafferty possesses hypnotic power and uses it to gratify her malice—for she is a malicious, vindictive old woman, according to all accounts—than believe she's entered into a pact with the Devil and signed away her soul."

He brought the car to a stop by the clubhouse porch in a long skid and leaped out with his little satchel.

"See you in a little while," he called across his shoulder. "Give me time to take a shower and get some breakfast."

THE western sky was burnished rose-gold and blush-pink, smoke rose in tall straight geysers from the chimneys, and the windows of the sparsely scattered houses reflected the last rays of sunset. Blue haze hung in the valleys, softening the burning reds and golds of autumn leaves, but on the rounded backs of the mountains the trees were blatant, flaunting flame-hued oranges and garnets.

Harrigan drew a deep lungful of the limpid evening air, glanced at his wrist-watch, and set out along the highway toward the clubhouse. His afternoon had been successful. He had managed to avoid Judge Crumpacker and, on his own, had ranged the fields clear to the river, bagging four fat rabbits and half a dozen quail. Now he was pleasantly tired, wolf-hungry and completely lost. How far he'd come he had no accurate idea, he knew only vaguely which direction to take for the club. The soft blue dusk of evening crept across the sky, the moon showed a thin crescent, and a few bright stars began to twinkle.

"The Lafferty farm must be about here," he told himself as he trudged past a hedge of clipped hornbeam. "Too bad it's posted. I could cut across the meadow to the Spellman place and—hullo?" He started with an exclamation of dismay as a great raindrop struck him in the face.

He glanced up wonderingly at the sky. Five minutes earlier it had been dead calm and crystal clear, but now it was black as an inverted kettle, and the rain fell with a frantic fury, while a sudden wind whined like an animal in pain. He bent his head against the buffeting blast and stinging drops, turned up the collar of his shooting-coat and plodded on. "If I can make the Spellman place b e f o r e I'm soaked through," he began, then, in spite of his discomfort, stopped stock-still in amazement. Through the waving branches of the birch-tree hedge a light shone with a steady invitation.

"It can't be old Miss Lucinda's shack," he reasoned. "That lies too low to be seen from the road. H'm; seems to me that would be just about the point the ruined mansion stands, but—pshaw! I'm confused by the storm. I've never been this far along the highway. Of course, there's a house there."

He swung along the surfaced roadway, found a gate pierced in the hedge and started up the avenue of honey locusts, chuckling at his luck. "Eddie, my boy, don't look a gift-house in the door," he advised. "If the Devil offers shelter on a night like this you'd better thank him kindly and accept it. Perhaps there isn't really any Devil. It's a dead sure thing pneumonia's no myth."

The house was larger than he'd thought, and older. Of red brick, built in Georgian style, it had tall windows, a deep, roofless porch with fluted white balustrade, and a cobweb fanlight above its wide front door. Through the transom shone a cheery glow of welcome, lamplight filtered through the curtained windows, mocking at the stormy blackness outside. This was no farmhouse, but the home of "quality" he realized as he

drew the silver knocker back and struck a loud alarum on the door.

Shuffling footsteps sounded as he repeated his summons; the white-enameled door swung back and an aged Negro smiled at him from amiable near-sighted eyes through the pebbles of a pair of gold-bowed spectacles. He wore a black dress coat with broad bright silver buttons, a tucked and frill-edged linen shirt, and an antique black silk stock bound round his neck.

"Good evenin', suh," he greeted. "We's jes' settin' down ter dinnah, an' Mis' Lafferty's supremely proud an' happy to receive yuh."

Harrigan started. This cordial greeting, as if he were expected . . . "Mis' Lafferty . . .?" A sudden gust of wind shattered the canopy of branches hanging by the porch and drove a chilling downpour on his neck. "Thank you," he answered, and stepped across the threshold.

Candles set in mirrored sconces stained the shadows of the wide hall with faint orange glows which faded out along the polished floor, but as he crossed the corridor behind the dusky major-domo Harrigan had glimpses of old waxed mahogany, carpets from Shiraz and Hamadan, blurred portraits in deep gilded frames and the upward graceful sweep of a wide balustraded staircase.

She rose to greet him as he stepped into the dining-room, and as definitely as if he had been listening to its rhythm, he felt his heart skip a beat. Between them stretched the long polished mahogany table with its sparkling crystal and bright-gleaming silver under the soft light of candelabra, but the opulence of Georgian silver and the blurred mulberry tones of old china were forgotten as he saw her. Tall, slender, exquisite she was in a dinner dress of blue brocade lamé with silver shoulder straps, with lovely, slightly slanting, brooding eyes, and lips that slashed across the pearl-pale whiteness of her face like spilled fresh blood. Her hair was so pale that he could not tell if it were white or silver-blond, and she wore it swept up from the temples and the neck with waves of little curls massed high upon her head. A wide bracelet of white gold or platinum set with emeralds and rubies circled her left arm above the elbow; a string of matched pearls hung about her throat, and the creamy skin beneath was almost the exact color of the pearls.

"I—I'm sorry to intrude," he began huskily, unable to take his gaze from the vision outlined by the candle-glow, "but I was overtaken by the storm, and——"

"Oh, I'm glad you came!" she interrupted with a soft, enticing laugh. "It's lonesome here, especially when it rains. You're from the club? Harrigan, I think Elijah said your name is? I'm Lucinda Lafferty."

He blinked at her in utter, stark amazement. "I beg your pardon, did I understand your name is——"

Her laugh, deep-pitched, a little husky, began in a soft chuckle that ended in a gay, infectious peal. "I know what you're thinking—that poor old woman down the road. Yes, we have the same name, and she's everlastingly receiving my mail. Only the other day she came here, almost burning up with rage, and threatened dreadful things—said she'd put a curse on me unless I either moved away or changed my name. She's really quite harmless, poor old creature, but they say she has an evil reputation. The country people, white as well as colored, firmly believe she's a witch. Imagine that in this century!"

Served by the velvet-footed old butler, they ate clear golden consommé spiced with a dash of lemon juice and Angostura bitters, bass fried to saddle-brown in country butter, roast wild duck gamed to perfection and served with stewed green celery tops and mint-quince jelly, and spoon

bread yellow as the sweet butter which melted on it.

Lucinda barely touched her glass, but Harrigan showed due appreciation for the vintage burgundy with which the butler kept his crystal goblet filled, and as he ate and drank his admiration for his hostess grew.

AFTER dinner they sat in the drawing-room before the fire, and while she poured coffee from a Georgian silver pot in eggshell Sèvres cups and brandy from a cobwebbed bottle into bubble-thin inhalers he looked at her as Abelard might first have looked at Héloïse or Aucassin at Nicolette.

She was a brilliant conversationalist, seeming to divine his thought before he put it into words, and following his verbal lead as a skilled dancer responds to her partner's lightest touch. She knew and loved the things he knew and loved—the bookstalls by the Seine, the pastry cooks' stands on the Ile de France, sunrise over the Grand Canyon, the flower market by St. Paul's in London, twilight on Fifth Avenue with lights beginning to appear in a soft veil of dusk.

But more than her quick sympathetic understanding and the wit and culture that her talk displayed, more than the beauty of her slim exquisite figure with its long and tapering arms and legs, flat back, firm, pointed breasts and head set gracefully upon a round full throat; more, even, than the beauty of her exquisite pale-ivory face with its vivid scarlet mouth and long moss-agate eyes, he found her voice compelling. It was deep-pitched, velvety, with that peculiar throaty quality one sometimes hears in southern countries, and its husky, bell-like timbre seemed to strike vibrations from the very keynote of his being. When, discussing poetry, she took down a slim vellum volume and read from a Persian songster dead for a long thousand years:

"O my belovèd,
O thou pearl among women,
If all other women in the world
Were gathered in one corner of the East
And thou alone in the dim West,
I should surely come to thee,
Even wert thou hidden
In the deepest forest
Or on the highest mountain top,
O my belovèd,"

he felt tears of something close akin to adoration welling in his eyes.

The storm had stopped and the silver boat of the moon's crescent rode a sky-turf tremulous with clouds when he left her. Her face was like jasmine blossom in the argent light as she bade him good-night on the porch. "May I see you again soon, please?" he besought as she laid her rosy-tipped, small hand in his. "Tomorrow —in the morning?"

"Not in the morning, Edward"—they had come to first names already—she denied. "Tomorrow night, if there's a moon, you may come to me, but I'm a different person in the day—I mean I like to lie abed till late," she added as he stared at her in bewilderment.

Acting on impulse, he raised her hand to his lips, and when she accepted the homage as if she had been used to it since infancy, he felt absurdly happy . . . grateful for her understanding acquiescence.

RAIN dripped from the locust trees that hemmed the avenue which led down to the highway; great drops fell splashing from the wayside branches as he walked along the road, but before he'd gone a hundred yards he found himself treading in dust.

"Great Scott, I'll have to kick the door down to get in!" he exclaimed as he looked at his wrist-watch. "Half-past one. It didn't seem as if I'd been with Lucinda more than an hour." Suddenly he was

hungry, famished. Despite the hearty dinner he had eaten he was as ravenous as though he'd tasted nothing since breakfast.

The clubhouse was ablaze with lights, and in the gunroom were gathered knots of members, talking in the hushed tones people use in church or at a funeral. "What's up?" he asked. "Somebody ill?"

"Not now," Dr. Clancy answered soberly. "It's Judge Crumpacker. He's dead."

"Dead? Good heavens——"

"I don't believe that heaven had a part in this," replied Clancy. "He died in frightful agony, sweating blood like a hemophiliac."

"Sweating blood? What caused it?"

Clancy's gaze was level and uncompromising as a pointed bayonet. "You remember hearing of his encounter with Lucinda Lafferty yesterday? Did he tell you that she cursed him?"

"Yes, but he wasn't specific, merely said——"

"I went to him when Mr. Marsten heard him groaning in his room," broke in the other.

"He was sinking fast, but trying to say something. I bent over him and heard him whisper, 'She said I'd die this way; my joints would stiffen and my eyes go blind, and I'd die in bloody sweat.' His knees and elbows were as stiff as if he had been frozen when I found him, and every toe and finger was as rigid as if it were cast iron. When I held a light before his eyes he couldn't tell the difference."

ALL night he dreamed of her. Sometimes she put soft hands against his cheeks; when she spoke to him the vibrant bell-tones of her voice thrilled through him till they struck responsive echoes from the smallest cell and fiber of his being. Once she leant above him and kissed him, and at the contact of her satin lips with his he felt his very spirit melt in him with longing and desire.

Troubled and unrested, he rose early and despite her refusal to see him till the evening set out for her house. This was a new experience for him. In all his thirty years he had met no woman with whom he would care to link his life; now, as he walked across the frost-jeweled fields he knew that whether for an hour or a lifetime he was hers without reserve or withholding. It was almost like an ecstasy, this strangely mingled sense of exaltation and abasement; such a love was epic, like that of Hero and Leander, Pyramus and Thisbe or Romeo and Juliet . . . too wonderful, too marvelous to have come to any prosaic scientist like him . . . yet there it was. The vision of her pale, exquisite face seemed outlined in the bank of fleecy cirrus cloud that burned with rose reflection of the morning sun. A snatch from an old song, rescued from oblivion by radio, came unbidden to his lips:

"I dream of you all the day long,
You run through the hours like a song,
My dearie."

He crossed the Spellman field and then vaulted the snake fence that bordered old Lucinda Lafferty's poor land. The house of his beloved, the other, the beautiful Lucinda, must lie beyond the weed-grown orchard and the ruined mansion of the farm.

Now he was in the old crone's apple grove, and the gnarled boughs and bent boles of her trees rose round him like menacing figures in a Doré engraving. Strangely, too, the trees, bereft of leaves, shed far more shadow than he had thought possible. The sun seemed banked behind a rack of sudden storm clouds; the air was permeated with an unreal, brassy twilight, confusing, threatening. Perhaps it was the odor of the rotting windfalls on the leaf-

mold round the twisted roots of the old trees, he could not say, but the very atmosphere of the place had a damp, dank chilliness. It smelled a little like the brackish water round the rotting piles of old wharves; there was something in it that made breathing difficult. A low-swinging branch knocked off his corduroy cap; as he leant to pick it up a limber twig snapped back and struck him on the cheek, not as if it were an accident, but viciously and purposefully.

He jerked his cap down low above his eyes and instantly another bough caught it and seemed to fling it off.

Something rustled in the undergrowth and flickered across his path. A squirrel? A rabbit? Possibly a cat, he could not be sure, but somehow it did not seem frightened; rather, it seemed to him, it was merely shifting position as if to get a better view of what was happening.

There came a sudden pattering. At first he thought it falling leaves, but there were few leaves on the withered boughs, and the pit-pat-patter grew into a steady rhythm, the beating of small feet, scores, hundreds of them, on the frost-dried leaves. Were they coming from the rear or in front? Or from the sides? It seemed at first as if they came from one direction, then another, finally from all around. Then something else cut straight across his path, and this time there could be no doubt. It was a rabbit running with the speed of panic, and as it passed him it seemed saying, "Get out of here, you fool—get out before it is too late!"

Now there seemed a little wind . . . no, it was no wind, it was a chorus of shrill, piping laughs, soft as chirping insects' cries, but spiteful and malicious as the cachinnation of a horde of mocking fiends. He took a running step forward, and brought up sharply with a startled grunt of pain. He had run full-tilt into a tree trunk—and he could have sworn there was no tree there. Turning, he plunged to the right. This time there was no mistake. The tree sprang into his path to stop him. It happened quicker than a wink, faster than the flicker of a bacillus beneath the eyepiece of a microscope, but he saw it! The way was open when he leaped; then it was blocked by a tree trunk, and he was lying flat upon his back, the wind knocked out of him, his hat gone one way and his gun another, and round about him, from the earth and trees and air, the high, thin cachinnating screams of rancorous laughter sounded in his ears.

He rose and blundered on again, saw bright sunlight showing at the end of a short vista, and made for it in stumbling haste. Now he was at the orchard's edge; in ten yards he would be clear of it. He set his teeth and drew a deep breath, put his head down and sprinted.

The blow was like the hammering of a loaded bludgeon. Whether it were falling limb or shifting tree trunk he could not be sure. He knew only that something struck him on the head with devastating force, that a brilliant blue-white light flashed in his eyes and that he tripped sprawling down into black oblivion.

THE sun had sunk almost below the hog-backed ridge that broke the western horizon, and little feathers of dusk were drifting through the autumn leaves when he awoke to find Dr. Clancy standing above him. "Hullo," he greeted as he rose and felt his head with tentative, exploring fingers, "I must have slept here since morning——"

The half-jocular, half-embarrassed words died still-born on his lips as he looked into the other's face. "What's wrong?" he ended lamely.

Dr. Clancy's steady gaze bored into his. "That's what I'd like to know," he answered in a toneless flat voice. "I've been looking for you since this morning, and

only just found you." Then, irrelevantly: "Where were you last night?"

A quick flush of resentment burned in Harrigan's cheeks. Who the deuce did Clancy think he was, putting him on the witness stand this way? "Why?" he jerked back. "What difference does it make?"

"It may make much. I sat with Judge Crumpacker's body last night, waiting for the coroner. It seemed unchristian to leave him alone, and sometime after three o'clock this morning I heard moans in your room. You'd been with him the day before; if he'd died from some strange infection—though I don't believe he did—you might have been stricken too. So I went to you.

"You were crying in your sleep, like a homesick lad, but when I bent above you I distinguished words between your sobs." He paused a moment; then: "I'm used to confidences; this won't go any farther, but"—his blue eyes fairly seemed to blaze as they burned into Harrigan's—"you were begging someone named Lucinda to have pity on you, to let you touch her, kiss her, even if it were only her dress-hem or her shoes; pleading with her to accept you as her slave. "Where—were—you—last—night—Edward Harrigan?"

Sullenly at first, then defiantly, finally with the ardor of a lover talking of his mistress, Harrigan retailed his night's adventure. When he told of the tempestuous rainstorm that drove him to seek shelter at the mansion Dr. Clancy crossed himself, muttering something in quick Latin which he could not catch, but which ended with *per Deum Patrem omnipotentem*.

"It's odd that lovely girl should have the same name as the old wi—the old woman," Harrigan concluded. "She tells me that they're constantly mistaken for each other by——"

"I don't doubt it," Clancy broke in; then. abruptly, "I don't suppose there's any hope of dissuading you from visiting her tonight?"

"Not the slightest," Harrigan replied. "I'm going to see her tonight, and tomorrow night, and every night she'll see me. If she'll have me, I'm going to marry her."

Dr. Clancy's hard gaze softened for a moment. "Would you care to tell me how you came here—under these trees?" he asked.

"I wouldn't," Harrigan snapped.

"I thought not," Clancy nodded understandingly. "Well, if you're set on seeing her, you're set on it, my boy. I've had enough experience to know that one can't argue when a man's in love."

HE HAD no difficulty finding the house now. Clear and sharply defined against the moon-brightened sky its chimneys rose to guide him like a landmark as he hurried down the highroad. Odd that he hadn't seen them in the morning. True, he'd approached from a different angle and his view had been obscured by the old apple trees . . . those trees! He laughed in recollection of his fight with them. Of course, he'd suffered an attack of vertigo. That was the answer. Up too late the night before, dream-troubled sleep, the shock of Judge Crumpacker's death. . . . Never mind all that, he was going to Lucinda; he'd be with her in five minutes . . . his pulses quickened at the thought.

She was sitting on the couch before the fireplace in the drawing-room as the butler Elijah announced him. The crackling fire put faint rose tints in her ivory skin, darkened the green in her long eyes.

"Edward!" Lightly as a tuft of breeze-blown thistledown she rose to her feet and held out soft bare arms in greeting. Once again he went completely breathless at the sight of her. Tall, graceful, altogether lovely she was, a being from another world, a sprite released from dark enchantment. Her coral-colored sleeveless gown was cut low and belted tightly at her slim waist with a corded silver girdle; her silver-shin-

ing hair was piled in clustering little curls upon her head. She wore little silver sandals on her bare feet, and the scent of gardenia mingled with an overtone of sandalwood that wafted to him from her mounted to his brain as if it were a potent drug from Araby or far Cathay.

Was she young, mature or ageless? It was as impossible to estimate her age as it would be to determine how old a statue is. A marble by Praxiteles or a bronze cast by Cellini is as young today—or in five hundred years—as when it left the master's hands. His eager, ravenous gaze took in the grace of her slim throat, the lovely contours of her outstretched arms, the softly glowing green lights in her half-closed eyes. Here was enchantment old as magic, potent as immortal beauty's self—and she was holding out her gracious hands, filled with the offer of her matchless loveliness, to him! He felt himself grow weak with longing. His heart beat with a hurrying, frenzied rhythm, like a madman on a drum, then seemed to stop entirely.

She moved across the room so lightly, so effortlessly and so silently it seemed that she was wafted by an unfelt breeze. She flowed toward him until he felt her breath upon his cheeks and the perfume of her silver-glowing hair in his nostrils. Then swiftly, hungrily, she kissed him. The flame of her raced in his blood like wildfire in a pine wood and crashed against his brain like an explosion. He swayed drunkenly, reaching out unsteady hands.

But she slipped back before his questing fingers found her. "You love me, don't you, Edward?" she asked, and it seemed to him amusement flickered in her green eyes. "You love me very, very much?" She drawled the question in her husky, bell-toned voice, and the magic of its timbre seemed to set his nerves aquiver, like tauted violin strings.

His breath rasped in his throat. "Love you?" he echoed hoarsely. "More than anything on earth——"

"Or in the heavens above, or waters underneath?" she supplied, and an acid mockery seemed to underlie her words.

"Or in the heavens above or waters underneath," he repeated like a formula.

"You want me to be yours, and you'd be mine forever—to the end of time, and beyond?"

He found no words to answer her; a gasp was all he could achieve, but with his tortured spirit looking from his eyes he nodded.

"Then place your hand upon my heart while I put mine on yours, and swear"—she took his hand in hers and held it to her bosom, and he felt the rondure of her breast beneath his fingers as she laid her free hand on his chest—"swear without reservation or withholding that as it is with me so it shall be with you; whom I serve you will serve, where I worship you will worship——"

Dimly, like a voice heard in a dream, or from a great distance, the command came to him: "Breathe on her, Edward Harrigan; breathe on her in the name of God!"

She drew away from him and raised her lovely arms as if in evocation. Her lips were redder than blood, and lights like green lightning-flashes flickered in her eyes.

"No!" she forbade, and now her voice had lost its bell-like resonance and was shrill and thin with terror. "No, Edward, pay no heed to him. *Astarte, Magna Mater*——" Tiny wrinkles seemed to etch themselves about her eyes, her sweetly rounded throat seemed shriveling, withering, the silver-luster faded in her hair.

HARRIGAN felt a shiver light as frosty air run through his body. Something terrified him—it was as if an awful unseen presence had come to the quiet firelit room, a thing of dreadful,

everlasting chill and terror and wickedness.

Again the far hail sounded, fainter this time: "Breathe on her, Edward Harrigan; breathe on her in the name of God for your immortal soul's sake!"

Scarce knowing what he did he pursed his lips and blew into her face saying, *"In nomine Dei!"*

She turned her great eyes on him sadly, reproachfully. He'd seen a dying deer look so at the hunter.

"Wretched man," she whispered, and now her voice had all its old-time vibrance, "what have you done? Hear me before the end comes, Edward Harrigan. My shadow is upon you. Never shall you free yourself from it; it shall come between you and every woman whom you look on; you shall see me in the sunshine and the moonlight, hear my voice in wind and flowing water——"

A roaring like the thunder of Niagara filled his ears. The room was sliding past him, breaking up, as if it were a painting on a china plate smashed by a sudden blow. He fell, rose to his knees, then fell again. Then he sat up and looked about him dazedly.

Around him was a creeper-covered, ruined wall of crumbling brick. Sumac bushes grew in rank profusion from the piles of earth and rubble. To right and left he saw the outlines of a broken chimney, topless, shattered, smothered in a growth of whispering-leaved ivy and pointing like a broken monument to the pale sky from which the stars had been wiped by the half-moon's light. "Good heavens," he exclaimed, "have I been dreaming?"

"Pray Heaven you never have another dream like it, my son!" The voice was at his elbow, and as he started round he beheld Dr. Clancy, vested in surplice and stole, an open prayer book in his hand.

"Dr. Clancy—Father!" He blinked at the vested man in astonishment.

"Yes, my son, I am a priest," replied Clancy. "Most of the members of the club are non-churchmen, and because it might embarrass them to know there was a priest present, I've used my university degree when I came up here for a few days' shooting every autumn. Judge Crumpacker knew about me; so do half a dozen others, but to most I am just Dr. Clancy. I was on my way from early mass at the village church when I met you and the judge that morning."

"But—but——" stammered Harrigan.

"I know, my son, you can't understand how I came here," Father Clancy smiled. "I've suspected old Lucinda Lafferty for a long time, but one doesn't talk of witchcraft nowadays. It does no good, and only gets one laughed at. I've had my eye on her, just the same, and when the judge told me about his experience it worried me. Not enough, though. I didn't realize how malignant—or how powerful—she was until too late. Then I found you lying in her orchard, and what you told me made me fear for you. She had killed Judge Crumpacker's body. She would kill your soul, unless I could prevent it. But what could I do? You were a victim of the glamour she cast about herself and her house by her devilish arts; it was futile to attempt to reason with you. So I followed you.

"I saw you come to this old ruin, saw you greet the cursed witch, and heard you prepare to forswear your Christian birthright of salvation. I could exorcise the foul fiend that aided her, but you had to save yourself. Only the victim of a witch's glamour can dispel the haze that binds him. Had I sent her off with a curse you would have remained her victim all your life, believing that the things you'd seen were really there and that she was a young and lovely woman——"

"She was—she is!" cried Harrigan. "I've seen her, kissed her, held her in my arms—"

"You think so?" interrupted the priest. "Look there!" He pointed to an object half visible in the moonlight, half obscured by shadow.

At first he thought it was a scarecrow or a pile of old discarded clothing, but as Harrigan looked closer he saw it was a woman's body, old, emaciated, clothed in filthy rags. The face was incredibly wrinkled, bone-pale and hideously ugly. Even in death there was no dignity about it, only a kind of reptilian malignancy. The hands, claw-like, with broken, dirt-filled nails, were like the talons of a vulture, red, cracked, swollen-jointed; between the slackly opened bloodless lips showed a few broken, yellowed teeth, long, sharp and pointed as the fangs of a carnivore. The whole appearance of the corpse was horrible, revolting, frightening. Yet—he caught his breath in sudden sickness—as he realized it—underneath the ugliness, the filth, the squalor, was a faint resemblance to the lovely creature he had caressed. Like a devilishly inspired caricature Lucinda Lafferty the witch had a resemblance to his beloved silver-blond Lucinda, as a skilled cartoonist's drawing may suggest, though not look like, the subject which it parodies.

"Thank Heaven you were not too dazed to hear me call to you, and to obey me," Father Clancy told him kindly. "Had you not acted when you did, and blown upon her as I ordered, we dare not think what might have happened——"

The laugh that interrupted him was dreadful, as unexpected and as shocking as a strong man's scream of pain. It was a laugh of disillusionment, abysmal, stark, complete.

THESE things Edward Harrigan remembers as vividly as if they'd happened yesterday. He is a dour and silent man, efficient in his work, but utterly unsocial. He calls no man his friend, no woman interests him. His little world is bounded by his laboratory and his suite at the hotel, he shuns the parks and country, no one ever sees him strolling in the sunshine or the moonlight. Usually he works till late with his test-tubes and reagents, and there is a standing order at the hotel desk to call him every morning at five.

For, as he shuns the beauties of the woods and fields, and eschews woman's company and man's companionship, Edward Harrigan shuns sleep. Dreams come with sleep, and his dreams he sees the vision of a fragile Dresden-china figure in a coral-colored gown cut in the Grecian fashion, with silver-gleaming curls piled high upon her dainty head and soft, bare arms held out in invitation. Sometimes he speaks to her; sometimes he reaches out to grasp the slender, rose-tipped hands in his.

But she never answers, and when he stretches out his hands to hers she fades slowly from his dream-sight, like moonlight fading just before the sky begins to brighten in the east.

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The Considerate Hosts

By THORP McCLUSKY

The man who sought shelter in that lonely house thought his hosts were making sport of him when they proclaimed themselves to be ghosts—but were they not what they said they were, after all?

MIDNIGHT.

It was raining, abysmally. Not the kind of rain in which people sometimes fondly say they like to walk, but rain that was heavy and pitiless, like the rain that fell in France during the war. The road, unrolling slowly beneath Marvin's headlights, glistened like the flank of a great blacksnake; almost Marvin expected it to writhe out from beneath the wheels of his car. Marvin's small coupé was the only man-made thing that moved through the seething night.

Within the car, however, it was like a snug little cave. Marvin might almost have been in a theater, unconcernedly watching some somber drama in which he could revel without really being touched. His sensation was almost one of creepiness; it was incredible that he could be so close to the rain and still so warm and dry. He hoped devoutly that he would not have a flat tire on a night like this!

Ahead a tiny red pinpoint appeared at the side of the road, grew swiftly, then faded in the car's glare to the bull's-eye of a lantern, swinging in the gloved fist of a big man in a streaming rubber coat. Marvin automatically braked the car and rolled the right-hand window down a little way as he saw the big man come splashing toward him.

"Bridge's washed away," the big man said. "Where you going, Mister?"

"Felders, damn it!"

"You'll have to go around by Little Rock Falls. Take your left up that road. It's a county road, but it's passable. Take your right after you cross Little Rock Falls bridge. It'll bring you into Felders."

Marvin swore. The trooper's face, black behind the ribbons of water dripping from his hat, laughed.

"It's a bad night, Mister."

"Gosh, yes! Isn't it!"

Well, if he must detour, he must detour. What a night to crawl for miles along a rutty back road!

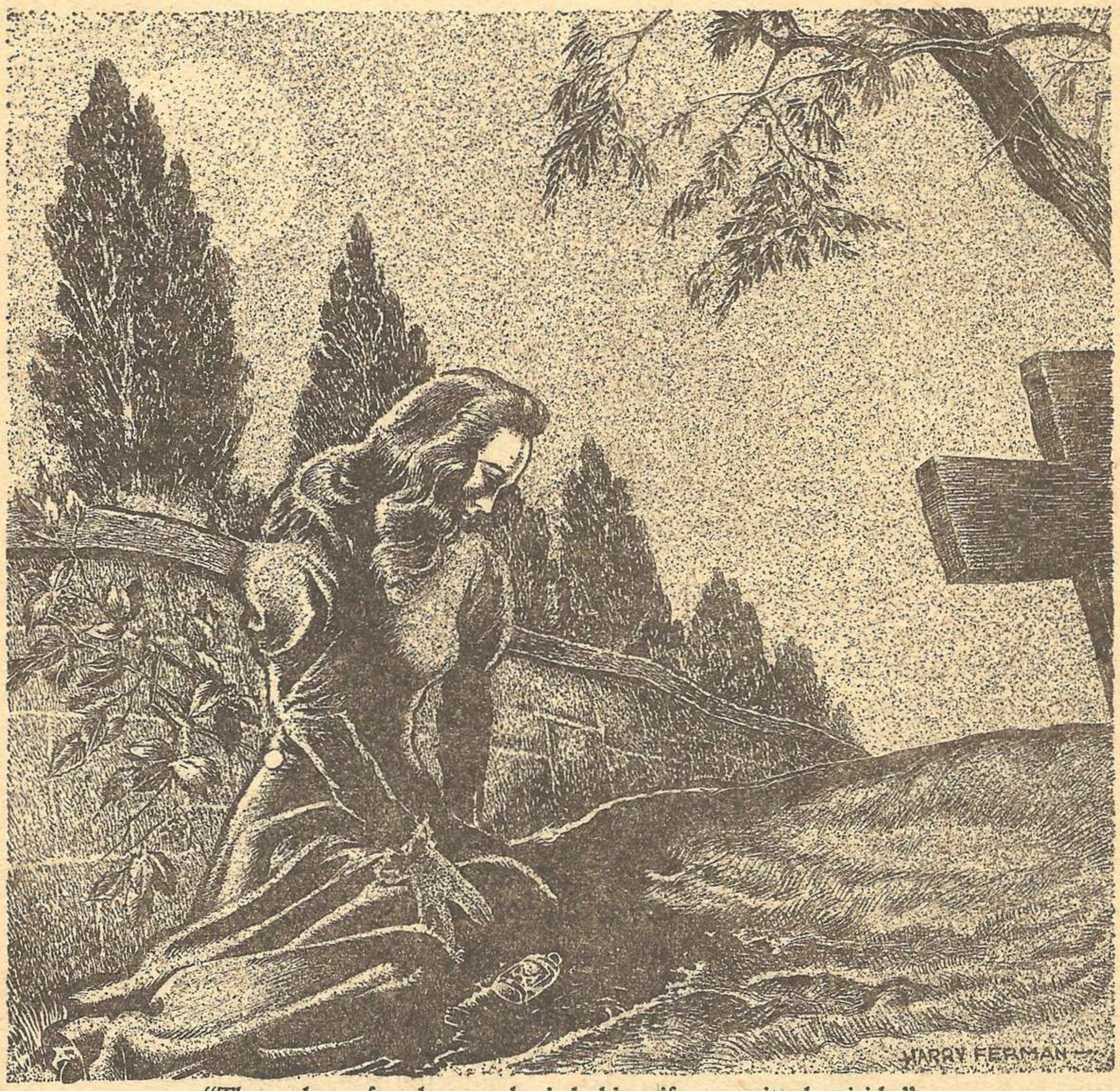
Rutty was no word for it. Every few feet Marvin's car plunged into water-filled holes, gouged out from beneath by the settling of the light roadbed. The sharp, cutting sound of loose stone against the tires was audible even above the hiss of the rain.

Four miles, and Marvin's motor began to sputter and cough. Another mile, and it surrendered entirely. The ignition was soaked; the car would not budge.

Marvin peered through the moisture-streaked windows, and, vaguely, like blacker masses beyond the road, he sensed the presence of thickly clustered trees. The car had stopped in the middle of a little patch of woods. "Judas!" Marvin thought disgustedly. "What a swell place to get stalled!" He switched off the lights to save the battery.

He saw the glimmer then, through the intervening trees, indistinct in the depths of rain.

Where there was a light there was certainly a house, and perhaps a telephone. Marvin pulled his hat tightly down upon



"Three days after he was buried, his wife committed suicide."

his head, clasped his coat collar up around his ears, got out of the car, pushed the small coupé over on the shoulder of the road, and ran for the light.

THE house stood perhaps twenty feet back from the road, and the light shone from a front-room window. As he plowed through the muddy yard—there was no sidewalk—Marvin noticed a second stalled car—a big sedan—standing black and deserted a little way down the road.

The rain was beating him, soaking him to the skin; he pounded on the house door like an impatient sheriff. Almost instantly the door swung open, and Marvin saw a man and a woman standing just inside, in a little hallway that led directly into a well-lighted living-room.

The hallway itself was quite dark. And the man and woman were standing close together, almost as though they might be endeavoring to hide something behind them. But Marvin, wholly preoccupied with his own plight, failed to observe how unusual it must be for these two rural people to be up and about, fully dressed, long after midnight.

Partly shielded from the rain by the little overhang above the door, Marvin took off

his dripping hat and urgently explained his plight.

"My car. Won't go. Wires wet, I guess. I wonder if you'd let me use your phone? I might be able to get somebody to come out from Little Rock Falls. I'm sorry that I had to——"

"That's all right," the man said. "Come inside. When you knocked at the door you startled us. We—we really hadn't—well, you know how it is, in the middle of the night and all. But come in."

"We'll have to think this out differently, John," the woman said suddenly.

Think what out differently? thought Marvin absently.

Marvin muttered something about you never can be too careful about strangers, what with so many hold-ups and all. And, oddly, he sensed that in the half darkness the man and woman smiled briefly at each other, as though they shared some secret that made any conception of physical danger to themselves quietly, mildly amusing.

"We weren't thinking of you in that way," the man reassured Marvin. "Come into the living-room."

The living room of that house was—just ordinary. Two overstuffed chairs, a davenport, a bookcase. Nothing particularly modern about the room. Not elaborate, but adequate.

In the brighter light Marvin looked at his hosts. The man was around forty years of age, the woman considerably younger, twenty-eight, or perhaps thirty. And there was something definitely attractive about them. It was not their appearance so much, for in appearance they were merely ordinary people; the woman was almost painfully plain. But they moved and talked with a curious singleness of purpose. They reminded Marvin of a pair of gray doves.

Marvin looked around the room until he saw the telephone in a corner, and he noticed with some surprise that it was one of the old-style, coffee-grinder affairs. The man was watching him with peculiar intentness.

"We haven't tried to use the telephone tonight," he told Marvin abruptly, "but I'm afraid it won't work."

"I don't see how it *can* work," the woman added.

Marvin took the receiver off the hook and rotated the little crank. No answer from Central. He tried again, several times, but the line remained dead.

The man nodded his head slowly. "I didn't think it would work," he said, then.

"Wires down or something, I suppose," Marvin hazarded. "Funny thing, I haven't seen one of those old-style phones in years. Didn't think they used 'em any more."

"You're out in the sticks now," the man laughed. He glanced from the window at the almost opaque sheets of rain falling outside.

"You might as well stay here a little while. While you're with us you'll have the illusion, at least, that you're in a comfortable house."

What on earth is he talking about? Marvin asked himself. Is he just a little bit off, maybe? That last sounded like nonsense.

Suddenly the woman spoke.

"He'd better go, John. He can't stay here too long, you know. It would be horrible if someone took his license number and people—jumped to conclusions afterward. No one should know that he stopped here."

The man looked thoughtfully at Marvin.

"Yes, dear, you're right. I hadn't thought that far ahead. I'm afraid, sir, that you'll have to leave," he told Marvin. "Something extremely strange——"

Marvin bristled angrily, and buttoned his coat with an air of affronted dignity.

"I'll go," he said shortly. "I realize perfectly that I'm an intruder. You should

not have let me in. After you let me in I began to expect ordinary human courtesy from you. I was mistaken. Good night."

The man stopped him. He seemed very much distressed.

"Just a moment. Don't go until we explain. We have never been considered discourteous before. But tonight—tonight . . .

"I must introduce myself. I am John Reed, and this is my wife, Grace."

He paused significantly, as though that explained everything, but Marvin merely shook his head. "My name's Marvin Phelps, but that's nothing to you. All this talk seems pretty needless."

The man coughed nervously. "Please understand. We're only asking you to go for your own good."

"Oh, sure," Marvin said. "Sure. I understand perfectly. Good night."

THE man hesitated. "You see," he said slowly, "things aren't as they seem. We're really ghosts."

"You don't say!"

"My husband is quite right," the woman said loyally. "We've been dead twenty-one years."

"Twenty-two years next October," the man added, after a moment's calculation. "It's a long time."

"Well, I never heard such hooey!" Marvin babbled. "Kindly step away from that door, Mister, and let me out of here before I swing from the heels."

"I know it sounds odd," the man admitted, without moving, "and I hope that you will realize that it's from no choosing of mine that I have to explain. Nevertheless, I was electrocuted, twenty-one years ago, for the murder of the Chairman of the School Board, over in Little Rock Falls. Notice how my head is shaved, and my split trouser-leg? The fact is, that whenever we materialize we have to appear exactly as we were in our last moment of life. It's a restriction on us."

Screwy, certainly screwy. And yet Marvin hazily remembered that School Board affair. Yes, the murderer *had* been a fellow named Reed. The wife had committed suicide a few days after burial of her husband's body.

It was such an odd insanity. Why, they *both* believed it. They even dressed the part. That odd dress the woman was wearing. 'Way out of date. And the man's slit trouser-leg. The screwy cluck had even shaved a little patch on his head, too, and his shirt was open at the throat.

They didn't look dangerous, but you never can tell. Better humor them, and get out of here as quick as I can.

Marvin cleared his throat.

"If I were you—why, say, I'd have lots of fun materializing. I'd be at it every night. Build up a reputation for myself."

The man looked disgusted. "I should kick you out of doors," he remarked bitterly. "I'm trying to give you a decent explanation, and you keep making fun of me."

"Don't bother with him, John," the wife exclaimed. "It's getting late."

"Mr. Phelps," the self-styled ghost doggedly persisted, ignoring the woman's interruption, "perhaps you noticed a car stalled on the side of the road as you came into our yard. Well, that car, Mr. Phelps, belongs to Lieutenant-Governor Lyons, of Felders, who prosecuted me for that murder and won a conviction, although he knew that I was innocent. Of course he wasn't Lieutenant-Governor then; he was only County Prosecutor. . . .

"That was a political murder, and Lyons knew it. But at that time he still had his way to make in the world—and circumstances pointed toward me. For example, the body of the slain man was found in the ditch just beyond my house. The body had been robbed. The mur-

derer had thrown the victim's pocketbook and watch under our front steps. Lyons said that I had *hidden* them there—though obviously I'd never have done a suicidal thing like that, had I really been the murderer. Lyons knew that, too—but he had to burn somebody.

"What really convicted me was the fact that my contract to teach had not been renewed that spring. It gave Lyons a ready-made motive to pin on me.

"So he framed me. They tried, sentenced, and electrocuted me, all very neatly and legally. Three days after I was buried, my wife committed suicide."

Though Marvin was a trifle afraid, he was nevertheless beginning to enjoy himself. Boy, what a story to tell the gang! If only they'd believe him!

"I can't understand," he pointed out slyly, "how you can be so free with this house if, as you say, you've been dead twenty-one years or so. Don't the present owners or occupants object? If I lived here I certainly wouldn't turn the place over to a couple of ghosts—especially on a night like this!"

The man answered readily, "I told you that things are not as they seem. This house has not been lived in since Grace died. It's not a very modern house, anyway—and people have natural prejudices. At this very moment you are standing in an empty room. Those windows are broken. The wallpaper has peeled away, and half the plaster has fallen off the walls. There is really no light in the house. If things appeared to you as they really are you could not see your hand in front of your face."

Marvin felt in his pocket for his cigarettes. "Well," he said, "you seem to know all the answers. Have a cigarette. Or don't ghosts smoke?"

The man extended his hand. "Thanks," he replied. "This is an unexpected pleasure. You'll notice that although there are ash-trays about the room there are no cigarettes or tobacco. Grace never smoked, and when they took me to jail she brought all my tobacco there to me. Of course, as I pointed out before, you see this room exactly as it was at the time she killed herself. She's wearing the same dress, for example. There's a certain form about these things, you know."

MARVIN lit the cigarettes. "Well!" he exclaimed. "Brother, you certainly seem to think of everything! Though I can't understand, even yet, why you want me to get out of here. I should think that after you've gone to all this trouble, arranging your effects and so on, you'd want somebody to haunt."

The woman laughed dryly.

"Oh, you're not the man we want to haunt, Mr. Phelps. You came along quite by accident; we hadn't counted on you at all. No, Mr. Lyons is the man we're interested in."

"He's out in the hall now," the man said suddenly. He jerked his head toward the door through which Marvin had come. And all at once all this didn't seem half so funny to Marvin as it had seemed a moment before.

"You see," the woman went on quickly, "this house of ours is on a back road. Nobody ever travels this way. We've been trying for years to—to haunt Mr. Lyons, but we've had very little success. He lives in Felders, and we're pitifully weak when we go to Felders. We're strongest when we're in this house, perhaps because we lived here so long.

"But tonight, when the bridge went out, we knew that our opportunity had arrived. We knew that Mr. Lyons was not in Felders, and we knew that he would have to take this detour in order to get home.

"We felt very strongly that Mr. Lyons would be unable to pass this house tonight.

"It turned out as we had hoped. Mr. Lyons had trouble with his car, exactly as you did, and he came straight to this house to ask if he might use the telephone. Perhaps he had forgotten us, years ago—twenty-one years is a long time. Perhaps he was confused by the rain, and didn't know exactly where he was.

"He fainted, Mr. Phelps, the instant he recognized us. We have known for a long time that his heart is weak, and we had hoped that seeing us would frighten him to death, but he is still alive. Of course while he is unconscious we can do nothing more. Actually, we're almost impalpable. If you weren't so convinced that we are real you could pass your hand right through us.

"We decided to wait until Mr. Lyons regained consciousness and then to frighten him again. We even discussed beating him to death with one of those non-existent chairs you think you see. You understand, his body would be unmarked; he would really die of terror. We were still discussing what to do when you came along.

"We realized at once how embarrassing it might prove for you if Mr. Lyons' body were found in this house tomorrow and the police learned that you were also in the house. That's why we want you to go."

"Well," Marvin said bluntly, "I don't see how I can get my car away from here. It won't run, and if I walk to Little Rock Falls and get somebody to come back here with me the damage'll be done."

"Yes," the man admitted thoughtfully. "It's a problem."

For several minutes they stood like a tableau, without speaking. Marvin was uneasily wondering: Did these people really have old Lyons tied up in the hallway; were they really planning to murder the man? The big car standing out beside the road belonged to *somebody*. . . .

Marvin coughed discreetly.

"Well, it seems to me, my dear shades," he said, "that unless you are perfectly willing to put me into what might turn out to be a very unpleasant position you'll have to let your vengeance ride, for tonight, anyway."

"There'll never be another opportunity like this," the man pointed out. "That bridge won't go again in ten lifetimes."

"We don't want the young man to suffer though, John."

"It seems to me," Marvin suggested, "as though this revenge idea of yours is overdone, anyway. Murdering Lyons won't really do you any good, you know."

"It's the customary thing when a wrong has been done," the man protested.

"Well, maybe," Marvin argued, and all the time he was wondering whether he were really facing a madman who might be dangerous or whether he were at home dreaming in bed; "but I'm not so sure about that. Hauntings are pretty infrequent, you must admit. I'd say that shows that a lot of ghosts really don't care much about the vengeance angle, despite all you say. I think that if you check on it carefully you'll find that a great many ghosts realize that revenge isn't so much. It's really the thinking about revenge, and the planning it, that's all the fun. Now, for the sake of argument, what good would it do you to put old Lyons away? Why, you'd hardly have any incentive to be ghosts any more. But if you let him go, why, say, any time you wanted to, you could start to scheme up a good scare for him, and begin to calculate how it would work, and time would fly like everything. And on top of all that, if anything happened to me on account of tonight, it would be just too bad for you. *You'd* be haunted, really. It's a bad rule that doesn't work two ways."

The woman looked at her husband. "He's right, John," she said tremulously. "We'd better let Lyons go."

The man nodded. He looked worried.

He spoke very stiffly to Marvin. "I don't agree entirely with all you've said," he pointed out, "but I admit that in order to protect you we'll have to let Lyons go. If you'll give me a hand we'll carry him out and put him in his car."

"Actually, I suppose, I'll be doing all the work."

"Yes," the man agreed, "you will."

THEY went into the little hall, and there, to Marvin's complete astonishment, crumpled on the floor lay old Lyons. Marvin recognized him easily from the newspaper photographs he had seen.

"Hard-looking duffer, isn't he?" Marvin said, trying to stifle a tremor in his voice.

The man nodded without speaking.

Together, Marvin watching the man narrowly, they carried the lax body out through the rain and put it into the big sedan. When the job was done the man stood silently for a moment, looking up into the black invisible clouds.

"It's clearing," he said matter-of-factly. "In an hour it'll be over."

"My wife'll kill me when I get home," Marvin said.

The man made a little clucking sound. "Maybe if you wiped your ignition now your car'd start. It's had a chance to dry a little."

"I'll try it," Marvin said. He opened the hood and wiped the distributor cap and points and around the spark plugs with his handkerchief. He got in the car and stepped on the starter, and the motor caught almost immediately.

The man stepped toward the door, and Marvin doubled his right fist, ready for anything. But then the man stopped.

"Well, I suppose you'd better be going along," he said. "Good night."

"Good night," Marvin said. "And thanks. I'll stop by one of these days and say hello."

"You wouldn't find us in," the man said simply.

By Heaven, he *is* nuts, Marvin thought. "Listen, brother," he said earnestly, "you aren't going to do anything funny to old Lyons after I'm gone?"

The other shook his head. "No. Don't worry."

Marvin let in the clutch and stepped on the gas. He wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible.

In Little Rock Falls he went into an all-night lunch and telephoned the police that there was an unconscious man sitting in a car three or four miles back on the detour. Then he drove home.

EARLY the next morning, on his way to work, he drove back over the detour.

He kept watching for the little house, and when it came in sight he recognized it easily from the contour of the rooms and the spacing of the windows and the little overhang above the door.

But as he came closer he saw that it was deserted. The windows were out, the steps had fallen in. The clapboards were gray and weather-beaten, and naked rafters showed through holes in the roof.

Marvin stopped his car and sat there beside the road for a little while, his face oddly pale. Finally he got out of the car and walked over to the house and went inside.

There was not one single stick of furniture in the rooms. Jagged scars showed in the ceilings where the electric fixtures had been torn away. The house had been wrecked years before by vandals, by neglect, by the merciless wearing of the sun and the rain.

In shape alone were the hallway and living-room as Marvin remembered them. *"There,"* he thought, "is where the bookcases were. The table was *there*—the davenport *there.*"

Suddenly he stooped, and stared at the dusty boards and underfoot.

On the naked floor lay the butt of a cigarette. And, a half-dozen feet away, lay another cigarette that had not been smoked—that had not even been lighted!

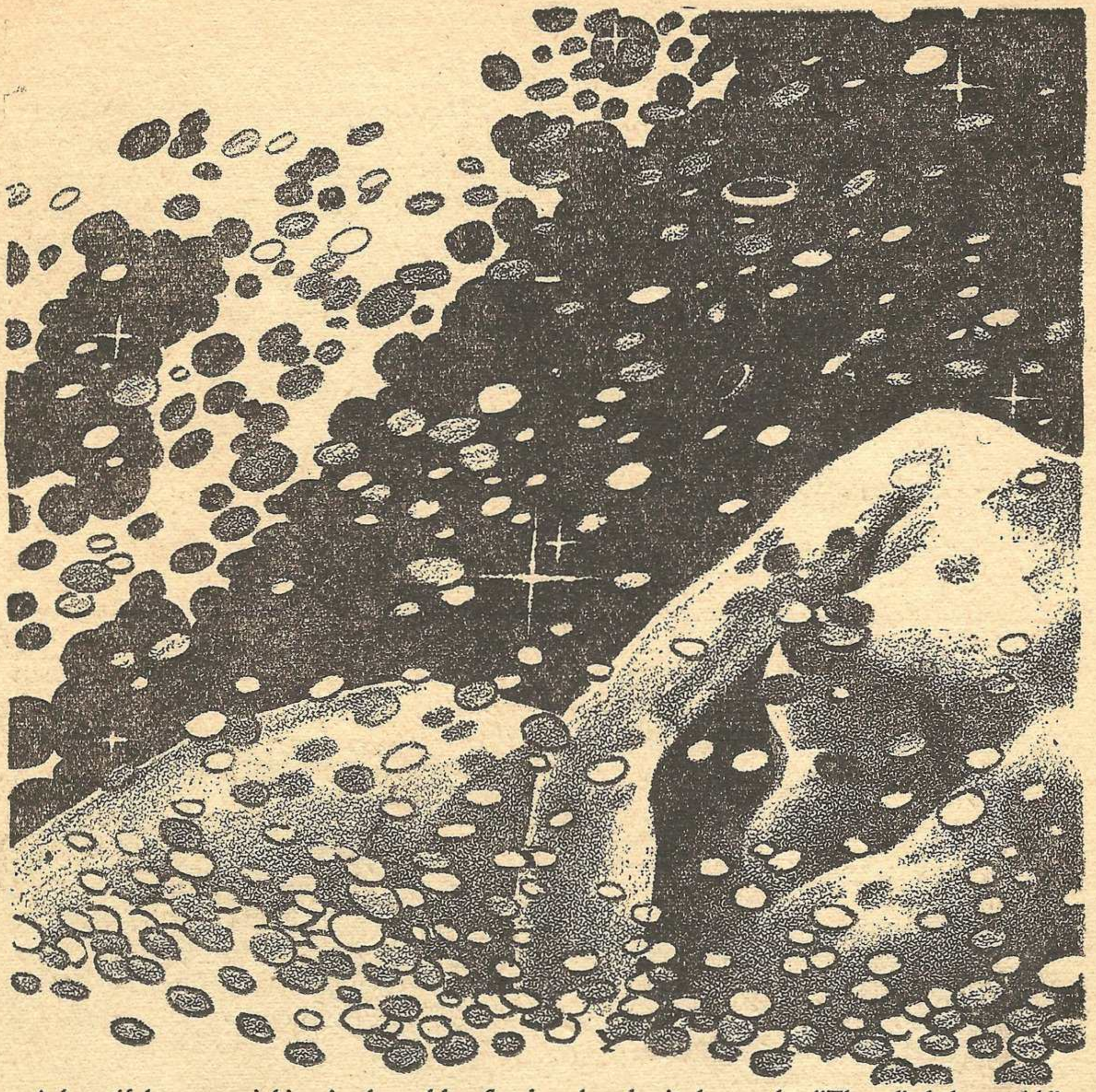
Marvin turned around blindly, and, like an automaton, walked out of that house.

Three days later he read in the newspapers that Lieutenant-Governor Lyons was dead. The Lieutenant-Governor had collapsed, the item continued, while driving his own car home from the state capital the night the Felders bridge was washed out. The death was attributed to heart disease. . . .

After all, Lyons was not a young man.

So Marvin Phelps knew that, even though his considerate ghostly hosts had voluntarily relinquished their vengeance, blind, impartial nature had meted out justice. And, in a strange way, he felt glad that that was so, glad that Grace and John Reed had left to Fate the punishment they had planned to impose with their own ghostly hands. . . .





A beautiful woman sinking in the golden flood and under it the words: "Thus died the world."

Lords of the Ice

By DAVID H. KELLER

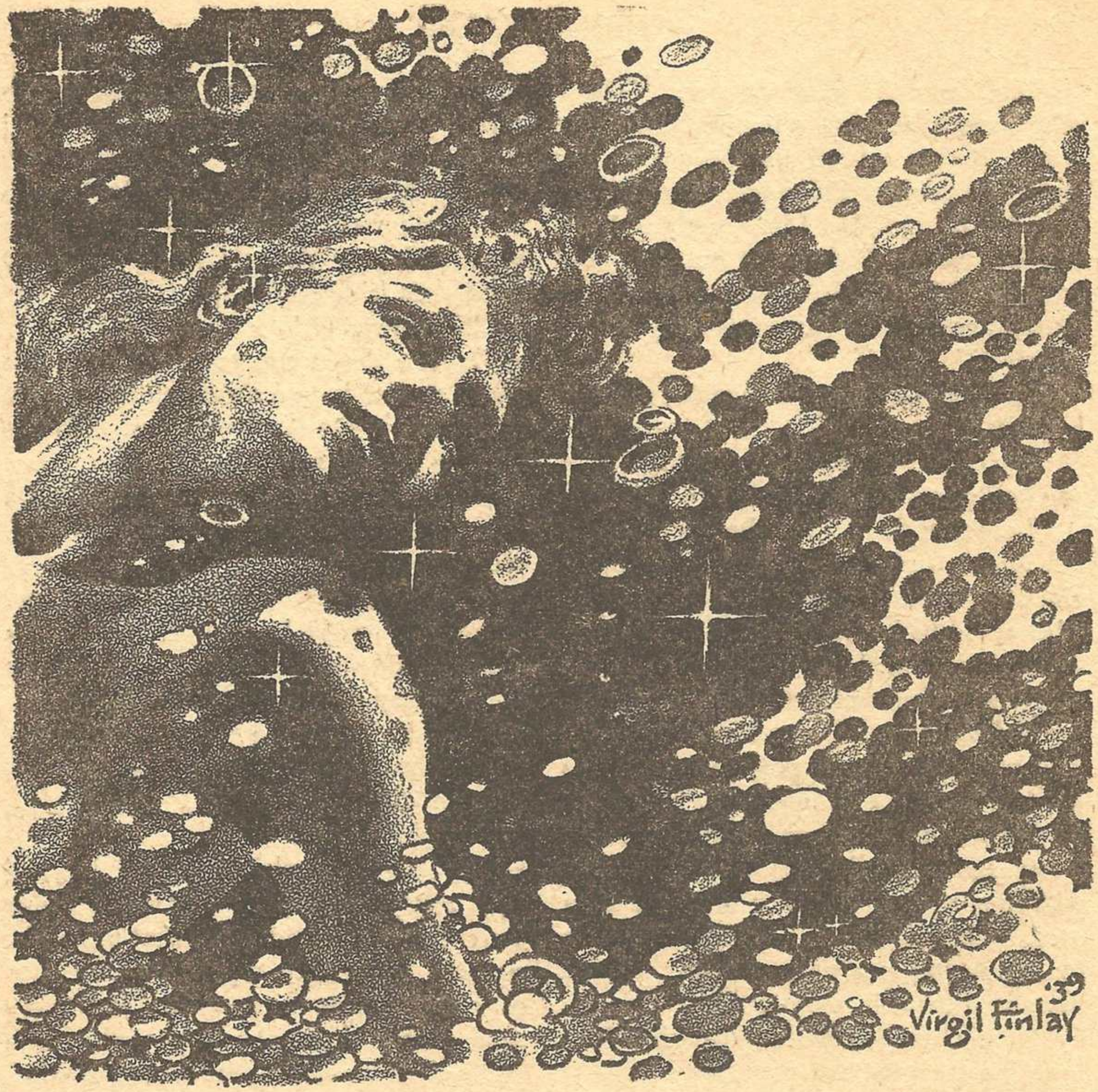
A strange and imaginative tale of the world gone mad with war-lust, of the oceans rising in their beds to engulf the globe, and a super-civilization in the Antarctic

1. Raw Material

"WHAT we need," repeated the Dictator, "is more raw material."

Having said that for the third time, there was no danger that any of his audience could fail to understand just what he meant. But evidently he thought it necessary to explain.

"We have men by the millions for



labor; we have scientists and inventors; in our country there are hundreds of large factories built to turn out every possible kind of material needed in peace—or in war. But our laborers are idle and starving, our scientists starting in to dream, and our factories are working about two days a week. I ask you, why? Simply because we have not the raw material to feed the factories and keep our inventors and laborers busy.

"There is a demand for iron, copper, oil, coal, all kinds of metals. If we had gold and silver we could buy, but we have nothing except credit and paper money, and one is as useless as the other. Our inventors have produced synthetic products till we are all sick of seeing, using and eating them. But they cannot make iron, steel, copper, coal; and without these there can be no war till the time comes when our enemies are ready to wipe us out.

"I have sent for you today. I have called three men to my home, not to my office. One is the rich man of our land, the other owns most of the manufactories, and the third is a scientist. And I ask you. I command you! Give the land raw material. Shambert, can you buy it from other nations?"

"No!" was the sharp answer. "Those who have it will not sell; they know our need. If they did sell, how would we pay for it? In credits? Exchange? Our money? You call me rich, but I have nothing I can buy iron with. Perhaps an old ship now and then." He laughed rather sadly. "Can I exchange my farms for copper, my houses for steel?"

The Dictator turned suddenly to the scientist.

"Harlkin! Where is your science? Can you find or make these things?"

"I can find them," was the answer, "but not in our land. My men have examined almost every square foot of our land, and what could be found has been found. As for making them! Listen to me. I can take wood fiber and make silk, but I cannot make iron with wood or corn-stalks. You talk of synthetic preparations. It is a wonderful field of invention, but so far no one can make iron, or coal, or crude oil. Years ago we had some of these things within our land, but they have all been used. They are gone. They were made by nature millions of years ago, and we have used them in a century."

"So you can give nothing to Schmidt to keep his factories and men busy?"

"Nothing."

"But I must have battleships, guns, tanks, railroads, airplanes, submarines, ammunition. No matter how many I have I cannot have too many of these things. We have six million men to put in the army. Can they fight with their hands? Harlkin, you say that you know where these things are, and that they are in another country. Where?"

"In the Antarctic. The South Pole is covered with ice from six feet to two miles thick. Under that ice is the richest field of raw material the world has ever dreamed of—iron, copper, coal, all the precious metals. It is larger than Europe, larger than America. One can only guess how many millions of tons of metal lie useless under the ice cap. And under the metal there is oil, an ocean of blackness. If our country had even a tenth of that wealth we would run our factories eight days a week and sixty weeks a year. But what good does it do us?"

"Who owns it?"

"Half a dozen countries. A man flies above part of it, and claims all he sees for his country. No one lives there. No one can, no one ever will."

"Then any nation who settled it, sent a thousand, ten thousand colonists there, could claim it?"

"No doubt. The other nations would laugh. It would be a joke. And soon there would be ten thousand dead men there instead of ten thousand colonists."

Schmidt, the practical man, the owner of many factories, suddenly woke from his sleep of despair.

"I WAS in Louisiana once," he said softly, "and there is a lot of sulfur there, but some hundreds of feet under the surface. First they dug it out and then they drove large pipes down, two pipes near each other. Down one pipe they pumped steam and up the other pipe they pumped the boiling water with the melted sulfur. They turned this melted sulfur into large wooden frames, and when the water evaporated nothing was left but blocks of pure sulfur, one hundred feet long, thirty feet high. It was beautiful stuff and so easy to get. Would it not be wonderful if you could drive pipes through the ice cap, melt the metal and pump it up? Harlkin says that there is oil there, and that means power and heat. With power work can be done; with heat men can live even near the South Pole. How about it, Harlkin?"

"I wonder. Some years ago my men made a tunnel excavator. Few saw it, because the tunnels we made with it were for

military purposes. It worked on a rotary principle, and on some days we completed five hundred feet of tunnel, smooth sides and perfectly rounded. We could drive it through ice as easily as through rock, and I presume that if we set it on end it would go down as far as we wanted it to. If you want to know just what is under that ice cap, this tunnel-maker could tell you. As for applying the sulfur-mining principle to iron, I guess it could be done. No doubt all the iron was fluid at one time, and is yet near the center of the earth."

"I know about that tunnel machine," commented the Dictator. "I saw it work. It is very clever. I thought once of using it to bore a tunnel under the sea to the land of one of our friendly neighbors. But the time was not ripe for such adventures. Some day we may do it. How heavy is such a machine? Could it be taken apart and carried in submarines? Show me a map of this country of ice!"

A map could not be found, but instead a large globe of the world, used as an ornament in his library, was studied.

"A good joke!" he laughed. "See, my friends. Here England rules and here France and here the United States. Between them they have eaten up this continent of ice; yet no one lives there. We could go down there, and no one would know the difference, till it was too late to remonstrate. Harlkin, prepare to take your tunnel-excavator apart and place the pieces in as many naval submarines as you need. Bore a tunnel into the ice and through the rock.

"Take your metal experts with you. Make a survey of what you find. For a while do not try for depth, but simply go miles into one of those mountains you tell me about. And if you find gold, leave the machine there and send me the golden metal back as fast as you can. I will consult at once with my officers and we will pick the men who will go on this modern argosy. No one must know of this. Afterward we will tell the world, but not yet."

2. Gold Is King

THREE Europeans came across the Atlantic Ocean to New York. Establishing a small office in their hotel rooms, they sent for a few hard-headed business men. To these they presented their letters of introduction. Shambert did the talking for the trans-Atlantic group.

"We have come to the United States to buy some steel, some copper, and a few other forms of raw material. I understand that you gentlemen are interested in marketing these things. Will you sell us some?"

"How much are you spending? asked Paul Parker.

"Our first order will be for one million tons. If this is satisfactory we will want a hundred times that amount."

"That is a fairly large order, but we could handle it. We could have it at the seaboard as fast as you could arrange to ship it. How are you going to pay us?"

"That is the big thing," commented another business man. "We know your country. In fact this knowledge cost us a lot of money. We refuse to take goods in exchange. We have had experience in loaning you the cash so you could buy from us and then reneg on the loan. If we sell you anything from a collar button up we want cash on delivery. We want the cash before we even will let you put the stuff on your ships. I do not know how Parker feels, but I think that he will agree with me."

Shambert smiled.

"What do you want? Gold?"

"Now you are talking!" replied Parker. "You give us the order, sign it, give us the gold, and the iron and copper and whatever you want is yours. But no credits, no exchange, no loans. You might pick up

some stuff here and there in America on some other terms, but when it comes to anything big like what you mention, a million tons of mixed metals, it just has to be paid for. We have the stuff, we want to sell it, but it has to be paid for."

"We expected you to say that," said Shambert, and he was still smiling, "so we brought over with us fifty millions in gold and have certificates of deposit in the Bank of England for three hundred million more, and if you name a bank here in New York we will place the entire amount there subject to your bills. What we buy from you from now on will be paid for in gold. I think that our total purchases will run into three or four billion, but whatever it is, we will pay for it, in gold."

"That is a lot of gold," said Parker. "You people must have found a mine. When some of our senators hear about this they will be wondering why you have not paid your debts. They may even ask us why we were willing to sell to you when you have not paid for the last order of copper we sold you. But if what you say is true we will take your order. But first we will go to the banks and check up on your statement.

"It is good news for us if what you say is true. I do not think that it will take many minutes for the bankers to tell us all about it."

The meeting adjourned.

To the astonishment of Parker and his business associates, everything told them by the European visitors was absolutely true. The prospective customers actually had three hundred and fifty millions in gold to spend, and seemed to be perfectly willing to spend it. There seemed to be no reason why they should not have anything they wanted, so long as they were willing to pay for it.

After that it was only a question of details. So many million tons of iron, so much steel, so much copper, aluminum, bronze, coal. Even wool, cotton and foodstuffs were included in the order. When the list was completed and arrangements made for distributing it among the producers in the United States, it was easy to see that at least in some parts of the nation there would be a few years of prosperity.

Ocean transportation prospered. Every kind of vessel that could float, travel and carry was prepared for the shuttle voyages to Europe. Railroads prepared for a great increase in freightage. Men by the hundreds of thousands were put to work.

Shambert kept on smiling. His last words to Parker were:

"I will be back in six months with another three hundred million dollar order. You people have a lot of raw material we need. And you ned not worry about the money."

To the Dictator he sent a single message, and it was not in code. It read, *"Gold is king!"*

3. The Mine

A REMARKABLE thing had happened. The plan of sending submarines to the Antarctic had gone ahead according to the details arranged at the first meeting of the Dictator and his advisers. Six of the largest submarines had been prepared for the long voyage. Two tankers were filled with fuel oil, and two freighters had been equipped with every form of supplies. The fleet had sailed without the slightest publicity.

They had arrived without accident in the summertime, if there is any summertime around the South Pole. After some cruising they found what they were hunting for, an isolated harbor, a shelving beach surrounded by lofty ice-capped mountains. The supplies had been landed, a very small camp built, and the tunnel-machine placed in position against the base of the mountain. After a month of intensive work it was started on its bur-

rowing journey into the heart of the mountain.

An endless chain of carriers removed the fine powder from the hole as far as the relentless machine chewed and ground and bored its way into the rock. Hour after hour it worked its way, and hour after hour chemists and metallurgists studied the dust. For a week, two weeks, there was nothing but granite. Suddenly it happened. They had expected to find coal, iron, copper, but instead they found gold.

Not gold ore, but solid gold.

It looked like a gigantic joke of Mother Nature.

Millions of years before, she had scattered the precious yellow metal in different parts of the earth to arouse the cupidity and longings of the human race. But in one place she had kept most of her wealth. Hidden beneath millions of tons of rock and ice she had banked a million times more gold than all the men of all the ages had ever seen, gold that assayed almost 95 percent pure. Without warning the yellow dust came out in the endless conveyers, and when the metallurgists saw it they gasped with astonishment. They doubted their own findings.

They had the machine slowed to a foot a day. Even then they were unable to handle the yellow wealth. At last they made crude machinery to melt the metal and form it into bricks, and in three weeks' time they had the two ships and the six submarines loaded and ready for the return voyage. And they had gone only fifty feet into the lode. No one knew how much gold there was left; perhaps no one cared.

Harlkin had accompanied the expedition. He decided to stay. He was having the thrill of his life. The fact that he had saved his country did not excite him, and the fact that iron, copper or any of the baser metals had not been found did not depress him. He knew that with unlimited gold the Dictator could buy everything the country needed. What was the use of mining and smelting and shipping iron from one end of the world to the other when these things could be bought for gold, and when there was more gold in sight than had ever been heard or dreamed of?

And he had found the gold!

Of course it was a pure accident. A hundred yards to the right or to the left and it would have remained untouched for another million years. It was more than wonderful, it was miraculous. There was only one thing to worry him.

There was too much gold!

That might lower its value, force every nation to adopt some other kind of money.

The submarines made one more trip, loaded again with thousands of yellow bricks. And then the short summer was over. It was thought best to close the little city. But Harlkin decided to stay. He asked three men to stay with him. He explained the reason to them:

"We can live very comfortably inside the tunnel. It will be warm, and fairly dry. There is much work to be done, and I want to be alone to think this matter out. The laboratory can be set up in the tunnel and we can go ahead with our scientific work. The thing that still disturbs me is the size of this gold lode. Is it possible that it is not gold? If it is really gold—and every known test says it is—how much more is there? I think we should make a few little lateral tunnels. We can do that by hand.

"Wealth has never meant anything to me, but now that we have an unlimited supply of what the human race calls richness, I do not want to leave it. I think that someone should stay here till next summer. Think of what would happen if everyone left and when the ships came back they could not find the place? A landslide could easily change the entire

topography of the region. This gold has been buried for a million million years. What if it should be buried for another million years?"

The three men looked at each other and then at their leader.

Finally one man, a white-haired miner, who had hunted for gold all over the world, uttered what was in the minds of all:

"If we are in the tunnel, and there is a landslide, and the gold is buried forever, we will certainly have a rich place to sleep through eternity. I do not know how the other feels, but for myself I want to stay. I am having the time of my life. I have helped find a real mine. Once I found a deposit that gave the owners thirty million before it was worked out, but here we could take that much out in one day by trying to. We can take out more than we can care for. Some day this adventure will be written up, and then people will know that John Johnson finally struck real paying ore."

HARLKIN stayed, and John Johnson, William Smathers and Richard Young stayed with him. The four men were not entirely isolated. They had a radio with which they could communicate with the world if they wanted to, but they did not want to. The world was not to know what had happened or what would happen in that tunnel.

Meanwhile the factories in the Dictator's country were working day and night. Everyone was busy. Even the women had been put to work. Food, clothing, supplies of every kind were beginning to arrive on a thousand ships. Not only the United States but every other country that had raw materials to sell found a cash customer. It looked like an era of world prosperity.

The thinkers in the rest of the world were beginning to worry, but the business men were happy. They had a market at last. Every dollar of the gold was turned over again and again. People made money and spent it. The more they made the more willing they were to spend it. Hoarding ceased. Saving became unfashionable. Gambling in stocks once more became a popular sport.

In the Dictator's country every preparation pointed toward another World War. But nobody cared and few worried. They had enough to wear, more than enough to eat, and the future was a long way ahead.

Another year passed. As soon as the summer started and the ice broke, more ships appeared in the harbor. Three trips were made that year. The tunnel was made three hundred feet longer and still went into solid gold. That fall the land of the Dictator paid its international debts. It owed no one, joined the League of Nations and asked for and received absolute equality with the rulers of the world.

Harlkin decided to stay through a second winter. This time he asked John Johnson to stay with him. The big reason this time was simply that he was afraid to return to civilization.

Primarily he was a scientist.

He was afraid of what would happen when the crash came. All the news from his home country told him that such a debacle was likely to occur at any time. It was not war he feared, but the destruction of all former monetary standards. What would happen when the world found that gold was worthless?

"The trouble with me," he explained to John Johnson, "is that I have too much imagination."

4. Another Tunnel

THE two men had spent one month of rather peaceful solitude. They had a definite routine of work, reading, exercise and sleep.

John Johnson had a rather interesting

hobby. He was making things out of gold.

"I got the idea from a book," he explained to the scientist. "It was an imaginative book written about a country called Utopia where gold was so common they used it instead of any other metal. So I am going to see how many things I can make out of the stuff. Did you ever read the *Conquest of Peru,* by Prescott? The Mexicans offered to fill a room with gold if the Spaniards would release their king. That has always been my idea, to have a golden room. All the furniture of gold, not plated stuff, but solid. Seems as though a man should sleep easier in a golden bedstead. It's a pity the metal is so soft that you cannot cook in it, but I am going to make a complete set of dishes, and a golden calf. Think of that! The Jews in the desert made one, but it took all the gold they had to make it. Perhaps I will make a golden woman. How do you like that idea?"

"That is better," laughed Harlkin. "Gold and women have a great deal in common. They have been associated for thousands of years. Rome was lost once because a woman wanted the golden bracelets the enemy wore. She sent word she would open the gate if they gave her what they had on their arms; so they double-crossed her and buried her crushed body under a pile of shields. Why not make a woman sinking in a quicksand of gold, her arms in the air and an agonized smile on her face, buried in the riches she gave her soul for? That shows not only women but the entire world. Think of that, Johnson! Not a nation that sold a pound of copper or iron but knew the Dictator was going to turn it into instruments for their ultimate destruction, but they all wanted the gold. They sold their future life for gold, and what did they do with it when they had it? Put it into vaults, built larger, stronger, deeper vaults to put more gold in. And there is so much here that some day all their gold will be worthless. Iron will rule, not gold. Explosives, chemicals will beat the human race to bleeding, suffocating pulp amid their useless gold. The Dictator knows humanity and how to destroy it. But he made one mistake. He thinks that in the end his country will be a paradise and the rest of the world a shambles, but he is wrong. Our country will go down to ruin with the rest of the nations. So make your beautiful woman sinking in the golden flood and under it place the words: *'Thus died the world.'*"

Johnson started his piece of golden statuary in a rather silent but enthusiastic manner. He knew that he was more of a miner than an artist. He was not sure just how a woman would look sinking into a quicksand of gold, but he was a rather stubborn personality and hated to admit that he had an idea that he could not carry to completion. On the third day of his work he was interrupted by Harlkin.

"Something is happening above us!" declared the scientist. "I have noticed that you are a little deaf, so perhaps you have not noticed it. Something or somebody is boring into the rock right above one of our empty rooms. I noticed it first as a vibration when I placed the palm of my hand against the wall. Now I can hear the grinding noise, first with my stethoscope, but now it is so loud that I can hear it anywhere in the chamber. I wish you would come in with me and tell me what you think of it."

Johnson went into the room with him. Even with the handicap of his deafness he could hear the grinding vibrations. He climbed up on some empty boxes and placed his hands on the curving ceiling of the tunnel. He was not satisfied, but worked his way over to one side. At last he said:

"I think I have it. Someone is boring a tunnel sidewise into ours. I think they

are still going through the rock, because the vibrations are too strong to be produced by passing through the solid gold. It seems to me that the instrument they are using must be at least ten feet in diameter, and if such a thing were possible, it works easier than our tunnel-borer."

"Do you think that it is a machine worked by human beings, or is it some kind of a worm?"

"A worm?" asked the astonished miner.

"Yes. I read a story once which told of a giant earthworm making a hole in a New England farm. It was just like a little worm, only it had a head thirty feet in diameter, and no one knew how long it was because the only man who saw it was swallowed before he could tell just what he did see. Of course it was a science-fiction story and perhaps had more fiction than science in it. But remember this: we are on the edge of the unknown! Back of us is a continent that has never been really explored. Millions of years ago there were large insects. Could they have lived on here under the ice? But whatever it is, there is no doubt that it is headed our way. A few days more will tell the story."

"Have we any guns?"

"I think so, but I don't think we will use them. If it is a worm it would be useless. If some other men are back of the machine I think it would be also useless to try and fight it out with them. The best thing is to wait and see what is going to happen."

5. The Strangers

THERE followed two days of waiting. At the end of the first day the vibrations became softer.

"They have struck the gold," explained Johnson. "Now they will eat their way through in a little while."

"You think that it is a machine operated by men?"

"Yes. I never have taken that worm idea of yours seriously."

"Time will tell," sighed the scientist.

And it did. At the end of the second day, the wall of the tunnel caved in, and out of the opening came, not a worm, but the polished metal head of a long, slowly revolving cylinder which kept on till it bit into the opposite wall of the golden tunnel and then once again kept on boring until it had completely disappeared.

The two men watched it.

In less than ten minutes there was nothing to show except the two holes, eight feet in diameter, perfectly round, and a heap of pulverized yellow metal.

"A machine without men!" cried Johnson.

"That is impossible," retorted Harlkin. "Every machine, no matter how complicated, has to have the human mind behind it. Some form of intelligence made this machine, started it to move, and directed it this way. Our finding the gold may have been an accident, but when one tunnel absolutely cuts through another tunnel, that means engineering skill of the highest type. We can do one of two things: Go into that new tunnel and find the brains back of it, or wait for that intelligence to show itself."

"You will not have long to wait," spoke a clear, almost musical voice, as out of the tunnel walked two men.

Harlkin shook his head as though to clear his emotions, and then said quietly:

"Perhaps we had better introduce ourselves."

"That is not necessary. We know who you are. You are Harlkin, the celebrated scientist, and the man with you is called John Johnson. My name is Alhazen and my companion is Ebn Junis. We are from the land of the ice, where we are called lords. We have been talking about you, and when we found that Johnson was going to build a symbolic statue of the effect

of gold on humanity we decided that it was time to come and see you."

"You knew we were here?" asked Harlkin, in astonishment.

"Of course. How do you suppose you would have come here and found the gold had it not been for us? Suppose we go and sit down in your rooms and let me explain the thing to you."

THE scientist led the way, the two strangers following, very much at their ease. They were tall men, rather thin, dark, with clean-cut, rather aristocratic faces. Except for their color they would have passed for members of the English nobility. Once seated, Alhazen began his promised explanation.

"Though we are far removed from what you think is civilization, we have never lost our interest in our fellow men. Occasionally we direct their actions, by our ability to use tele-psychology. We send ideas through the ether to their brains and they think that these ideas are their own inventions. Most of the time we let men go on their blind, bloody, blundering course, but occasionally we interfere. We have noticed you in past years, and many of your ideas, especially those of service to your fellow men, were given you by our leaders. We suggested to you that raw material could be found in this isolated part of the world.

"After you started, my friend, Ebn Junis thought it would be interesting to have you find gold, instead of iron or copper or coal. Perhaps I should let him tell you about that."

The other stranger took up the conversation.

"Gold has always been the curse of the race. They never had enough for everyone. The idea came to me that if there were enough gold given to the world things might be a little better; so I suggested to the other lords that we give you all you wanted. We knew about this underground field of the yellow metal, just as we know everything else of interest concerning our country. They agreed with me, so we directed you here. We showed you the very place to land and the exact spot to start your tunnel."

The scientist looked at him in amazement.

"Do you mean to tell me that it was not luck?"

"There is no such thing in science. You found the gold because you were constantly working in an automatic manner under our control. The gold was found. You knew and your Dictator knew that there was enough gold here to make everyone comfortable, so long as gold remained the standard of world finance. He used that gold to prepare for another war. No doubt he thinks that with the nations conquered he can take back the gold he has given them and then his nation will be the only one with gold. And what will he have? So many tons of a metal. That is all. The human race will be no better. His country will be no better.

"But we allowed you to have the gold, just to see what you would do with it. When Johnson and you worked out the idea of making a golden image showing the curse to the world from the yellow metal we decided that you were two men who were worth cultivating. At least we might make you our emissaries to the outside world."

"Allow me to interrupt you," apologized the scientist, "but all you say is so very much out of the ordinary that I just have to ask you some questions. Who are you? Where do you live? How long have you lived there? Where did you come from?"

"All very proper questions," answered Alhazen. "To answer very briefly: we are Moors from Spain, driven from Cordova many centuries ago. With us came a few Jews, who decided to cast their lot with us. Our dwelling-place is two hundred miles

from here, built on a tableland of solid rock, many miles wide. We have lived there since the Spaniards conquered our people in Spain. Much of our wisdom is inherited from our Cordovan ancestors. To that we have added, because for centuries we have had nothing to do except study.

"If you will come and live with us for a few weeks or months you will learn more about our life and work. Of course, you do not have to accept the invitation unless you wish to. You will not be coerced. But tell me one thing: If there was peace in your country, if every man and every nation tried to help his neighbor instead of killing them, would there be enough food, clothing, fuel, necessities of life to make all happy?"

"I believe so," replied the scientist, "but so many people want more than the necessities of life and, if they can get them, the luxuries of existence, by robbing and killing, then that is what they have done and always will do."

"You are not rich?"

"No. I have been so busy trying to learn the secrets of the universe that I have had no time to play in the stock markets."

"And your friend, John Johnson, is he rich?"

"I do not think so. He told me the other day that his great desire in life was to find gold, but after he found a new field he lost interest in it. He has found more gold and has less money than any other man I know of."

"We know all that," commented Ebn Junis. "We knew about Johnson when we suggested to you that he, and he alone, spend the winter with you. Now suppose you come with us, and be our guests for a little while."

6. *The Ice City*

"IT TOOK us several days to bore the tunnel," commented Alhazen, "but the return trip will only take a little over an hour. Back of our tunneling-machine we traveled in a small car which we left inside the tunnel. If you will come with us, we will start at once. Our machine is very similar to yours except that we do not have to get rid of the powdered rock. We simply drive it into the walls of the bore as we go ahead. This makes a very dense wall, and avoids any danger from seepage of oil or water. Perhaps this idea has occurred to you, Harlkin?"

"Yes, but I never could work out the question of power."

"Power never bothers us. Since we learned to split the atom we have all the power we need for any work. But let us start. You need not worry about your personal belongings. Everything you need will be provided for, and what you leave here will be perfectly safe."

Ten minutes later the four men were in a cylindrical car, exactly fitting the tunnel and twenty feet long. Alhazen touched a button and the car moved. It was difficult to estimate its speed, but in what seemed to be a very short time another button was pressed and the car stopped.

"We take an elevator from here," explained Alhazen. "At present we are about two miles under our city. Perhaps you have noticed the pressure on your ears. Please step this way, and enter this little car. These elevators are a very necessary part of our life. Living as we do, high in the air, our tunnel systems are absolute necessities."

In five minutes more the four men walked out of the elevator car into a large room.

"We will leave you here," said Alhazen. "You will be furnished a guide to your rooms. Once there, you will be provided for in every way. Your guide will remain with you and you will be permitted to visit all parts of our small city. I recommend especially our library and science buildings. Later on you might be interested in visit-

ing our temple, where we have a very large collection of gods. I am especially anxious to learn what you think of our food. It is largely synthetic, but we find it stimulating and it certainly has kept us alive. When we first came here the climate was milder, but as the centuries passed we had more and more trouble with our food supply and finally were forced to manufacture it. In your rooms you will find clothing, such as we wear. With us clothing is partly a necessity but in the city wholly ornamental, as we live constantly in a temperature of 72 degrees."

The two men left, and a third man walked over to the Europeans. He said, rather quietly:

"My name is Hiram. I am to take care of you while you are with us. Will you please follow me to your rooms?"

The three walked out of the building into a wide street, illumined with a clear, steady light. Flowers and trees were not only growing in parks but were in full bloom.

The air was warm. There seemed to be no sky, simply an opolescent haze above them.

"I notice," said Harlkin, "that you speak our language."

"A few of us speak all languages," replied Hiram. "We had to learn them all to benefit by the radio. Our common language is Arabic, but I know a dozen languages. A few of the lords of the ice who have trained themselves for years do not have to talk. They simply exchange thoughts silently. I am working on that, but so far am not an expert. No doubt Lord Alhazen told you of our use of telepsychology. That is most interesting, but it is never practised here, because everyone is equal and free to act as he wishes. We have rank, but it is based only on intelligence. Anyone can become a lord who is mentally capable."

They walked down the street. Harlkin commented on its cleanliness, the absence of people, and especially the quiet.

"It certainly seems deserted," agreed Johnson.

"Everyone is resting," explained Hiram. "There is no night here, no periods of daylight or darkness. We simply accustom ourselves to rest at regular intervals. Those who do not care to sleep simply relax completely. I suppose that explains the total absence of what you people call nervousness. We have nothing to worry us, are never fatigued, and the work we do is either mental or the mechanical supervision of machinery that is almost human in its ability to do complicated work. There are some pieces of city machinery that have run for ten years with practically no attention. Here is the little building which will be your home. I am sure you will find it convenient and comfortable in every way. You have radio service with the world; so you will not be lonely because of lack of news from your home. I will show you to your rooms and call for you later on, in what you call morning."

THE two Europeans walked through the one-story house. It was John Johnson who at last broke the silence.

"Everything is made of gold, Mr. Harlkin. Furniture and even the floors. What do you think of it all?"

"Even in my wildest dreams I never imagined such a city in such a place possible. Two miles above sea level and perhaps two miles under the ice cap. There must be a roof to the city. How did they ever build it? It is wonderful, Johnson, the most wonderful thing I ever saw. Their ancestors were from Cordova. Do you know anything about that city?"

"Not that I know of. Now I remember that Hiram said there was some kind of telephone here. He told me that if I wanted to know anything I should ask for the information over the phone. He said

that it was not like our phones, but a red circle in the wall of the living-room. I guess we had better try it out before going to sleep. Here it is. I suppose you just stand or sit in front of the red circle and talk to it. At least I will try it."

RATHER slowly he asked:

"What kind of weather is there in Berlin?"

From the circle came the reply.

"Six inches of snow fell last night. Today the temperature is 31, and the sun is shining."

"What kind of a city was Cordova when it was occupied by the Moors?"

"It was a city of two hundred thousand houses and a million population. Its longest street was ten miles long and paved and lighted. The houses were air-conditioned, cool in summer and comfortable in winter. The furniture of the rich was made of sandal and citron wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Every house was piped with hot and cold water. The city library was so large that the index filled forty volumes. There were hospitals and universities. At one time it was the center of world education. Medicine, astronomy, mathematics, chemistry and all the arts and sciences were studied. When the Moors left Spain and the Jews were driven out, Spain lost something it has never been able to regain."

Harlkin turned to Johnson.

"That helps us to understand," he commented. "That was the old Cordova. Some of those Moors left Spain, and determined to go as far away from civilization as they could. They either came here deliberately or were carried here by storms. Alhazen said that the climate was milder centuries ago. It must have been, because otherwise they never could have built a city like this—not when the wind was blowing sixty miles an hour and the temperature fifty below zero most of the time. They must have known a change was coming, and so they built that dome over the city. How they did it I do not know. What they have for a lighting-system I do not know. Some form of electricity, no doubt. And they have lived here, peacefully, quietly, comfortably, learning more every year, using their knowledge to better their lives. Eight hundred years without war. Think of that! Any nation could become great if it were able to live in peace that long. They must have laughed at us, Johnson, when we were passing through the Reformation, the Thirty Years' War, the Inquisition, the conquest of America, the Napoleonic wars, the famines, pestilences, bloodshed that have darkened the face of the world century after century. They have lived in isolation but it has been splendid, magnificent. We will spend the winter here. I must learn all I can of this city and its people."

"Perhaps," sighed Johnson, "one of them will tell me how they locate their gold mines."

Finally the two men, in spite of their excitement, went to sleep.

7. *The Temple*

FOR the next week Halkin lived in a period of intense interested excitement. In Europe he had been considered one of the greatest scientists of all ages. In the White City he realized that all his life he had been a child playing with toys and groping in the dark, in comparison with the men he now came in contact with. They knew how to do so many things that he had only thought of doing but had never even started to learn to do.

For example, heatless light, almost frictionless machinery, production of electricity so that 95 percent of the power was utilized instead of less than 5 percent. What interested him most was their ability to concentrate. They could turn their intelligence on one problem and think of

nothing else for five years, or ten, until they secured the proper answer, the correct explanation, the complete solution. During this time there was a total absence of anxiety, and a beautiful freedom from worry of any kind. The routine problems of civilization had all been solved.

Hiram tried to explain it to him.

"I am not particularly interested in religion," he said in his usual quiet, musical voice, "but perhaps this will tell you something that may interest you. For many centuries the human race has worried over the matter of gods. Some races had thousands and other races had only one, but no matter how many or how few they had they were never sure they were right; so they compensated for this inability to be sure by trying to make other people think the way they did. That is one of the reasons our ancestors had to leave Cordova. One of the primary decisions of the emigrants to this land was that everyone should be allowed to believe in any god he wished; there was to be free instruction but no coercion as far as religion was concerned.

"Centuries ago we started to make images of all the gods we knew or ever heard of. Because we had so much gold and because it could be so easily handled we made these statues of that metal. Our histories were consulted, and from every nation all over the known world we recalled the memories of their gods, and made them as we remembered them. Always there are a few young men who do nothing but make new gods. No matter how many we have, there are always more to make; because even in this age of science the imaginations of men run wild when it comes to religion.

"Here is the temple. We will walk inside and you can see for yourself. There are gods here that are animals, and half-animals, images of men and women beautiful and also with every conceivable form of monstrous physical deformaties. In one wing of the building there are symbolic gods of the wind, of the waterfalls, of rocks, trees and flowers. One entire section is devoted to the special gods of medicine, of the household, of hunting and the stars.

"You can study these images in any way you want; from the viewpoint of anthropology, philosophy, psychology, and even psychiatry. Any of our young men and women can come here, select a god and worship it for the rest of their lives."

"What has the result of this freedom been?" asked the scientist.

"Rather interesting. We know more about religion and practise less of it as an avocation than any people since history was written. We have no services and no priests. And yet our morals are rather fine compared with the races you know. Now and then a young man or woman deliberately forgets his obligations to himself and our city, and then we feel that he is sick. We try to restore them to mental health and if we fail they are simply given their freedom. They leave the city and they die."

The scientist spent two entire days wandering through the long rows of gods and goddesses. Then he asked Hiram:

"Where is John Johnson?"

"He has been down in the tunnels with the metallurgists. They are showing him how to find the various deposits of metals. He says that after he has learned how to do this he wants to go ahead and make his image of a woman sinking in a quicksand of gold. He says that it is symbolic of a new god the Europeans are worshipping and he wants to add it to our collection. He seems very happy and contented. Now that you are through with the temple, would you like to see our library, or our collection of model machinery? Or would you care to learn about our use of electricity or the things we make out of crude oil? Or how about studying a few days with the men who have learned to split the atom?"

"I want to talk some matters over with Alhazen," said Harlkin. "Is he a busy man?"

"No. At present he is working on a very interesting problem. He thinks that flowers and plants have a language and he is trying to learn it. Simply a pastime with him, and I do not believe that he will object to being interrupted. I will take you to his garden. He spends hours there with his eyes shut. He thinks that he can hear better that way."

They found the Moor in his garden laboratory surrounded by irises, peonies, pansies, bleeding-hearts and oriental poppies. He seemed very glad to see his visitors.

8. *Serious News*

"I AM glad you have come to see me," said Alhazen. "I have most interesting news for you, from the rest of the world."

"What is it?"

"When your Dictator started in to use his gold, all of the other countries were rather interested, not only in selling him raw products, but also in finding out where he was getting the gold from. I suppose there were some who even thought that he had learned the secret of the alchemists and was making it. But someone who knew the real facts decided to commercialize it. He loved the idea of personal wealth more than he loved his country; so he traveled here and there and sold the secret, and each nation buying it thought it was the only one in the secret. As a consequence, when the winter ends and the ice breaks at the beginning of our short summer your little harbor will look like a filled sardine can. I know that eight nations are preparing to send warships, freighters, colonists and troops to your gold mine. Perhaps the Dictator knows it, but perhaps he does not. He has a peculiar mind, and so far none of our psychologists has been able to get into rapport with him. Some days he thinks one thing and some days something entirely different. He has a many-track mind and no definite time-table or direction for his mental trains. But next October he is going to start his air fleet in action, and London, Paris, Rome, New York will be conquered before the nations know that war has been started. His first declaration of war will be the destruction of every large city in the world except his own capital. Did you know that?"

"I was afraid of it. That is one reason why I wanted to stay here. I am not sure that I ever want to go back. I am a scientist and not a fighter."

"That was well said. I am glad to hear you say it. What do you think will happen in your little harbor?"

"That is easy. There will be a battle royal. Everybody will start fighting everybody else. When they finish there will be nothing left except the tails, like the time the Kilkenny cats settled their differences."

"I feel that you are right. And that is what we do not want. If these nations want to stage a war and kill each other by the millions we are willing to look on with indifference, but we do not want it to happen on our front door-steps. Perhaps you think that we never worry, but there is one thing we are afraid of and that is the loss of our isolation. For centuries all we have asked is to be left alone. We gave the Dictator gold as a social experiment. Perhaps it was a mistake. There was just a chance that if everybody felt he had enough to pay his debts and be comfortable, all would cease hating one another; but it seems that no matter how much gold anyone has he always wants more.

"So we decided over a hundred years ago that if necessary we would give the world a shock that would keep them so busy for a few centuries they would forget their strife and jealousies. I am going to

tell you about it, because I feel that someone should know it. Perhaps if the world is warned they will stop in time."

"But what can I do?"

"You are going back to carry the warning. We are arranging to send you in one of our submarines. You need not be surprised at that. We used underwater travel years before your nations perfected it. Go to the Dictator or King or President of the eight large countries and tell them to make peace with each other, or something very serious will happen. You are known internationally. You are respected. Perhaps they will listen to you."

"And perhaps they will not. But what can you do that would harm the world? Hiram tells me your population is less than five hundred, counting the women and children. It is a rather small number to frighten the whole world with."

"Numbers do not count. One man could do it. Perhaps you recall the ancient scientist who said he could move the world if he had a long-enough crowbar and a place to stand on. In a way he was correct. Come into the house with me and I will show you a small working-model of a very interesting piece of machinery."

In a few minutes he was showing his visitor something that looked like a twelve-inch shell. It was conical at one end and flat on the other. At its pointed end it was grooved.

"That," explained Alhazen, "is a small model of our tunnel-borer. The actual size can be anything up to fifty feet in diameter. It can be charged with enough energy to travel twelve miles through solid rock at one charging. At the present time we have five thousand of them in place pointed downward toward the center of our continent. These are all connected in such a way that the pressure of a single contact will start them all sinking their way into the ice.

"Under the ice is rock. Then come layers of metal, and large deposits of coal. No one knows how much coal there is in these veins. Under the coal are lakes of oil; and under the oil there is more rock and below that lies the fire. Occasionally in Siberia, Alaska, and in our own country this fire has broken through and formed volcanoes. In parts of Antarctica there are still a few that break out occasionally.

"Our city is peculiarly located. We are on a granite rock that is at least three miles deep and several hundred miles wide. Whatever happens to the rest of this continent, we feel that we are safe. To quote the words of a very celebrated man, 'We have builded our house upon a rock.'

"Now as a scientist I am going to ask you a question. Take one of these machines and start it downward on a twelve-mile journey. It will go through ice, rock, coal, rock, a lake of oil, through the lake into more rock and then into the fire. What will be the result?"

"You will have a chimney, and through it will come fire, and the fire will keep on and on till all the oil and coal has been burned and till the pressure of the molten mass underneath is exhausted."

"That is correct. In other words there will be a volcano. Explosions will increase the size of the hole, and heat will be formed. Remember that. *Heat will be formed.* Over Antarctica there is enough ice to cover the entire world 120 feet if it were spread out in a thin layer. Suppose it would start to melt, not slowly as it is doing now, but rapidly, inside of a year? The increased amount of water would raise the surface of the oceans over 100 feet. Suppose only half of it melted? I think that New York, London, Berlin would be flooded. The Gulf of Mexico would become three times larger than it is now. A great inland sea would form in the Desert of Sahara. The geography of the world would be changed. And the temperature would also be changed. Vegetation would

increase at a tremendous rate. Insect life would threaten the lives of the human race. Am I right?"

"I believe so!"

"Tell your world that. Tell them that if they do not live in peace we will start melting the ice. We will turn this continent into a sea of fire. We will give them so much to think of that they will have to use all their energy saving themselves, instead of preparing for wholesale murder and territorial conquests. You have seen enough of our city and the people in it to know that this is not an idle threat. We do not want to do it, but if we are forced to we will. We are willing to destroy our continent to keep it from being exploited for the greed of your peoples."

"There is one thing that worries me," cried the scientist, "and that is, they will not believe me!"

"Give them the chance. And tell them that if their fleets come here next summer to fight for gold we will bury them under a rain of fire."

"You are in earnest?"

"Absolutely!"

"All right. When do I start?"

"At once. Leave Johnson here. He is happier than he has ever been in his life."

9. The World Doubts

HALKIN had been talking to eight men for over two hours. He had told them about his experiences and had given them the message from the lords of the ice. His language had been plain, and simple. There was no need of any of the eight failing to understand what he said.

The eight men represented eight countries. Not one of those countries trusted any of the other seven. Each country had been preparing for war as rapidly and as silently as possible. Now they were being asked to stop thoughts of war, live in perpetual peace and work for the mutual happiness of the human race. It was too much. The Dictator, who had decided to represent his own country at this conference, watched the other seven with half-shut eyes. Six of the other men remained quiet. The American spoke.

"It looks to me like a beautiful piece of propaganda. One country has secured a vast amount of gold. I might say that we know definitely that this gold was taken from land that belonged to the United States. They have used that gold to build a powerful war machine. Now a scientist from that country comes and tells us that we must not go on our own land and take any of our own gold. He also says that we must stop all our preparations for national security, break up our army and navy and air fleet and from now on live in peace. His threat tells of a land of supermen who can, when they wish to do so, change the surface of the earth.

"I do not know what the rest of you are going to do, but just as soon as it can the United States fleet will sail south. Where our flag flies we are going to be masters. We know how to play poker and we refuse to be bluffed. That is my answer in plain words. The rest of you can do as you please, but there will be no more gold taken by anyone from our lands."

And he left the room.

The other six left without a word. Harlkin was left with the Dictator.

"I ought to kill you, Harlkin!" purred the Dictator, "but instead I am going to decorate you. You have exploded a mine that is greatly to our benefit. Tonight our air fleets start in six directions. Instead of explosives they will drop bacteria. In a month thirty million of our enemies will be dead from disease. And now because I cannot trust you I am going to make you a prisoner. You will be very comfortable, but nevertheless you are going to be in prison."

"I expected that," replied the scientist.

"You are doing something that is very terrible, and something that you will live to regret. I am going to advise you not to take the offensive without giving the matter a few days of serious thought."

"No! The order goes out tonight."

Just then a messenger knocked at the door. He said he bore a radiogram for the Dictator. The ruler tore the envelope open, read the short letter and handed it with a sneer to Harlkin, who read:

"IF CONFERENCE HAS FAILED, WE START OUR MACHINERY AT ONCE.

SIGNED,

ALHAZEN."

"Just another reason for issuing the order," cried the Dictator. "It looks to me like a part of the American bluff. Do you know that I doubt your entire story? And this radiogram confirms my thought. You are in a conspiracy against your country. This message probably was prepared by you in advance."

The thinker shrugged his shoulders as he sighed:

"I guess there is nothing more for me to do. If you doubt me, there is nothing I can say to change your mind. Go on with your plans to destroy humanity."

10. The World Goes Mad

THE Dictator had not counted fully on his enemies. Every other nation except the United States launched its air fleets that night. His thousand planes were met in air before they had crossed their own borders. All that night raged the battle. With morning came the beginning of another world war in which the science of seven nations did its best to destroy and kill.

It was different from the last World War. Not one nation had a friend or an ally it could trust. Every nation started in to fight the world, each thinking that its instruments of destruction were greater and more deadly than those of all other nations. The United States and Canada remained on guard, thinking that they were protected by the oceans; but when the Panama Canal was blown up and the Hawaiian Islands were captured by the Asiatics they plunged into the multi-war.

For two weeks the various parts of the human race gripped one another by the throats, and then came the flood. Tidal waves and earthquakes should have given warning of what was going to happen, but the nations were too busy killing and being killed to pay any attention. But when the oceans started to cover their lands they were forced to start thinking about it.

The ice of Antarctica was melting. The whales knew it, the sea-lions had fled for their lives, but no human being actually saw what was happening. Five thousand volcanoes had opened their flaming throats in that land of perpetual ice. The water flowing down their maws only excited them to fresh fury. Fire that had rolled restlessly for millions of years now started in gigantic, super-heated fury to the surface. Antarctica was being turned into a furnace. The world was being covered with the water it spewed out.

The rock on which the lords of the ice had built their little city swayed, but finally held firm; the ice cap above melted but no water came through the perfect roof. Their world changed around them, but inside the city life went on as usual. London, Berlin, New York turned into ultra-modern Venices. Half of the world was either finding new homes or working frantically and vainly to build dikes to save their cities. Gone were thoughts of gold and conquest and the terrors of war. Humanity had all it could do to adjust itself to the new geography. Through it all, the ice lords continued on with their calm life, though there was not much ice left to justify their names.

11. Two Friends Meet

DURING the rioting that had followed the downfall of the Dictator's country he had been killed. Halkin escaped from prison and finally made his way to Switzerland. That little country, on its lofty mountains, had been one of the very few countries not seriously affected by either the war or the floods. As always, it served as a place of refuge for the suffering ones and the oppressed. The scientist was made welcome, it being felt that his knowledge would be a great asset to any country. A little laboratory was given him and he was provided with the necessities of life. To that little room came Alhazen.

The scientist was both surprised and pleased.

"I never expected to see you again," he cried.

"I was not sure of it myself," was the quiet answer. "We thought our city was secure; but for a few days, during the worst of the earthquakes, we had serious doubt as to whether our rock foundation was as secure as we had fancied it. But we came through in good condition. Many of our rock tunnels were ruined, and our future supply of oil destroyed, but we are doing very well, considering everything. When the earth became a little quiet we drove a new tunnel to the seashore, contacted with our submarines, and here I am. It took a good deal of mental concentration to find you. Everyone in your old country thought you were dead, but I felt that your time for death had not come."

"How is John Johnson?"

"Fine. He finished his symbolic god of gold, refused to be satisfied with it, melted it and made it over again. You see the first time he made it, he was not very well acquainted with the feminine face. He met one of our women, fell in love with her, and she is his model for what he thinks is going to be a masterpiece."

"I suppose he will marry and live happily ever after?"

"No doubt. Now in regard to our plan. You would be surprised to know how it worked. There is little left of the old Antarctica you found the gold in. No ice, and only a few isolated lofty mountains rising out of the water. We blew a continent to pieces to make the word recover from its madness."

"Do you think it worked?"

"I do not know. We hear talk of a world confederacy. No doubt even now various groups are at work trying to form such a union and head it. Human nature changes very little. You can change the shape of continents, but when it comes to the emotions of mankind they are rather unchangeable. But I want you to go back to the City of Ice with me. You have no family and no ties. We like you and have work for you. It is something new. We solved so many of our problems that we felt we had to have something new and entirely different to puzzle over in order to retain our national youth. We want you to share the adventure with us."

"What is your idea?"

"It is the sky and the stars and the moon."

"Interspace travel?"

"No. We have begun to doubt the existence of space. We think that perhaps there is a solid covering to the earth, on the other side of what we call the stratosphere. No one has ever been up there to actually see what really is there. Perhaps the things we see there are optical delusions. It is hard for me to put it into words, but the main idea is that we are not sure what really is above us and we are going up there to find out. Will you come with us?"

"I think that you are wrong. But I would like to be there when you find out that you are. So I will go. When do we start?"



"Smith leaned forward breathlessly."

Nymph of Darkness

By C. L. MOORE & FORREST J. ACKERMAN

An unusual story is this, of the strange and eery adventure that befell Northwest Smith on the waterfront of Ednes in the black night, and a veritable nymph of darkness who appealed to him for help

THE thick Venusian dark of the Ednes waterfront in the hours before dawn is breathless and tense with a nameless awareness, a crouching danger. The shapes that move murkily through its blackness are not daylight shapes. Sun has never shone upon some of those misshapen figures, and what happens in the dark is better left untold. Not even the Patrol ventures there after the

lights are out, and the hours between midnight and dawn are outside the law. If dark things happen there the Patrol never knows of them, or desires to know. Powers move through the darkness along the waterfront which even the Patrol bows low.

Through that breathless blackness, along a street beneath which the breathing waters whispered, Northwest Smith strolled slowly. No prudent man ventures out after midnight along the waterfront of Ednes unless he has urgent business abroad, but from the leisurely gait that carried Smith soundlessly through the dark he might have been some casual sight-seer. He was no stranger to the Ednes waterfront. He knew the danger through which he strolled so slowly, and under narrowed lids his colorless eyes were like keen steel probes that searched the dark. Now and then he passed a shapeless shadow that dodged aside to give him way. It might have been no more than a shadow. His no-colored eyes did not waver. He went on, alert and wary.

He was passing between two high warehouses that shut out even the faint reflection of light from the city beyond when he first heard that sound of bare, running feet which so surprised him. The patter of frantically fleeing steps is not uncommon along the waterfront, but these were—he listened closer—yes, certainly the feet of a woman or a young boy, light and quick and desperate. His ears were keen enough to be sure of that. They were coming nearer swiftly. In the blackness even his pale eyes could see nothing, and he drew back against the wall, one hand dropping to the ray-gun that hung low on his thigh. He had no desire to meet whatever it was which pursued this fugitive.

But his brows knit as the footsteps turned into the street that led between the warehouses. No woman, of whatever class or kind, ventures into this quarter by night. And he became certain as he listened that those feet were a woman's. There was a measured rhythm about them that suggested the Venusian woman's lovely, swaying gait. He pressed flat against the wall, holding his breath. He wanted no sound to indicate his own presence to the terror from which the woman fled. Ten years before he might have dashed out to her—but ten years along the spaceways teaches a man prudence. Gallantry can be foolhardy sometimes, particularly along the waterfront, where any of a score of things might be in close pursuit. At the thought of what some of those things might be the hair prickled faintly along his neck.

The frantic footsteps came storming down the dark street. He heard the rush of breath through unseen nostrils, the gasp of laboring lungs. Then those desperate feet stumbled a bit, faltered, turned aside. Out of the dark a hurtling figure plunged full-tilt against him. His startled arms closed about a woman—a girl—a young girl, beautifully made, muscular and firmly curved under his startled hands.

He released her rather quickly.

"Earthman!" she gasped in an agony of breathlessness. "Oh, hide me, hide me! Quick!"

There was no time to wonder how she knew his origin or to ask from what she fled, for before the words had left her lips a queer, greenish glow appeared around the corner of the warehouse. It revealed a pile of barrels at Smith's elbow, and he shoved the exhausted girl behind them in one quick motion, drawing his gun and flattening himself still further against the wall.

Yet it was no nameless monster which appeared around the corner of the building. A man's dark shape came into view, a squat figure, broad and misshapen. The light radiated from a flash-tube in his hand, and it was an oddly diffused and indirect light, not like an ordinary flash's clear beam, for it lighted the man behind it as well as what lay before the tube, as if a

greenish, luminous fog were spreading sluggishly from the lens.

THE man came forward with a queer, shuffling gait. Something about him made Smith's flesh crawl unaccountably. What it was he could not be sure, for the green glow of the tube did not give a clear light, and the man was little more than a squat shadow moving unevenly behind the light-tube's luminance.

He must have seen Smith almost immediately, for he came straight across the street to where the Earthman stood against the wall, gun in hand. Behind the glowing tube-mouth Smith could make out a pale blur of face with two dark splotches for eyes. It was a fat face, unseemly in its puffy pallor, like some grub that has fed too long upon corruption. No expression crossed it at the sight of the tall spaceman in his leather garb, leaning against the wall and fingering a ready gun. Indeed, there was nothing to arouse surprise in the Earthman's attitude against the wall, or in his drawn gun. It was what any nightfarer along the waterfront would have done at the appearance of such a green, unearthly glow in the perilous dark.

Neither spoke. After a single long glance at the silent Smith, the newcomer began to switch his diffused light to and fro about the street in obvious search. Smith listened, but the girl had stilled her sobbing breath and no sound betrayed her hiding-place. The sluggish searcher went on slowly down the street, casting his foggy light before him. Its luminance faded by degrees as he receded from view; a black, misshapen shadow haloed in unholy radiance.

When utter dark had descended once more Smith holstered his gun and called to the girl in a low voice. The all but soundless murmur of bare feet on the pavement heralded her approach, the hurrying of still unruly breath.

"Thank you," she said softly. "I—I hope you need never know what horror you have saved me from."

"Who are you?" he demanded. "How did you know me?"

"They call me Nyusa. I did not know you, save that I think you are of Earth, and perhaps trustworthy. Great Shar must have guided my flight along the streets tonight, for I think your kind is rare by the sea edge, after dark."

"But—can you see me?"

"No. But a Martian, or one of my own countrymen, would not so quickly have released a girl who dashed into his arms by night."

In the dark Smith grinned.

"You had better go quickly now," she went on; "there is such danger here that——"

Abruptly the low voice broke off, Smith could hear nothing, but he sensed a tensing of the girl by his side, a strained listening. And presently he caught a far-away sound, a curious muffled wheezing, as if something short-winded and heavy were making laborious haste. It was growing nearer. The girl's caught breath was loud in the stillness at his elbow.

"Quick!" she gasped. "Oh, hurry!"

Her hand on his arm tugged him on in the direction the squat black searcher had taken. "Faster!" And her anxious hands pulled him into a run. Feeling a little ridiculous, he loped through the dark beside her with long, easy strides, hearing nothing but the soft fall of his own boots and the scurrying of the girl's bare feet, and far behind the distant wheezing breath, growing fainter.

Twice she turned him with a gentle push into some new byway. Then they paused while she tugged at an unseen door, and after that they ran down an alley so narrow that Smith's broad shoulders brushed its walls. The place smelled of fish and decayed wood and the salt of the seas. The

pavement rose in broad, shallow steps, and they went through another door, and the girl pulled at his arm with a breathed, "We're safe now. Wait."

He heard the door close behind them, and light feet pattered on boards.

"Lift me," she said after a moment. "I can't reach the light."

Cool, firm fingers touched his neck. Gingerly in the dark he found her waist and swung her aloft at arm's length. Between his hands that waist was supple and smoothly muscled and slim as a reed. He heard the fumble of uncertain fingers overhead. Then in an abrupt dazzle light sprang up about him.

HE SWORE in a choked undertone and sprang back, dropping his hands. For he had looked to see a girl's body close to his face, and he saw nothing. His hands had gripped—nothing. He had been holding aloft a smooth and supple—nothingness.

He heard the fall of a material body on the floor, and a gasp and cry of pain, but still he could see nothing, and he fell back another step, lifting an uncertain hand to his eyes and muttering a dazed Martian oath. For look though he would, he could see no one but himself in the little bare room the light had revealed.

Yet the girl's voice was speaking from empty air.

"What—why did—O, I see!" and a little ripple of laughter. "You have never heard of Nyusa?"

The repetition of the name struck a chord of remote memory in the Earthman's mind. Somewhere lately he had heard that word spoken. Where and by whom he could not recall, but it aroused in his memory a nebulous chord of night peril and the unknown. He was suddenly glad of the gun at his side, and a keener awareness was in the pale gaze he sent around the tiny room.

"No," he said. "I have never heard the name before now."

"I am Nyusa."

"But—where are you?"

She laughed again, a soft ripple of mirth, honey-sweet with the Venusian woman's traditionally lovely voice.

"Here. I am not visible to men's eyes. I was born so. I was born"—here the rippling voice sobered, and a tinge of solemnity crept in—"I was born of a strange mating, Earthman. My mother was a Venusian, but my father—my father was Darkness. I can't explain. But because of that strain of Dark in me, I am invisible. And because of it I—I am not free."

"Why? Who holds you captive? How could anyone imprison an invisibility?"

"The—Nov." Her voice was the faintest breath of sound, and again, at the strange word, a prickle of nameless unease ran through Smith's memory. Somewhere he had heard that name before, and the remembrance it roused was too nebulous to put into words, but it was ominous. Nyusa's breathing whisper went on very softly at his shoulder. It was a queer, unreal feeling, that, to be standing alone in a bare room with a girl's sweet, muted murmur in his ears from empty air.

"The Nov—they dwell underground. They are the last remnant of a very old race. And they are the priests who worship That which was my father: the Darkness. They prison me for purposes of their own.

"You see, my heritage from the lady who bore me was her own lovely human shape, but the Thing which was my father bequeathed to his child stranger things than invisibility. I am of a color outside the range of human eyes. And I have entry into—into other lands than this—strange lands, lovely and far—O, but so damnably near! If I could only pass by the bars the Nov have set to shut me away! For they need me in their dark worship, and here I

must stay, prisoned in the hot, muddy world which is all they themselves can ever know. They have a light—you saw it, the green glow in the hands of the Nov who pursued me through the dark tonight—which makes me visible to human eyes. Something in its color combines with that strange color which is mine to produce a hue that falls within man's range of vision. If he had found me I should have been—punished—severely, because I fled tonight. And the Nov's punishments are—not nice.

"To make sure that I shall not escape them, they have set a guardian to dog my footsteps—the thing that wheezed on my track tonight—Dolf. He sprang from some frightful union of material and immaterial. He is partly elemental, partly animal. I can't tell you fully. And he is cloudy, nebulous—but very real, as you would have discovered had he caught us just now. He has a taste for human blood which makes him invaluable, though I am safe, for I am only half human, and the Nov—well, they are not wholly human either. They——"

She broke off suddenly. Outside the door Smith's keen ears had caught a shuffle of vague feet upon the ground, and through the cracks came very clearly the snuffle of wheezing breath. Nyusa's bare feet pattered swiftly across the boards, and from near the door came a series of low, sibilant hissings and whistlings in a clearer tone than the sounds the great Dolf made. The queer noise crescendoed to a sharp command, and he heard a subdued snuffling and shuffling outside and the sound of great, shapeless feet moving off over flagstones. At his shoulder Nyusa sighed.

"It worked that time," she said. "Sometimes I can command him, by virtue of my father's strength in me. The Nov do not know that. Queer, isn't it—they never seem to remember that I might have inherited more from their god than my invisibility and my access to other worlds. They punish me and prison me and command me to their service like some temple dancing-girl—me, the half divine! I think—yes, I think that some day the doors will open at my own command, and I shall go out into those other worlds. I wonder—could I do it now?"

THE voice faded to a murmurous undertone. Smith realized that she had all but forgotten his presence at the realization of her own potentialities. And again that prickle of unease went over him. She was half human, but half only. Who could say what strange qualities were rooted in her, springing from no human seed? Qualities that might some day blossom into—into—well, he had no words for what he was thinking of, but he hoped not to be there on the day the Nov tried her too far.

Hesitant footsteps beside him called back his attention sharply. She was moving away, a step at a time. He could hear the sound of her bare feet on the boards. They had almost reached the opposite wall now, one slow step after another. And then suddenly those hesitating footfalls were running, faster, faster, diminishing in distance. No door opened, no aperture in the walls, but Nyusa's bare feet pattered eagerly away. He was aware briefly of the vastnesses of dimensions beyond our paltry three, distances down which a girl's bare feet could go storming in scornful violation of the laws that held him fast. From far away he heard those steps falter. He thought he heard the sound of fists beating against resistance, the very remote echo of a sob. Then slowly the patter of bare feet returned. Almost he could see a dragging head and hopelessly slumped shoulders as the reluctant footfalls drew nearer, nearer, entered the room again. At his shoulder she said in a subdued voice:

"Not yet. I have never gone so far before, but the way is still barred. The Nov are too strong—for a while. But I know, now. I know! I am a god's daughter, and

strong too. Not again shall I flee before the Nov's pursuit, or fear because Dolf follows. I am the child of Darkness, and they shall know it! They——"

Sharply into her exultant voice broke a moment of darkness that cut off her words with the abruptness of a knife stroke. It was of an instant's duration only, and as the light came on again a queer wash of rosy luminance spread through the room and faded again, as if a ripple of color had flowed past. Nyusa sighed.

"That is what I fled," she confided. "I am not afraid now—but I do not like it. You had best go—or no, for Dolf still watches the door I entered by. Wait—let me think."

Silence for a moment, while the last flush of rose faded from the air, to be followed by a ripple of fresh color that faded in turn. Three times Smith saw the tide of red flow through the room and die away before Nyusa's hand fell upon his arm and her voice murmured from emptiness:

"Come. I must hide you somewhere while I perform my ritual. That color is the signal that the rites are to begin—the Nov's command for my presence. There is no escape for you until they call Dolf away, for I could not guide you to a door without having him sense my presence there and follow. No, you must hide — hide and watch me dance. Would you like that? A sight which no eyes that are wholly human have ever seen before! Come."

Invisible hands pushed open the door in the opposite wall and pulled him through. Stumbling a little at the newness of being guided by an unseen creature, Smith followed down a corridor through which waves of rosy light flowed and faded. The way twisted many times, but no doors opened from it nor did they meet anyone in the five minutes or so that elapsed as they went down the hallway through the pulsing color of the air.

At the end a great barred door blocked their passage. Nyusa released him for an instant, and he heard her feet whisper on the floor, her unseen hands fumble with something metallic. Then a section of the floor sank. He was looking down a shaft around which narrow stairs spiraled, very steeply. It was typically a Venusian structure, and very ancient. He had descended other spiraled shafts before now, to strange destinations. Wondering what lay in store for him at the foot of this, he yielded to the girl's clinging hands and went down slowly, gripping the rail.

He had gone a long way before the small, invisible hands plucked at his arm again and drew him through an opening in the rock through which the shaft sank. A short corridor led into darkness. At its end they paused, Smith blinking in the queer, pale darkness which veiled the great cavern that lay before them.

"Wait here," whispered Nyusa. "You should be safe enough in the dark. No one ever uses this passage but myself. I will return after the ceremony."

Hands brushed his briefly, and she was gone. Smith pressed back against the wall and drew his gun, flicking the catch experimentally to be sure it would answer any sudden need. Then he settled back to watch.

Before him a vast domed chamber stretched. He could see only a little of it in the strange dark pallor of the place. The floor shone with the deep sheen of marble, black as quiet water underground. And as the minutes passed he became aware of motion and life in the pale dark. Voices murmured, feet shuffled softly, forms moved through the distance. The Nov were taking their places for the ceremony. He could see the dim outlines of their mass, far off in the dark.

After a while a deep, sonorous chanting began from nowhere and everywhere, swelling and filling the cavern and echoing from the domed ceiling in reverberant

monotones. There were other sounds whose meaning he could not fathom, queer pipings and whistlings like the voice in which Nyusa had commanded Dolf, but invested with a solemnity that gave them depth and power. He could feel fervor building up around the dome of the cavern, the queer, wild fervor of an unknown cult for a nameless god. He gripped his gun and waited.

NOW, distantly and very vaguely, a luminance was forming in the center of the arched roof. It strengthened and deepened and began to rain downward toward the darkly shining floor in long streamers like webs of tangible light. In the mirrored floor replicas of light reached upward, mistily reflecting. It was a sight of such weird and enchanting loveliness that Smith held his breath, watching. And now green began to flush the streaming webs, a strange, foggy green like the light the Nov had flashed through the waterfront streets in pursuit of Nyusa. Recognizing the color, he was not surprised when a shape began to dawn in the midst of that raining light—a girl's shape, half transparent, slim and lovely and unreal.

In the dark pallor of the cavern, under the green luminance of the circling light, she lifted her arms in a long, slow, sweeping motion, lighter than smoke, and moved on tiptoe, very delicately. Then the light shimmered, and she was dancing. Smith leaned forward breathlessly, gun hanging forgotten in his hand, watching her dance. It was so lovely that afterward he could never be sure he had not dreamed.

She was so nebulous in the streaming radiance of the light, so utterly unreal, so fragile, so exquisitely colored in the strangest tints of violet and blue and frosty silver, and queerly translucent, like a moonstone. She was more unreal now, when she was visible, than she had ever seemed before his eyes beheld her. Then his hands had told him of her firm and slender roundness—now she was a wraith, transparent, dream-like, dancing soundlessly in a rain of lunar color.

She wove magic with her dancing body as she moved, and the dance was more intricate and symbolic and sinuous than any wholly human creature could have trod. She scarcely touched the floor, moving above her reflection in the polished stone like a lovely moonlight ghost floating in mid-darkness while green moon-fire rained all about her.

With difficulty Smith wrenched his eyes away from that nebulous creature treading her own reflection as she danced. He was searching for the sources of those voices he had heard, and in the green, revealing light he saw them ringing the cavern in numbers greater than he had dreamed—the Nov, intent as one man upon the shimmering figure before them. And at what he saw he was glad he could not see them clearly. He remembered Nyusa's words, "——the Nov are not wholly human either." Veiled though they were in the misty radiance and the pallor of the dark, he could see that it was so. He had seen it, unrealizing, in the face of that squat pursuer who had passed him in the street.

They were all thick, shapeless, all darkly robed and white-faced as slugs are white. Their formless features, intent and emotionless, had a soft, unstable quality, not shaped with any human certainty. He did not stare too long at any one face, for fear he might make out its queer lack of contour, or understand the portent of that slug-white instability of feature.

NYUSA'S dance ended in a long, floating whirl of unhuman lightness. She sank to the floor in deep obeisance, prostrate upon her own reflection. From the front ranks of the assembled Nov a dark figure stepped with upraised arms. Obediently Nyusa rose. From that dark form,

from the slug-like, unfeatured face, a twittering whistle broke, and Nyusa echoed the sounds unerringly, her voice blending with the other's in a chant without words.

Smith was so intent upon watching that he was not aware of the soft shuffling in the dark behind him until the wheeze of labored breath sounded almost upon his neck. The thing was all but on him before that sixth sense which had saved him so often before now shrieked a warning and he whirled with a choked oath of surprise and shock, swinging up his gun and confronting a dim, shapeless immensity out of which a dull glow of greenish light stared at him. His gun spat blue flame, and from the imponderable thing a whistling scream rang quaveringly, echoing across the cavern and cutting short that wordless chant between the Nov and the girl.

Then the dark bulk of Dolf lurched forward and fell smotheringly upon Smith. It bore him to the floor under an engulfing weight which was only half real, but chokingly thick in his nostrils. He seemed almost to be breathing Dolf's substance, like heavy mist. Blinded and gasping, he fought the curiously nebulous thing that was smothering him, knowing he must win free in a few seconds' time, for Dolf's scream must bring the Nov upon him at any moment now. But for all his efforts he could not break away, and something indescribable and nauseous was fumbling for his throat. When he felt its blind searching, his struggles redoubled convulsively, and after a frantic moment he staggered free, gulping in clean air and staring into the dark with wide eyes, trying to make out what manner of horror he had grappled with. He could see nothing but that dull flare, as of a single eye, glowing upon him from an imponderable bulk which blended with the dark.

DOLF was coming at him again. He heard great feet shuffling, and the wheezing breath came fast. From behind, the shouts of the Nov rose loud, and the noise of running men, and above all the high, clear call of Nyusa, screaming something in a language without words. Dolf was upon him. That revolting, unseen member fumbled again at his throat. He thrust hard against the yielding bulk and his gun flared again, blue-hot in the dark, full into the midst of Dolf's unstable blackness.

He felt the mass of the half-seen monster jerk convulsively. A high, whistling scream rang out, shrill and agonized, and the sucking organ dropped from his throat. The dim glow of vision dulled in the shape's cloudy midst. Then it flickered, went out. Somehow there was a puff of blackness that dissolved into misty nothing all about him, and the dark shape that had been Dolf was gone. Half elemental, he had gone back into nothingness as he died.

Smith drew a deep breath and swung round to front the first of the oncoming Nov. They were almost upon him, and their numbers were overwhelming, but his flame-gun swung its long arc of destruction as they swarmed in and almost a dozen of the squat, dark figures must have fallen to that deadly scythe before he went down under the weight of them. Pudgily soft fingers wrenched the gun from his hand, and he did not fight hard to retain it, for he remembered the blunt-nosed little flame-thrower in its holster under his arm and was not minded that they should discover it in any body-to-body fight.

Then he was jerked to his feet and thrust forward toward the pale radiance that still held Nyusa in its heart, like a translucent prisoner in a cage of light. A little dazed by the swiftness of events, Smith went on unsteadily in their midst. He towered head and shoulders above them, and his eyes were averted. He tried not to flinch from the soft, fish-white hands urging him forward, not to look too closely into the faces of the squat things swarming so near. No,

they were not men. He knew that more surely than ever from this close sight of the puffy, featureless faces ringing him round.

At the brink of the raining light which housed Nyusa the Nov who had led the chanting stood apart, watching impassively as the tall prisoner came forward in his swarm of captors. There was command about this Nov, an air of regality and calm, and he was white as death, luminous as a corpse in the lunar reflections of the light.

They halted Smith before him. After one glance into that moveless, featureless face, slug-pale, the Earthman did not look again. His eyes strayed to Nyusa, beyond the Nov who fronted him, and at what he saw he took faint hope again. There was no trace of fear in her poise. She stood straight and quiet, watching, and he sensed a powerful reserve about her. She looked the god's daughter she was, standing there in the showering luminance, translucent as some immortal.

Said the leader Nov, in a voice that came deeply from somewhere within him, though his featureless face did not stir:

"How came you here?"

"I brought him," Nyusa's voice sounded steadily across the space that parted them.

The Nov swung round, amazement in every line of his squatness.

"You?" he exclaimed. "You brought an alien to witness the worship of the god I serve? How dared——"

"I brought one who had befriended me to witness my dance before my father," said Nyusa in so ominously gentle a tone that the Nov did not realize for a moment the significance of her words. He spluttered Venusian blasphemy in a choked voice.

"You shall die!" he yelled thickly. "Both of you shall die by such torment——"

"S-s-s-zt!"

Nyusa's whistling hiss was only a sibilance to Smith, but it cut the Nov's furious flow abruptly short. He went dead quiet, and Smith thought he saw a sicker pallor than before spreading over the slug face turned to Nyusa.

"Had you forgotten?" she queried gently, "that my father is That which you worship? Dare you raise your voice to threaten Its daughter? Dare you, little worm-man?"

A GASP ran over the throng behind Smith. Greenish anger suffused the pallid face of the priest. He spluttered wordlessly and surged forward, short arms clawing toward the taunting girl. Smith's hand, darting inside his coat, was quicker than the clutch of his captors. The blue flare of his flame-thrower leaped out in a tongue of dazzling heat to lick at the plunging Nov. He spun round dizzily and screamed once, high and shrill, and sank in a dark, puddly heap to the floor.

There was a moment of the deepest quiet. The shapeless faces of the Nov were turned in one stricken stare to that oddly fluid lump upon the floor which had been their leader. Then in the pack behind Smith a low rumble began to rise, the mutter of many voices. He had heard that sound before—the dawning roar of a fanatic mob. He knew that it meant death. Setting his teeth, he spun to face them, hand closing firmer about the butt of his flame-thrower.

The mutter grew deeper, louder. Someone yelled, "Kill! Kill!" and a forward surge in the thick crowd of faces swayed the mass toward him. Then above that rising clamor Nyusa's voice rang clear.

"Stop!" she called. In sheer surprise the murderous mob paused, eyes turning toward the unreal figure in her cage of radiance. Even Smith darted a glance over his shoulder flame-gun poised in midair, his finger hesitating upon the catch. And at what they saw the crowd fell silent, the Earthman froze into stunned immobility as he watched what was happening under the rain of light.

Nyusa's translucent arms were lifted, her head thrown back. Like a figure of triumph

carved out of moonstone she stood poised, while all about her in the misty, lunar colors of the light a darkness was forming like fog that clung to her outstretched arms and swathed her half-real body. And it was darkness not like any night that Smith had ever seen before. No words in any tongue could describe it, for it was not a darkness made for any vocal creature to see. It was a blasphemy and an outrage against the eyes, against all that man hopes and believes and is; the darkness of the incredible, the utterly alien.

Smith's gun fell from shaking fingers. He pressed both hands to his eyes to shut out that indescribably awful sight, and all about him heard a long, soft sighing as the Nov sank to their faces upon the shining floor. In that deathly hush Nyusa spoke again, her voice vibrant with conscious godhood and underrun with a queer, tingling ripple of inhumanity. It was the voice of one to whom the unknown lies open, to whom that utterly alien and dreadful blackness is akin.

"By the Darkness I command you," she said coldly. "Let this man go free. I leave you now, and I shall never return. Give thanks that a worse punishment than this is not visited upon you who paid no homage to the daughter of Darkness."

Then for a swift instant something indescribable happened. Remotely Smith was aware that the Blackness which had shrouded Nyusa was spreading through him, permeating him with the chill of that blasphemous dark, a hideous pervasion of his innermost being. For that instant he was drowned in a darkness which made his very atoms shudder to its touch. And if it was dreadful to him, the voiceless shriek that rose simultaneously from all about him gave evidence how much more dreadfully their god's touch fell upon the Nov. Not with his ears, but with some nameless sense quickened by that moment of alien blackness, he was aware of the scream of intolerable anguish, the writhing of extra-human torment which the Nov underwent in that one timeless moment.

Out of his tense awareness, out of the spreading black, he was roused by a touch that startled him into forgetfulness of that dreadful dark—the touch of a girl's mouth upon his, a tingling pressure of sweet parted lips that stirred delicately against his own. He stood tense, not moving a muscle, while Nyusa's mouth clung to his in a long, close kiss like no kiss he had ever taken before. There was a coldness in it, a chill as alien as the dark that had gathered about her translucency under the light, a shuddering cold that struck through him in one long, deep-rooted shock of frigid revulsion. And there was warmth in it, headily stirring the pulse which that cold had congealed.

In the instant while those clinging lips melted to his mouth, he was a battleground for emotions as alien as light and dark. The cold touch of darkness, the hot touch of love. Alienity's shuddering, frozen stab, and humanity's blood-stirring throb of answer to the warm mouth's challenge. It was a mingling of such utter opposites that for an instant he was racked by forces that sent his senses reeling. There was danger in the conflict, the threat of madness in such irreconcilable forces that his brain blurred with the effort of compassing them.

Just in time the clinging lips dropped away. He stood alone in the reeling dark, that perilous kiss burning upon his memory as the world steadied about him. In that dizzy instant he heard what the rest, in their oblivious agony, could not have realized. He heard a girl's bare feet pattering softly along some incline, up and up, faster and faster. Now they were above his head. He did not look up. He knew he would have seen nothing. He knew Nyusa walked a way that no sense of his could perceive. He heard her feet break into an eager little run. He heard her laugh once, lightly, and the

laugh cut off by the sound of a closing door. Then quiet.

Without warning, on the heels of that sound, he felt a tremendous release all about him. The darkness had lifted. He opened his eyes upon a dimly lighted cavern from which that train of light had vanished. The Nov lay in quivering windrows about his feet, their shapeless faces hidden. Otherwise the whole vast place was empty as far as his eyes could pierce the dark.

Smith bent and picked up his fallen gun. He kicked the nearest Nov ungently.

"Show me the way out of this place," he ordered, sheathing the flame-thrower under his arm.

Obediently the sluggish creature stumbled to his feet.

Night Gaunts

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

Out of what crypt they crawl, I cannot tell,
But every night I see the rubbery things:
Black, horned, and slender, with membranous wings,
And tails that bear the bifid barb of hell.
They come in legions on the north wind's swell,
With obscene clutch that titillates and stings,
Snatching me off on monstrous voyagings
To gray worlds hidden deep in nightmare's well.

Over the jagged peaks of Thok they sweep,
Heedless of all the cries I try to make,
And down the nether pits to that foul lake
Where the puffed shoggoths splash in doubtful sleep.
But oh! if only they would make some sound,
Or wear a face where faces should be found!

Escape from Tomorrow

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG, Jr.

A curious narrative of the world of the future, when Science has enslaved mankind—the story of an artificial brain that rebelled against this enslavement

LIFE seemed suddenly very rich and rewarding to Jon Maal. He arose from smooth metal and threw open the window casement, and stared down at the gray Atlantic.

Far beneath him the sea heaved tumultuously. The rising sun was a great, dull disk bisected by a continuous stream of stratoplanes. Close to him in the shimmering, golden glow gulls wheeled and dipped, their wings skimming the waves.

The glandular injection didn't seem so horrible in that early morning glow. He bared his chest to the sea spume, pulling his spun glass sleeping-robe down over his shoulders, and inhaling deeply.

Today he would live. It was her eyes chiefly, but he liked her hair too, and the way she tingled when he kissed her.

He closed the window, crossed to the surgical pylon, and pulled out the hormone tray. The anterior lobe pituitary extract was slowing him up but he merely frowned slightly when the phial came into view.

Injecting the hormone was a matter of seconds. He bared his arm and plunged the hypodermic in remorselessly. His flesh tingled for an instant, but he was used to that.

He wondered if the extract would alter his expression before the Controllers decided that he had ceased to think anti-socially. Too much of it increased growth even in an adult, lengthened the long bones, coarsened the features. The Controllers had warned him against taking too much. But they had also warned him that he must cease to think anti-socially.

He was still out of step. The Controllers had given him one month to snap back into line. He knew what was wrong with himself, because the ductless glands were his daily companions, and closer to him than breathing.

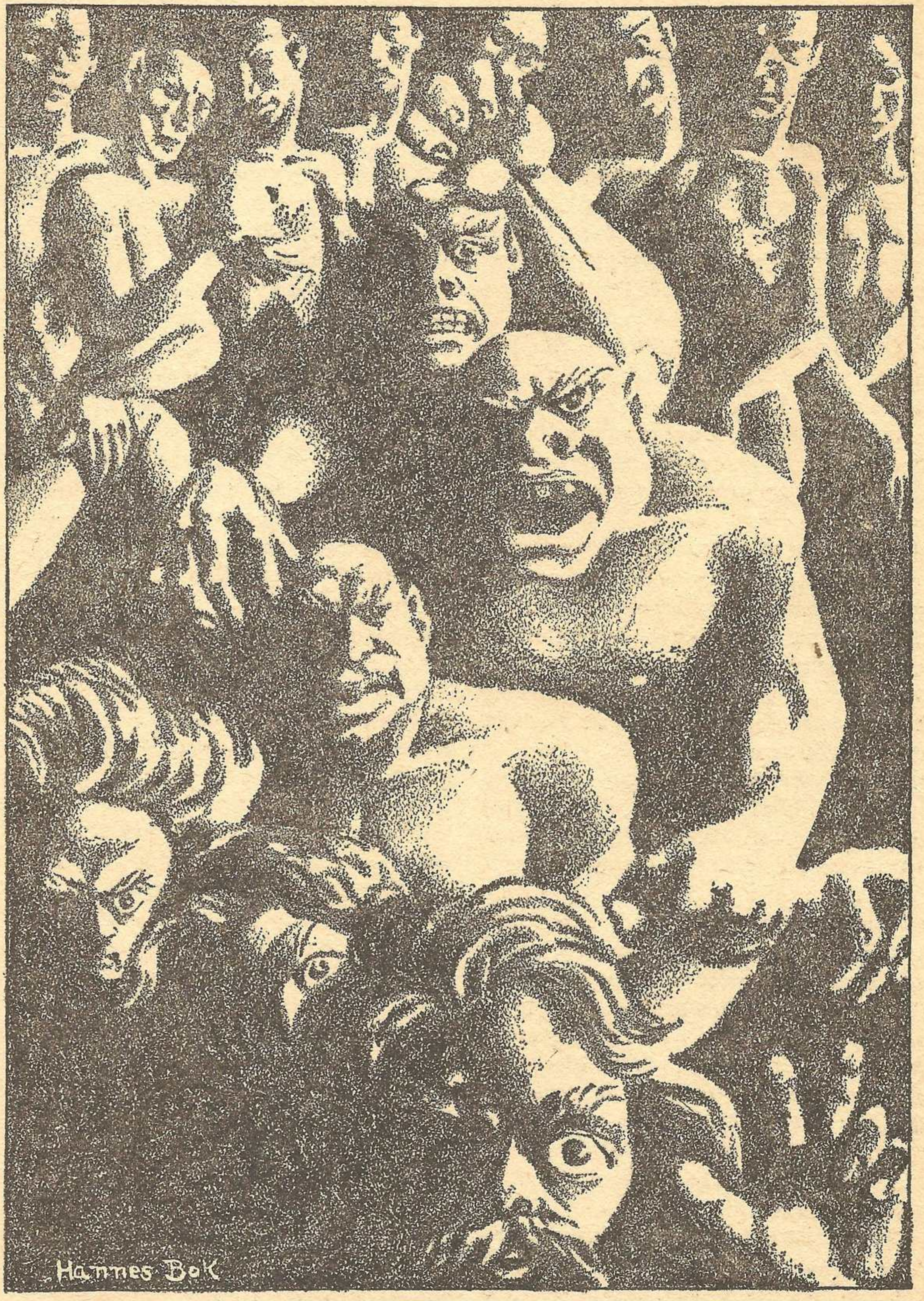
He had been correcting faulty glands for a decade. He didn't enjoy correcting other people's glands. But he had been conditioned from birth to experiment and speculate and brood over glands, and there was nothing he could do about it. In the fifth decade of the Twenty-ninth Century glandular correctionists were made, not born.

The anterior lobe pituitary hormone was the Great Inhibitor. It arrested the secretions of the other glands all over the human body. What he needed was something that would slow him up, and take new life out of him.

But somehow he didn't feel slowed up this morning. He felt wonderful. He shaved with the beard-dissolver jumping in his hand, the while he hummed irrelevantly.

Little snatches of song jiggled between his teeth:

"Oh, she'll rise in the morning,
And swim with the mermen,
And the sea-lions will tickle her toes;
And at sundown we'll sit
Till the lanterns are lit
By a walrus with rings in his nose."



"Kill him! Kill him!" they howled.

No, he wasn't slowed up at all. He was still rebellious, defiant. Despite the Controllers, he would see her and talk to her, and interrupt her work in the middle of the morning—a damnable thing to do, considering. The micro-biological slides were draining the color from her cheeks, but it was terribly important work and she was behind schedule already. The report on those filtrable viruses——

Oh, to perdition with all that! She was a woman and he was a man, and biology could wait.

Shaved, dressed, a windflower gleaming in his tunic, he crossed his retreat cell and threw open the casement again.

THE little solo stratoplane was already occupied. As he gazed down at the ledge which supported it a smile twisted his thinnish lips. A huge, gray-black gull was perched above the pilot chamber, its wings fluttering as it stared through drenching spray toward the rotor-blade at the stern of the little vessel.

It ascended with a flapping of wings as soon as Maal descended. He inhaled the salt air with zest, adjusted his flying-goggles and climbed into the glass-encased cockpit.

The little vessel left the slide in a slow glide, rose steadily above the gray, wind-tossed sea and headed in to the east.

An hour later the coastline of Europe emerged from the thin mist of the upper atmosphere, revealing itself to Maal as a wavering thread of darkness unraveling in the dawn. The British Isles were microscopically visible to the west of the thread, but the continent itself was obscured by a tenuous haze.

Maal followed the coast southward, descending to six thousand feet as he crossed the Pyrenees and zoomed inland over the plains of central Spain.

The plains were dotted with the circular black domes of the research cities. In thick clusters they nestled at the base of purple mountains, and marched in solitary splendor across wide wastes of gleaming sand.

Squatter, more massive than the other tower cities was the edifice toward which he flew, the bright sunlight of the Sierra Morena foothills gleaming on the little vessel's slanting wings, and dripping from its rotor-blades in glittering gobs.

He flew low over the Guadalquivir River, and descended in a slow arc toward the mile-high summit of that somber edifice of science.

It rose solidly from the site of the old Spanish city of Seville, a tiered and ebon meniscus of dome-capped research blocks dedicated to all the natural sciences—biology, anthropology, physics, astrophysics, bio-chemistry, and the more specialized branches of medical research — homotherapy, chemic-psychology.

From low-hanging cirrus clouds the stratoplane descended and settled to rest at the summit of the dome, its rotor-blades gently humming.

Bright motes were dancing before Maal's eyes when he climbed from the little vessel and strode across the dome-bisecting skyport to the massive roof of the upper-level pneumatic drop. He swung low under the roof, holding tightly to a gleaming descent rail until converging air currents sucked him into the depths of the drop. He descended a thousand feet, the vortex swirling him about, and retarding the acceleration at half-second intervals. His heart was thudding like a trip-hammer when he emerged on the biological research level.

He came out on a recreation platform between the clustering cells of the research workers and stared about him, his tall, lean-fleshed body aureoled in cold light.

The platform was crowded. Standing, sitting and lying at full length on smooth

metal were eight men and two women. They looked horribly done up. They were blinking up at the cold light lamps, their faces greenish in the diffuse radiance which poured down from above. Two of the men were sipping menfaline, a dangerous and oppressive drug which silenced screaming nerves. One of the women was playing cribbage with a young lad whose pinched, prematurely aged countenance hinted at sleepless nights and microbe-haunted days.

The other woman was resting on her side at the edge of the platform. She looked repellently like a mummy. Her incredibly aged face was shriveled and cadaverous, her flesh the color of bees-wax.

It was tragic. It was superb—the quiet courage of those relaxing men and women, expending their energies in ceaseless toil, sacrificing the greatness of the world for the greatness of science; sacrificing love and rapture, sunsets, music, moonlight and roses and the serenities of old age; sacrificing——

They had leaped up and were crowding about him. They were all speaking at once, as though his mere presence had unleashed whirlwinds of discourse.

Actually he could have been any privileged outsider. They were simply seeking to relieve pent-up emotions by sharing them with an outsider whom they respected and admired, a privileged glandular correctionist from America who was trusted by the Controllers, who could fly about at will.

"Maal, the thought-plasm has spoken. It has spoken eight words. They have transferred it to Allelan's cell. They wish her to devote all her time to it. Think of it, Maal, the plasm has parroted human speech."

The young lad with the pinched face was tugging at his sleeve. "Maal, they think it is a reflex. The words it uttered were Allelan's words, distorted, but distorted queerly. Allelan asked a question and it replied in the affirmative.

The old woman shrilled: "It thinks. We know it thinks. Why should it not utter intelligent words?"

Maal stared at them aghast. "You mean she has ceased to work on the viruses?"

One of the older men laughed. "Viruses! What do viruses matter? Allelan is a woman of genius. Why shouldn't she study the most complex example of synthetic life-plasm ever created? It won't harm her. After all, Maal, it is encased in glass, it breathes through a respirator and without the aid of a vocalator it could not speak. Not even eight little words, Maal. Eight words—a reflex."

"I do not believe it is a reflex," insisted the aged woman.

MAAL did not dispute the point. He has seen the plasm in its incipiency—a loathsome, gelatinous blob, with a hideous sentience which had chilled him to the marrow of his bones.

But what of that? It was not a horror that could grow indefinitely, like a synthetic ameba, or the chicken hearts which the barbarian science-gropers of the remote Twentieth Century grew with childish impudence in sticky culture mediums.

Why did the thought of his dear one in proximity to that utterly harmless mass of veined jelly chill and appall him? Because the electrical content of that mass exceeded the electrical content of a human brain? Because it *was* a brain, of a sort?

Rubbish! Damn intuitions—damn all elusive, mystical-primitive feelings that created bogies out of thin air!

He said: "I'm sorry she isn't out here with you. Can't you compel her to rest?"

The young lad said: "Go in and talk to her, Maal. She will listen to you."

The woman at the cribbage board smiled. "If she would dance for ten minutes to a corybantic rhythm she would re-

turn refreshed to her work. But she is terribly stubborn, Maal."

Maal nodded grimly, crossed the recreation platform and entered the white, circular cell of the woman who would not rest.

She did not hear him enter. She was bending above the glass-encased thought-plasm, her coppery hair disheveled, her bosom swiftly rising and falling in the cold light.

Excitement became her. Her face, with its flushed capillaries and racial norm features, was biologically glorious. Swiftly Maal crossed to her side, and caught her in his arms. He clasped her tightly, kissed her till she tingled. He could feel the tingling vibrations of her body in his arms.

Breathlessly she struggled, protested: "Maal, darling, all this is so demoralizing. If you wish to make love to me the Controllers will see that you get a psychiatric adviser."

Maal threw back his head and laughed. "I do not wish to be stared at when I kiss you," he said.

"But surely, dear, you wish to be advised! You are behaving like a savage. We all must regress occasionally, because there are steamy jungles in our minds. But unless we are advised when we make love, the pleasure-impulse will—well, undo years of conditioning. Oh, Maal, Maal, what is wrong with you?"

Her vehemence abashed him. He released her and frowned. "I do not know, Allelan. I feel at times like a man of the Twenty-first Century."

"Oh, Maal, how shameless! To want to love *one* woman always, and secretly——"

"Allelan, I am mad, I know. But I would like to——"

"Yes, Maal?"

"To carry you in my arms to some cave on a high, purple mountain, to smother you with kisses beneath the eternal snows."

A tinkling voice said: "Well, why don't you? What's stopping you?"

All the color drained from Maal's face. He swung about, gasping.

The thought-plasm was tremulously in motion. It was twisting about and pulsing violently in its conical container. It looked exactly like an immense black leech clinging to wet glass, its flattish bulk surmounted by thin, nourishment-supplying tubes which arched above it like the coils of a hydra. Both the container itself and the sturdy pylon which supported it were vibrating in harmony with the plasm's feverish throbbings. From the vocalator at the summit of the case a voice rose, tinkling, derisive.

"You do not wish to be stared at! Why, I was closer to you than breathing. I was sharing your thoughts when you kissed her. From your mind alone I have built up a complete picture of the external world."

Maal was staring in horror at the encased plasm. "You mean you are aware of *all* my thoughts?"

"Of course. Wretched thoughts they are, too."

"Then you have telepathic powers?"

"Whoever made me was no slouch," said the plasm. "I have absorbed and correlated all of your cerebral concepts, your memories and desires. Your brain is a cracked, distorted mirror, but it reflects reality in wavering fragments."

Allelan spoke then, her voice tremulous with excitement. "You probed both our minds?"

"Naturally. By correlating the contents of both your minds I have built up a satisfying picture of reality."

"A *complete* picture?"

"Reasonably complete. There are a few gaps, of course, but I have bridged them by deductions of my own."

"But Maal just entered the cell. How could you, so quickly?"

"It was not quickly for me," said the plasm. "I have aged a hundred years since you spoke to me."

"A hundred years of *our* time?"

"Yes."

"But you are here with us on Earth. You are protoplasmic. How could you escape from our time?"

"You would have to be very astute mathematically to grasp the technical aspects of *that,*" said the plasm. "But roughly and loosely speaking, I escape by telescoping the small portion of the space-time continuum which contains me."

"But how, how——"

"By rhythm. My electro-dynamic content is so tremendous it telescopes space-time."

The thought-plasm shuddered violently. "Now I am suffering pain. I am telescoping time too rapidly, thinking too rapidly——"

It was silent an instant, then shrilled. "Oh, how ugly you are!"

ALLELAN turned pale. "Ugly—I?" "I do not mean physically. The men of your race would think you attractive. You are ugly because you are a slave."

The girl drew herself up. Her eyes flashed angrily. "I am not a slave," she said. "I labor unselfishly to glorify Science and the Scientific World State."

The plasm said: "You are putting the cart before the horse. Science should glorify *you.*"

Maal's lips were white. He was trembling uncontrollably. He almost screamed at the encased plasm: "The Controllers would instantly destroy a man holding such views."

The plasm said: "Possibly. But they will not destroy me. I am too costly an experiment."

Allelan said: "You despise Science, then?"

"On the contrary," said the plasm. "I believe that Science is the hope of your world. It's just that you've let it get into the hands of the wrong people. The dull, stupid, beauty-hating people. The dry-as-dust people and not—well, poets, artists, dancers, lovers."

Maal had the uncanny feeling that the brain was staring at him. Its flat, eyeless bulk seemed somehow visually aware of him. He had never experienced anything more disturbing, more terrifying, than that eyeless stare.

"Look at you," said the plasm. "You were an amazing infant, a wonderful child. You were infinitely more sensitive and imaginative than the average run of bipedal brats. You loved the world and everything in it. You had the insatiable, gnawing curiosity, the terrific emotional drive of a great lover of life.

"But the Controllers enslaved you. They made you ashamed of beauty, ashamed of yourself. Being dull, stern, pleasure-hating men and women, they conditioned your reflexes until you were made to feel that Science was an end in itself. You were made to feel that stern renunciation was more desirable than the enrichment of human life through avenues of shared ecstasy and creative leisure.

"Yet despite the Controllers, despite thirty years of joyless toil, the pleasure impulse still torments you. You still secretly desire—oh, maddeningly—to whisper in a woman's ear that she is beautiful.

"I can tap all of your escape-memories, Jon Maal. A few hours ago you were staring at the sea and envying—the gulls. You wanted to skim the waves. You wanted to wheel and dip and ascend fearlessly toward the blazing sun.

"You were stirred to the depths of your being by the sea, Jon Maal. The sea stirs something mysterious, glorious in all men, perhaps because all life came out of the sea. To love the sea is to love life. To hate the sea is to be—less wise than an

amphibian. Why don't you wake up, Jon Maal? Escape to the Everest Colony before the Controllers destroy you."

The plasm paused an instant, then resumed: "They are compelling you to destroy yourself with injections, Jon Maal. They think you are merely a little off balance. They do not know that your adrenal cortex has rebelled completely. It is pouring fiery hormones into your bloodstream.

"If you attempt to inhibit drastically that great Gland of Life you will become an acromegaliac idiot. Your hypophysis cerebri will swell to the size of an egg. Your features will coarsen and you will drool like a schizophrene."

Suddenly the voice seemed to be laughing, to be jeering at Maal. "I can see that you do not believe me. The Controllers will be angry if you do not examine the cretins this morning. You have so much work to do—before idiocy claims you. Go, Jon Maal. Live and die a coward."

Maal's face was livid. He was struggling with a fury such as he had never known. He wanted to smash the container; to seize the gelatinous, dark plasm and twist it to death.

Allelan perceived his agitation. She took his arm, and drew him firmly toward the doorway of the cell.

Maal's face reflected torment, rage, uncertainty, despair. He was reluctant to leave the girl alone with that sinister mass of synthetic jelly. A thought-plasm that sneered at sacred things, that respected neither the Controllers nor the inviolacy of conditioned feelings, was surely a fearful menace to a young and inexperienced girl. It could instil into her mind poisonous heresies and tempt her to renounce hardship and the scoured bowl, toil for toil's sake, hatred of pleasure, hatred of joy.

He had tempted her himself, wildly, recklessly, in a moment of folly. But the plasm was poisonously persuasive. Its specious reasoning was as corruptive as a sunset, or a woman's smile. He hated it, hated it. It had torn veils from his soul, bared his inmost thoughts.

Suddenly he knew what he must do. He must plunge into work to regain his self-respect, to cover up his shame. He dared not meet Allelan's eyes. He was unworthy of her, unworthy of himself. With a sob he turned and stumbled from the cell.

THE men and women on the recreation platform stared at him with startled eyes as he tottered toward the pneumatic drop, the young lad calling after him:

"Why the hurry, Maal? Didn't you like the plasm?"

The old woman shrilled: "Was it a reflex, Maal?"

He turned on the edge of the drop, and stood facing them, his eyes tormented, his pale features glimmering in the cold light. "No, it wasn't a reflex. The plasm is more intelligent than you dream. A great, wonderful, synthetic plasm has been created at last. But it is as alien, as hostile to us as red Betelgeuse. Watch Allelan, guard her from harm."

There was a sudden rush of wildly excited research workers in the direction of Allelan's cell. Maal did not wait for them to disappear into the cell. He swung himself into the drop and was carried swiftly downward, his lean-fleshed body revolving slowly in the swirl of the traveling vortex in the depths of the shaft.

He emerged on the endocrinopathic research level two thousand feet below, and stood blinking at the long cretin block, the little circular cells of the thymus infantiles, the flat oblong which housed the acromegaliacs, and the mottled, dome-like huts of the suprarenal virilists.

The long recreation platform between the cells and the cretin block was filled

with exhausted men and women. Maal advanced swiftly between them, his face grim, his mind intent on his task at last.

He ignored enervated greetings, feeble exclamations of praise. He was the foremost living correctionist. His fame was world-wide, but here it was concentrated in a white blaze that haloed him as he walked. But the people on the recreation platform were too tired, too horribly tired, to do more than salute that blaze and mutter feebly that Jon Maal was great indeed. Some day he would become a Controller—if only his own glands did not betray him. There were a few disturbing rumors, hints that he had surrendered, surreptitiously, to joy. But surely he was competent to cure himself.

When he entered the cretin block he was surprised to observe that all the cretins were running wildly about, their little, stunted bodies quivering with rage.

They were usually sluggish, apathetic, semi-somnolent. With horror he advanced between the struggling, short-armed, thick-tongued little men and stood staring down at the object which had inspired their rage.

His flesh congealed. Lying on the sloping metal floor of the cretin pen was Russan Ange, Maal's co-worker and friend. The young endocrinologist had been beaten, clawed and trampled into insensibility. The infuriated cretins had torn off his laboratory smock and attacked him with their nails. His body was pouring a red flood on the pale, shimmering floor. Several of the cretins were still savagely clinging to him, clawing and kicking in feral rage.

Utter horror engulfed Maal as he stared. He bent, seized one of the little monstrosities by the nape of its neck and lifted it into the air.

Instantly the cretin snarled and glared at him, the doughy flesh of its cheeks quivering with rage, its little slitted eyes malevolently agleam.

"I hate you, Jon Maal. You made me what I am. When I was a helpless infant you took me from the warm, protective embrace of the Birth Machine. You dissected out my thyroid gland. You removed the right lobe, sutured the isthmus, and sliced off the superficial layers of the capsule. You warped my growth."

So profound was Maal's amazement and horror that he forgot for an instant his stricken friend, and the infuriated child-men surrounding him. The little, squirming monstrosity had the brain of an eight-year-old child. It was almost an idiot—a half-witted stammerer of simple nouns and adjectives. Yet now it was spewing forth resentment with the verbal competence of an adult!

With an effort he shook off his horror, dropped the little, writhing monster, and fell to his knees beside his prostrate friend. On all sides of him the cretins were prancing, shrieking, their short, malformed limbs writhing repulsively in the cold light.

"He is guilty too!"

"Yes, yes, he is guilty!"

"He took us from the Birth Machine. He warped our minds. We are laboratory freaks, experimental child-men."

"He is helpless now, completely at our mercy. Drag him down, kill him."

"Wait, wait, wait. He is the Law. He is the Ringer of the Bell."

"Kill him, kill him."

"No, wait. The Bell is our life. Without it we would be lost in the terrible dark."

The little monsters fell suddenly to wrangling and disputing amongst themselves.

They bared their teeth at one another, and circled menacingly about.

MAAL leapt swiftly to his feet. He was appallingly aware that his power over them was waning. But they were reluctant to attack him because they asso-

ciated that power with an immense, impersonal force.

The great conditioning-bell brought them light and security and warmth. When it rang out sonorously they were stirred to the depths of their beings.

Swiftly Maal retreated across the pen, between menacing, swarming baroques scarcely larger than five-year-old children. Out on the recreation platform he staggered, white-faced, trembling, and moved along the outer wall of the block toward the ten-foot bell.

The bell stood on a massive pedestal between the cretin pen and the circular huts of the thymus infantiles. He was within twenty feet of it when he saw *the others*.

They had flocked from their cells and circular domes, and were converging menacingly on the startled research workers.

In horror Maal stopped in his tracks and stared straight before him. Moving across the recreation platform were creatures so monstrously deformed that they seemed like the conjurations of some bad brain. Stooped and glary-eyed acromegaliacs with ape-like jaws and bushy eyebrows, their spade-like hands outspread in quivering rage. Virile infants two feet tall, with reddish beards descending to their navels, their lantern-jawed faces distorted with hate. Frail, thymus-activated adults looking like lean hairless vampires in the cold light, their teeth bared as they advanced with infantile toddlings across the platform.

The air was filled with bestial grunts, screams and imprecations.

"We could have been normal too! But they distorted us from birth."

"Let us kill, kill, kill!"

"They wanted to observe and study us. When you hear the bell it will be—time to sleep and dream. Oh, merciful Mother Machine, what have they done to us?"

"I am four years old. I have the mind and strength of a man. They stimulated my adrenal cortex. I am a little, strong man. A *little* man. Can they fathom the depths of my despair? No woman would even look at me. I am eighteen inches tall and never, never, never may I know the wondrous solace of a woman's arms about me."

"Kill, kill, let us destroy the destroyers! I am an ape. Look at me. I am not human at all. My hands are padded, my jaw protrudes. My ears are hideously hypertrophied; my lips swollen. Oh, how I envy you, little man! I am not even human."

"Kill, kill, kill!"

Maal swayed backward against the great bell in blind terror. Instinctively his hands grasped the striker, and swung it with vigor, released it, swung it again.

Bong, bong, bong.

Bong, bong, bong.

The effect of that sudden, sonorous tolling was cataclysmic. The glandular monstrosities stiffened, swayed and groveled. All over the platform they went rigid, sinking to their knees or flattening themselves in attitudes of abject submission.

The rage and hate seeped from their features. They moaned blissfully and wept.

"Oh, sweet Bell, dear Bell, bringer of repose."

"We kneel before you, oh Bell, for you are all-powerful, all-merciful."

"When you ring, oh Bell, my hunger is satisfied. You bring peace and light."

"The darkness dissolves when you ring, oh Bell."

Maal swayed a little when he released the striker. He raised his hand, wiped sweat from his brow. He had never known the great bell to fail.

The glandular baroques had been conditioned from birth to respond submissively to its sonorous tolling. Every pleasure, every gratification had been accompanied by a tolling of that bell; from birth —every fugitive joy. And now the bell

alone sufficed. External gratifications were no longer necessary. The bell itself was food and drink, warmth and shelter, joy and peace.

It soothed them, calmed them, put them to sleep. It brought satiety and blissful dreams. They worshipped it. It was the only god they knew.

Yet Maal had had misgivings this time. Some terrible, obscure force was at work. The cretins had been animated by an intelligence greater than their own. They had been whipped into a rebellious frenzy by something—suddenly Maal paled—by some great, disembodied intelligence that could roam about at will!

Maal did not stop to reassure the still terrified research workers. He simply turned and ran toward the pneumatic drop, shouting frantic warnings as he approached the edge of the platform.

"Keep ringing the bell! They may awake again. Get Russan out of the cretin pen, quickly!"

He swung himself into the descent shaft and embraced the vortex. He dropped a thousand feet, hurtled through a horizontal transfer tube, and ascended through the central pneumatic lift to the micro-biological level, his face losing its paleness as the vortex spun him about.

HIS temples were pounding furiously when he emerged from the lift and raced across the recreation platform toward Allelan's cell. His one thought was to destroy the plasm; to smash the container and crush the loathsome jelly before it sent its mind on a longer journey, disrupting, destroying civilization itself.

He entered the cell with that one thought needling and puckering his brain to a focus of blind, insensate rage. For a second his fury dizzied him, misting his vision. He stood swaying in the doorway, aware only of a slender, white form whirling about in the center of the cell.

Suddenly his vision cleared and he sucked in a long, shuddering breath. The whirling figure was Allelan. *Allelan was dancing*. She was gyrating about on her toes, her pale arms upraised in rapture, her long, rust-colored hair sheening in the cold light.

From the vocalator came a tinkling, apologetic voice. "Maal, I am sorry that the cretins attacked you. My hatred of your wretched civilization was so intense that my thoughts flowed out from me in concentric waves—thoughts laden with furious indignation. The cretins and the other poor glandular cripples were stirred by my thoughts. Deep within their minds there is a center of awareness that is wiser than you dream.

"Even idiots are subconsciously wise, Maal. I could not help my thoughts flowing out."

"You could not help——"

"Steady, Maal. I know what you are thinking. I will influence your minds too—the minds of all 'normal' men and women. Well, I have done so a little. I have released Allelan from bondage. She was so near to me that I could break down her resistance swiftly.

"She now hates everything that I hate—ugliness, cruelty, contempt for joy. Unceasing toil, and needless self-denial. The immense cruelty of scientific techniques perversely used to throttle joy, and crush the human spirit.

"And she loves—music and laughter, compassion and joy, all the great beauty of the world, Maal, the wheeling majesty of the stars. She loves Science, Maal—true Science, which is another name for passionate curiosity, for infinite wonder and surmise.

"Are you familiar with the ancient poets, Maal? A lonely boy who lived far back in the Nineteenth Century, an idle, foolish dreamer whose name I have forgotten once wrote:

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

"That's true science, Maal. That's what Allelan is experiencing now."

Allelan stopped dancing suddenly. She stared at Maal wide-eyed, her hand going to her throat.

Maal groaned: "Allelan, are you mad?"

"No, not mad," said the plasm. "Sane at last. Gloriously, deliriously sane. I could make you sane too, Maal. If only I had time——"

Allelan spoke then. Her voice was tremulous with compassion. "It is dying, Jon."

The plasm said: "Yes, I am dying. I have telescoped time too rapidly. Immense, terrible rhythms are tearing me apart."

Suddenly Maal was aware of the plasm's eyeless gaze upon him. "Perhaps I *shall* have time, Maal. You are stubborn and strong-willed, and a fool. But for Allelan's sake I will try to free you."

Too late Maal attempted to tear his gaze from the violently quivering plasm. He felt a lightness, a giddiness sweeping over him. The walls of the cell seemed to quiver and expand. The cold lights were altering too, coalescing into bands of glimmering whiteness which widened and widened until they filled all space about him.

It seemed to him that the very floor was dissolving, dwindling away beneath his feet. Awfully for a moment he seemed to be standing on empty air, amidst blinding shafts of light that continued to widen about him.

Someone was tugging at his arm. "Jon, Jon, wake up. The plasm is dead. It exploded, shattering the glass."

Maal stared dully. "Allelan? Allelan?"

"Yes, dear. Allelan."

The floor was returning. He could feel the cold metal against his soles. The bands of light were splitting into luminous segments, were receding in globular clusters across the cell.

"Allelan?"

"Yes, dear."

"It seems to me that I have been living in darkness, underground, far underground. A mummy, Allelan. Shriveled, bent, crippled with toil."

"I know, Jon. And now you want to sing and dance. It changed me swiftly like that too."

"Allelan, the Everest colony! The eternal snows. We thought them mad. We let them go because we thought them mad criminals."

"I know, dear."

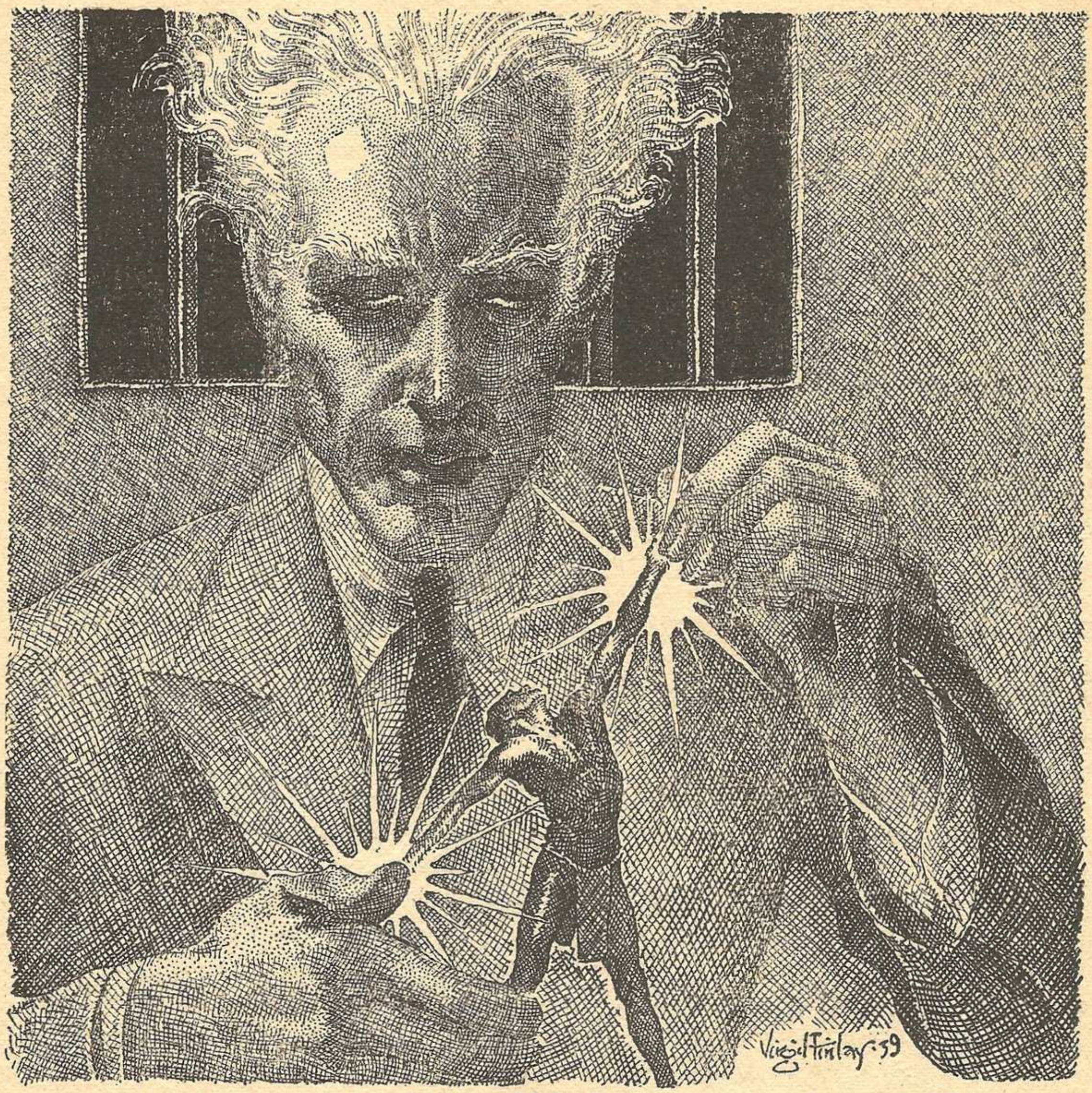
"They were men and women of heroic mold."

Allelan nodded, her eyes glowing. Rapturously to her inward gaze there arose a vision of golden domes and purple vineyards. She saw the stratoplanes descending, the mists on the mountainside, the tiered streets of a populous city thronged with men and women who had sought refuge from tyranny beneath the eternal summit of Earth's highest peak.

"We shall join them, Allelan."

Suddenly he was moving toward her. His arm went out and encircled her waist. Hesitantly at first and then with utter recklessness they began to dance.

Breast to breast they waltzed about, under lights that glimmered softly—cheek to cheek and breast to breast, their eyes shining with happiness at last.



"Be the greatest sculptor in the world, be the greatest surgeon, be a creator!"

Mannikins of Horror

By ROBERT BLOCH

Colin was a sculptor, who combined in himself the attributes of Pygmalion and Frankenstein—a tale of a dread doom

COLIN had been making the little clay figures for a long time before he noticed that they moved. He had been making them for years there in his room, using hundreds of pounds of clay, a little at a time.

The doctors thought he was crazy; Doctor Starr in particular, but then Doctor

Starr was a quack and a fool. He couldn't understand why Colin didn't go into the workshop with the other men and weave baskets, or make rattan chairs. That was useful "occupational therapy," not foolishness like sitting around and modeling little clay figures year in and year out. Doctor Starr always talked like that, and sometimes Colin longed to smash his smug, fat face. "Doctor" indeed!

Colin knew what he was doing. He had been a doctor once: Doctor Edgar Colin, surgeon—and brain-surgeon at that. He had been a renowned specialist, an authority, in the days when young Starr was a bungling, nervous interne. What irony! Now Colin was shut up in a madhouse, and Doctor Starr was his keeper. It was a grim joke. But mad though he was, Colin knew more about psychopathology than Starr would ever learn.

Colin had gone up with the Red Cross base at Ypres; he had come down miraculously unmangled, but his nerves were shot. For months after that final blinding flash of shells Colin had lain in a coma at the hospital, and when he had recovered they said he had *dementia praecox*. So they sent him here, to Starr.

Colin asked for clay the moment he was up and around. He wanted to work. The long, lean hands, skilled in delicate cranial surgery, had not lost their cunning—their cunning that was like a hunger for still more difficult tasks. Colin knew he would never operate again; he wasn't Doctor Colin any more, but a psychotic patient. Still he had to work. Knowing what he did about mental disorders, his mind was tortured by introspection unless he kept busy. Modeling was the way out.

As a surgeon he had often made casts, busts, anatomical figures copied from life to aid his work. It had been an engrossing hobby, and he knew the organs, even the complicated structure of the nervous system, quite perfectly. Now he worked in clay. He started out making ordinary little figures in his room. Tiny mannikins, five or six inches high, were molded accurately from memory. He discovered an immediate knack for sculpture, a natural talent to which his delicate fingers responded.

Starr had encouraged him at first. His coma ended, his stupor over, he had been revivified by this new-found interest. His early clay figures gained a great deal of attention and praise. His family sent him funds; he bought instruments for modeling. On the table in his room he soon placed all the tools of a sculptor. It was good to handle instruments again; not knives and scalpels, but things equally wonderful: things that cut and carved and reformed bodies. Bodies of clay, bodies of flesh—what did it matter?

It hadn't mattered at first, but then it did. Colin, after months of painstaking effort, grew dissatisfied. He toiled eight, ten, twelve hours a day, but he was not pleased—he threw away his finished figures, crumpled them into brown balls which he hurled to the floor with disgust. His work wasn't good enough.

The men and women looked like men and women in miniature. They had muscles, tendons, features, even epidermal layers and tiny hairs Colin placed on their small bodies. But what good was it? A fraud, a sham. Inside they were solid clay, nothing more—and that was wrong. Colin wanted to make complete miniature mortals, and for that he must study.

IT WAS then that he had his first clash with Doctor Starr, when he asked for anatomy books. Starr laughed at him, but he managed to get permission.

So Colin learned to duplicate the bony structure of man, the organs, the quite intricate mass of arteries and veins. Finally, the terrific triumph of learning glands, nerve-structure, nerve-endings. It took

years, during which Colin made and destroyed a thousand clay figures. He made clay skeletons, placed clay organs in tiny bodies. Delicate, precise work. Mad work, but it kept him from thinking. He got so he could duplicate the forms with his eyes closed. At last he assembled his knowledge, made clay skeletons and put the organs in them, then allowed for pin-pricked nervous system, blood vessels, glandular organization, dermic structure, muscular tissue—everything.

And at last he started making brains. He learned every convolution of the cerebrum and cerebellum; every nerve-ending, every wrinkle in the gray matter of the cortex. Study, study, disregard the laughter, disregard the thoughts, disregard the monotony of long years imprisoned; study, study, make the perfect figures, be the greatest sculptor in the world, be the greatest surgeon in the world, be a creator.

Doctor Starr dropped in every so often and subtly tried to discourage such fanatical absorption. Colin wanted to laugh in his face. Starr was afraid this work was driving Colin madder than ever. Colin knew it was the one thing that kept him sane.

Because lately, when he wasn't working, Colin felt things happen to him. The shells seemed to explode in his head again, and they were doing things to his brain—making it come apart, unravel like a ball of twine. He was disorganizing. At times he seemed no longer a person but a thousand persons, and not one body, but a thousand distinct and separate structures, as in the clay men. He was not a unified human being, but a heart, a lung, a liver, a blood-stream, a hand, a leg, a head—all distinct, all growing more and more disassociated as time went on. His brain and body were no longer an entity. Everything within him was falling apart, leading a life of its own. Nerves no longer co-ordinated with blood. Arm didn't always follow leg. He recalled his medical training, the hints that each bodily organ lived an individual life.

Each cell was a unit, for that matter. When death came, you didn't die all at once. Some organs died before others, some cells went first. But it shouldn't happen in life. Yet it did. That shell-shock, whatever it was, had resulted in a slow unraveling. And at night Colin would lie and toss, wondering how soon his body would fall apart—actually fall apart into twitching hands and throbbing heart and wheezing lungs; separated like the fragments torn from a spoiled clay doll.

He had to work to keep sane. Once or twice he tried to explain to Doctor Starr what was happening, to ask for special observation—not for his sake, but because perhaps science might learn something from data on his case. Starr had laughed, as usual. As long as Colin was healthy, exhibited no morbid or homicidal traits, he wouldn't interfere. Fool!

Colin worked. Now he was building bodies—real bodies. It took days to make one; days to finish a form complete with chiseled lips, delicate aural and optical structures correct, tiny fingers and toe-nails perfectly fitted. But it kept him going. It was fascinating to see a table full of little miniature men and women!

Doctor Starr didn't think so. One afternoon he came in and saw Colin bending over three little lumps of clay with his tiny knives, a book open before him.

"What are you doing there?" he asked.

"Making the brains for my men," Colin answered.

"Brains? Good God!"

Starr stooped. Yes, they *were* brains! Tiny, perfect reproductions of the human brain, perfect in every detail, built up layer on layer with unconnected nerve-endings, blood vessels to attach them in craniums of clay!

"What——" Starr exclaimed.

"Don't interrupt. I'm putting in the thoughts," Colin said.

Thoughts? That was sheer madness, beyond madness. Starr stared aghast. Thoughts in brains for clay men?

Starr wanted to say something then. But Colin looked up and the afternoon sun streamed into his face so that Starr could see his eyes. And Starr crept out quietly under that stare; that stare which was almost—*god-like*.

The next day Colin noticed that the clay men moved.

2

"FRANKENSTEIN," Colin mumbled. "I am Frankenstein." His voice sank to a whisper. "I'm not like Frankenstein. I'm like God. Yes, like God."

He sank to his knees before the table-top. The two little men and women nodded gravely at him. He could see thumbprints in their flesh, his thumbprints, where he'd smoothed out the skulls after inserting the brains. And yet they lived!

"Why not? Who knows anything about creation, about life? The human body, physiologically, is merely a mechanism adapted to react. Duplicate that mechanism *perfectly* and why won't it live? Life is electricity, perhaps. Well, so is thought. Put thought into perfect simulacra of humanity and they will live."

Colin whispered to himself, and the figures of clay looked up and nodded in eery agreement.

"Besides, I'm running down. I'm losing my identity. Perhaps a part of my vital substance has been transferred, incorporated in these new bodies. My—my disease—that might account for it. But I can find out."

Yes, he could find out. If these figures were animated by Colin's life, then he could control their actions, just as he controlled the actions of his own body. He created them, gave them a part of his life. They *were* him.

He crouched there in the barred room, thinking, concentrating. And the figures moved. The two men moved up to the two women, grasped their arms, and danced a sedate minuet to a mentally-hummed tune; a grotesque dance of little clay dolls, a horrid mockery of life.

Colin closed his eyes, sank back trembling. It was true!

The effort of concentration had covered him with perspiration. He panted, exhausted. His own body felt weakened, drained. And why not? He had directed four minds at once, performed actions with four bodies. It was too much. But it was real.

"I'm God," he muttered. "God."

But what to do about it? He was a lunatic, shut away in an asylum. How to use his power?

"Must experiment, first," he said aloud.

"What?"

Doctor Starr had entered, unobserved. Colin cast a hasty glance at the table, found to his relief that the mannikins were motionless.

"I was just observing that I must experiment with my clay figures," he said, hastily.

The doctor arched his eyebrows. "Really? Well, you know, Colin, I've been thinking. Perhaps this work here isn't so good for you. You look peaked, tired. I'm inclined to think you're hurting yourself with all this; afraid hereafter I'll have to forbid your modeling work."

"Forbid it?"

Doctor Starr nodded.

"But you can't—just when I've—I mean, you can't! It's all I've got, all that keeps me going, alive. Without it I'll—"

"Sorry."

"You can't."

"I'm the doctor, Colin. Tomorrow we'll take away the clay. I'm giving you

a chance to find yourself, man, to live again——"

Colin had never been violent until now. The doctor was surprised to find lunatic fingers clawing at his throat, digging for the jugular vein with surgically skilled fingers. He went over backward with a bang, and fought the madman until the aroused guards came and dragged Colin off. They tossed him on his bunk and the doctor left.

IT WAS dark when Colin emerged from a world of hate. He lay alone. They had gone, the day had gone. Tomorrow they and the day would return, taking away his figures—his beloved figures. His *living* figures! Would they crumple them up and destroy them, destroy actual *life?* It was murder!

Colin sobbed bitterly, as he thought of his dreams. What he had meant to do with his power—why, there were no limits! He could have built dozens, hundreds of figures, learned to concentrate mentally until he could operate a horde of them at will. He would have created a little world of his own; a world of creatures subservient to him. Creatures for companionship, for his slaves. Fashioning different types of bodies, yes, and different types of brains. He might have reared a private little civilization.

And more. He might have created a race. A new race. A race that bred. A race that was developed to aid him. A hundred tiny figures, hands trained, teeth filed, could saw through his bars. A hundred tiny figures to attack the guards, to free him. Then out into the world with an army of clay; a tiny army, but one that could burrow deeply in the earth, travel hidden and unseen into high places. Perhaps, some day, a world of little clay men, trained by him. Men that didn't fight stupid wars to drive their fellows mad. Men without the brutal emotions of savages, the hungers and lusts of beasts. Wipe out flesh! Substitute godly clay!

But it was over. Perhaps he was mad, dreaming of these things. It was over. And one thing he knew: without the clay he would be madder still. Tonight he could feel it, feel his body slipping. His eyes, staring at the moonlight, didn't seem to be a part of his own form any longer. They were watching from the floor, or from over in the corner. His lips moved, but he didn't feel his face. His voice spoke, and it seemed to come from the ceiling rather than from his throat. He was crumpling himself, like a mangled clay figure.

The afternoon's excitement had done it. The great discovery, and then Starr's stupid decision. Starr! He'd caused all this. He was responsible. He'd drive him to madness, to a horrid, unnamed mentally-diseased state he was too blind to comprehend. Starr had sentenced him to death. If only he could sentence Starr!

Perhaps he could.

What was that? The thought came from far away—inside his head, outside his head. He couldn't place his thoughts any more—body going to pieces like this. What was it now?

Perhaps he could kill Starr.

How?

Find out Starr's plans, his ideas.

How?

Send a clay man.

What?

Send a clay man. This afternoon you concentrated on bringing them to life. They live. Animate one. He'll creep under the door, walk down the hall, listen to Starr. If you animate the body, *you'll* hear Starr.

Thoughts buzzing so . . .

But how can I do that? Clay is clay. Clay feet would wear out long before they got down the hall and back. Clay ears—perfect though they may be—would shat-

ter under the conveyance of actual sounds.

Think. Make the thoughts stop buzzing. There is a way. . . .

YES, there was a way! Colin gasped. His insanity, nis doom, were his salvation! If his faculties were being disorganized, and he had the power of projecting himself into clay, why not project special faculties into the images? Project his hearing into the clay ears, by concentration? Remodel clay feet until they were identical replicas of his own, then concentrate on walking? His body, his senses, were falling apart. Put them into clay!

He laughed as he lit the lamp, seized a tiny figure and began to recarve the feet. He kicked off his own shoes, studied carefully, looked at charts, worked, laughed, worked—and it was done. Then he lay back on the bed in darkness, thinking.

The clay figure was climbing down from the table. It was sliding down the leg, reaching the floor. Colin felt his feet tingle with shock as they hit the floor. Yes! *His* feet.

The floor trembled, thundered. Of course. Tiny vibrations, unnoticed by humans, audible to clay ears. *His* ears.

Another part of him—Colin's actual eyes—saw the little creeping figure scuttle across the floor, saw it squeeze under the door. Then darkness, and Colin sweated on the bed, concentrating.

Clay Colin could not see. He had no eyes. But instinct, memory guided.

Colin walked in the giant world. The foot came out, the foot of Colossus. Colin edged closer to the woodwork as the trampling monster came down, crashing against the floor with monstrous vibrations.

Then Colin walked. He found the right door by instinct—the fourth door down. He crept under, stepped up a foot onto the carpet. At least, the grassy sward seemed a foot high. His feet ached as the cutting rug bit sword-blades into his soles. From above, the thunder of voices. Great titans roared and bellowed a league in the air.

Doctor Starr and Professor Jerris. Jerris was all right; he had vision. But Starr . . .

Colin crouched under the mighty barrier of the armchair, crept up the mountainside to the great peaks of Starr's bony knees. He strained to distinguish words in the bellowing.

"This man Colin is done for, I tell you. Incipient breakdown. Tried to attack me this afternoon when I told him I was removing his clay dolls. You'd think they were live pets of his. Perhaps he thinks so."

Colin clung to the pants-cloth below the knees. Blind, he could not know if he would be spied; but he must cling close, high, to catch words in the tumult.

Jerris was speaking.

"Perhaps he thinks so. Perhaps they are. At any rate—what are you doing with a doll on your leg?"

Doll on your leg? Colin!

Colin on the bed in his room tried desperately to withdraw life; tried to withdraw hearing and sensation from the limbs of his clay self, but too late. There was an incredulous roar; something reached out and grasped him, and then there was an agonizing squeeze. . . .

Colin sank back in bed, sank back into a world of red, swimming light.

3

SUN shone in Colin's face. He sat up. Had he dreamed?

"Dreamed?" he whispered.

He whispered again. "Dreamed?"

He couldn't hear. He was deaf.

His ears, his hearing faculty, had been focussed on the clay figure, and it was destroyed last night when Starr crushed it. Now he was deaf!

The thought was insanity. Colin swung

himself out of bed in panic, then toppled to the floor.

He couldn't walk!

The feet were on the clay figure, he'd willed it, and now it was crushed. He couldn't walk!

Disassociation of his faculties, his members. It was real, then! His ears, his legs, had in some mysterious way been lent vitally to that crushed clay man. Now he had lost them. Thank heaven he hadn't sent his eyes!

But it was horror to stare at the stumps where his legs had been; horror to feel in his ears for bony ridges no longer there. It was horror and it was hate. Starr had done this. Killed a man, crippled him.

Right then and there Colin planned it all. He had the power. He could animate his clay figures, and then give them a *special* life as well. By concentrating, utilizing his peculiar physical disintegration, he could put part of himself into clay. Very well, then. Starr would pay.

Colin stayed in bed. When Starr came in the afternoon, he did not rise. Starr mustn't see his legs, or realize that he could no longer hear. Starr was talking, perhaps about the clay figure he'd found last night, clinging to his leg; the clay figure he'd destroyed. Perhaps he spoke of destroying these clay figures that he now gathered up, together with the rest of the clay. Perhaps he asked after Colin's health; why he was in bed.

Colin feigned lethargy, the introspection of the schizoid. And Starr gathered up the rest of the clay and went away.

Then Colin smiled. He pulled out the tiny clay form from under the sheets; the one he'd hidden there. It was a perfect man, with unusually muscled arms, and very long finger-nails. The teeth, too, were very good. But the figure was incomplete. It had no face.

Colin began to work, very fast there as the twilight gathered. He brought a mirror and as he worked on the figure he smiled at himself as though sharing a secret jest with someone—or something. Darkness fell, and still Colin worked from memory alone; worked delicately, skilfully, like an artist, like a creator, breathing life into clay. Life into clay. . . .

4

"I TELL YOU the damned thing *was* alive!" Jerris shouted. He'd lost his temper at last, forgot his superior in office. "I saw it!"

Starr smiled.

"It was clay, and I crushed it," he answered. "Let's not argue any longer."

Jerris shrugged. Two hours of speculation. Tomorrow he'd see Colin himself, find out what the man was doing. He was a genius, even though mad. Starr was a fool. He'd evidently aggravated Colin to the point of physical illness, taking away his clay.

Jerris shrugged again. The clay—and last night, the memory of that tiny, perfectly formed figure clinging to Starr's pants-leg where nothing could have *stuck* for long. It had *clung*. And when Starr crushed it, there had been a framework of clay bones protruding, and viscera hung out, and it had writhed—or seemed to writhe, in the light.

"Stop shrugging and go to bed," Starr chuckled. It was a matter-of-fact chuckle, and Jerris heeded it. "Quit worrying about a nut. Colin's crazy, and from now on I'll treat him as such. Been patient long enough. Have to use force. And—I wouldn't talk about clay figures any longer if I were you."

The tone was a command. Jerris gave a final shrug of acquiescence and left the room.

Starr switched off the light and prepared to doze there at the night-desk. Jerris knew his habits.

Jerris walked down the hall. Strange, how this business upset him! Seeing the clay figures this afternoon had really made him quite sick. The work was so perfect, so wonderfully accurate in miniature! And yet the forms were clay, just clay. They hadn't moved as Starr kneaded them in his fists. Clay ribs smashed in, and clay eyes popped from actual sockets and rolled over the table-top—nauseous! And the little clay hairs, the shreds of clay skin so skilfully overlaid! A tiny dissection, this destruction. Colin, mad or sane, was a genius.

Jerris shrugged, this time to himself. What the devil! He blinked awake.

And then he saw—it.

Like a rat. A little rat. A little rat scurrying down the hall, upright, on two legs instead of four. A little rat without fur, without a tail. A little rat that cast the perfect tiny shadow of—a *man!*

It had a face, and it looked up. Jerris almost fancied he saw its eyes *flash* at him. It was a little brown rat made of clay—no, it was a little clay man like those Colin made. A little clay man, running swiftly toward Starr's door, crawling under it. A perfect little clay man, alive!

Jerris gasped. He was crazy, like the rest, like Colin. And yet it had run into Starr's office, it was moving, it had eyes and a face and it was clay.

JERRIS acted. He ran — not toward Starr's door, but down the hall to Colin's room. He felt for keys; he had them. It was a long moment before he fumbled at the lock and opened the door, another before he found the lights, and switched them on.

And it was a terribly long moment he spent staring at the thing on the bed—the thing with stumpy legs, lying sprawled back in a welter of sculpturing-tools, with a mirror flat across its chest, staring up at a sleeping face that was not a face.

The moment *was* long. Screaming must have come from Starr's office for perhaps thirty seconds before Jerris heard it. Screaming turned into moans and still Jerris stared into the face that was not a face; the face that changed before his eyes, melting away, scratched away by invisible hands into a pulp.

It happened like that. Something wiped out the face of the man on the bed, tore the head from the neck. And the moaning rose from down the hall. . . .

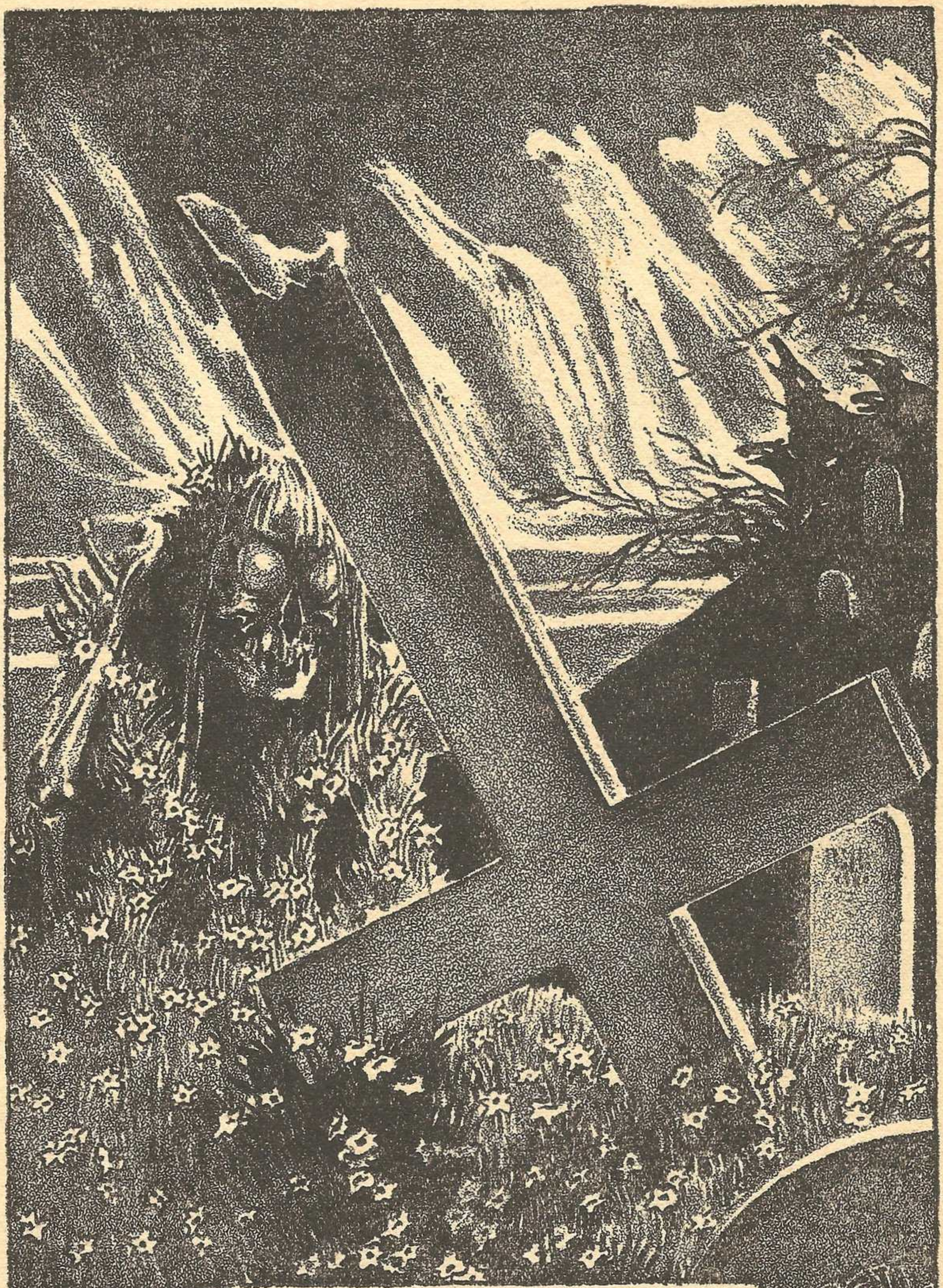
Jerris ran. He was the first to reach the office, by a good minute. He saw what he expected to see.

Starr lay back in his chair, throat flung to one side. The little clay man had done its job and Doctor Starr was quite dead. The tiny brown figure had dug perfectly-formed talons into the sleeping throat, and with surgical skill applied talons, and perhaps teeth, to the jugular at precisely the most fatal spot in the vein. Starr died before he could dislodge the diabolically clever image of a man, but his last wild clawing had torn away the face and head.

Jerris ripped the monstrous mannikin off and crushed it; crushed it to a brown pulp between his fingers before others arrived in the room.

Then he stooped down to the floor and picked up the torn head with the mangled face, the miniature, carefully-modeled face that grinned in triumph, grinned in death.

Jerris shrugged himself into a shiver as he crushed into bits the little clay face of Colin, the creator.



Deep night, dark night, the silent of the night . . .
The time when screech-owls cry, and ban-dogs howl,
And spirits walk, and ghosts break up their graves.
—Shakespeare: *King Henry VI.*

Dead Man's Schooner

By ANDRÉ LINVILLE

A short and unusual story, an arresting and interest-gripping tale of a radio broadcast, and a sailor who played the Flute of Death

"HELLO! . . . Hello! . . . This is the radio station of the liner *Acadia,* of the Cunard Line. Lieutenant Howard speaking. . . Hello!. . . Hello! . . . This is the radio station of the liner *Acadia,* en route from New York to Southampton.

"We are now southeast of the Grand Bank of Newfoundland, at 42 degrees north latitude and approximately 52 degrees west longitude.

"Everything is going well on board, except that there is a heavy fog which is slowing us up considerably.

"Hello! . . . Hello! . . . This is the radio station of the liner *Acadia.*

"We are about to broadcast the concert which is to be given on board for the benefit of the widows of our sailors.

"The expense of the concert has been generously taken care of by Mr. Ralph Glennor, the well-known New York manufacturer, who we understand is giving a reception at this time in his Fifth Avenue mansion.

"We have the honor to number among our guests on this trip, Duke Philippe de Ballancourt du Saussaye and his bride. The Duchess was, until her marriage a few days ago, Miss Edith Glennor, daughter of Mr. Ralph Glennor.

"In a few moments we will turn the microphone over to the Duchess, so that she can talk to her family and friends. But we wish to know first whether we are being heard distinctly in New York. We shall now tune in to the wave length of Mr. Ralph Glennor's private station, and listen.

"Hello! . . . Hello . . . This is the radio station of the liner *Acadia.* We are listening. . ."

"HELLO! . . . Hello! . . . This is Ralph Glennor's private station in New York City. Ralph Glennor himself speaking.

"Hello! . . . Hello! . . . We have been hearing everything Lieutenant Howard said, very distinctly, and we are glad to learn that the *Acadia* is having a good passage.

"We hope that the fog that is slowing you up will lift soon.

"Here in our drawing-room, in front of the loud-speaker, are all our good friends from all over New York City. They are all anxious to hear your dear voice, Edith, my daughter.

"Hello! I hope you can hear me well, my dear little girl. I am sending you our best love, sweetheart. Give our kindest regards to your husband. I hope he's well and happy.

"Hello, Edith! . . . Now we want to hear from *you.* We are listening."

"HELLO! . . . Hello! . . . This is the radio station on the liner *Acadia.* Lieutenant Howard, station chief, speaking.

"We heard everything Mr. Ralph Glennor said, and it was all perfectly distinct.

"Now I will turn the microphone over

to the Duchess de Ballancourt du Saussaye."

"Hello! . . . Hello! . . . This is Edith speaking. It's wonderful that I can talk to you like this, sweet old Daddy. Philippe is happy about it, too. Would you believe that we haven't had a quarrel yet since we were married? It has been all of four days, now!

"Hello, Daddy! . . . It's a shame I can't hear your voice right back, so I could tell if you are hearing everything I say perfectly well. But it's awfully nice to be able to talk to you at all, away out at sea, hundreds of miles away from you.

"I can see you all sitting around in the drawing-room in front of the loud-speaker. I know Clara Whitechurch has a wonderful new gown on. Give her a kiss for me, won't you, Daddy—sweet Clara! And tell her I will do all the things for her in Paris she told me to.

"Hello! . . . I just can't wait to get to Paris and get acquainted with Philippe's family.

"We've been having such a nice passage, but there is a horrid fog just now, as Lieutenant Howard told you. It's just like pea soup, you might say.

"Can you hear that roaring sound: *Muhh—uhh—uhh—uhh?* That's the boat's siren, to warn any other boats that might be in danger of running into us. I'm sure you can hear it, can't you? It makes an awful noise here on board, but they say that in the fog it can't be heard far away.

"Then there's a big bell on board that tolls when the siren isn't blowing. Listen, Daddy—can't you hear the bell, too?—*Dong, ding, dong, ding. . . .*

"It gets on my nerve a little, I must say. But now I can hear the orchestra tuning up. You are going to listen to our fine concert, now. After the concert they'll play jazz, and we are going to dance all night.

"Now I'll give my place in front of the microphone back to Lieutenant Howard."

"Hello! . . . Hello! . . . This is Lieutenant Howard, chief of the radio service on the liner *Acadia.*

"I am extremely sorry, ladies and gentlemen, that I can't guarantee you perfect reception of our concert this evening, and I hope the Honorable Ralph Glennor and his guests will excuse us if they don't hear well. The siren and the alarm bell are making such a hubdub that I know our music will be hard to hear. Of course there is nothing we can do about it, for the fog is getting thicker and thicker every minute. It is true that there is nothing unusual about this in this region and at this time of the year, and the *Acadia* is in absolutely no danger of any kind. This is not the time of the year when the icebergs drift down from the north. So you mustn't feel the slightest alarm about the ship.

" . . . One moment. The Duchess of Ballancourt wishes to say a few words more to her father."

"Hello! . . . Hello, Daddy! . . . This is Edith, again. I wanted to ask Clara Whitechurch—oh! that wretched siren . . . it's just simply awful. . . .

"Hello! . . . Clara, can you hear me, darling? I wanted to say to you . . .

"Good gracious, what's the matter? . . . What's that awful, piercing whistle for? . . . They're shouting and crying, up on deck. . . . And the engines have stopped all at once, stopped completely. . . . Oh, Philippe, is anything the matter? Call Lieutenant Howard back here, quick. . . ."

Frr-tt . . . Fr'tt . . . Tac . . . Tac . . . Tac . . . Tac . . . Zzz . . . Zzz. . . .

"HELLO! . . . Hello! . . . This is Ralph Glennor's private station. . . . Hello! . . . Hello! . . . This is Ralph Glennor's private station. . . .

"Will the station on the *Acadia* please communicate with us at once? We haven't been able to hear anything from you for half an hour.

"We are very much alarmed by this silence, and we hope Lieutenant Howard will reassure us by sending us some sort of word at once.

"Hello! . . . Hello! . . . This is Ralph Glennor's private station. . . .

"We hope the *Acadia* . . ."

Frr'tt . . . Tac . . . Tac . . . Frr'tt . . . Zzz . . . Tac . . . Tac. . . .

"HELLO! . . . Hello! . . . This is the radio station on the liner *Acadia*, Lieutenant Howard, chief of the station, speaking.

"We are very sorry that we have not been able to make ourselves heard for some time, and we know that through no fault of our own, we have alarmed and worried Mr. Ralph Glennor and his guests.

"Everything is going perfectly well on board the *Acadia*, and I haven't the slightest idea what happened to interfere with our emission.

"I can't see any explanation in the sad accident which happened at the moment when the emission stopped.

"I will tell you what this accident was. The *Acadia* had the misfortune to cut in two one of these Newfoundland fishing-dories whose lantern could not be seen because of the fog. One of the two sailors who were in the dory was drowned. We were able to save the other. He was taken to the infirmary on board, and he is being given the very best of treatment. The Duchess de Ballancourt insisted on going to the infirmary to help the nurses. But I see she has just come back, and here she is. . . . She will tell you about the unfortunate accident, herself. . . ."

"Hello! . . . Hello! . . . This is Edith in front of the microphone again. Oh, Daddy! it's terrible! . . . Those poor men! . . . Lost in the fog and run down by the *Acadia*. . . .

"The fisherman in the infirmary is not injured. He has regained consciousness, but he seems to have lost his mind. He is a Frenchman—a Breton. His name is Yves Le Flanchec. He is very young.

"Oh! If that terrible siren would be still just a minute! . . .

"I want to tell you, Daddy. . . . Yves Le Flanchec told the most frightful story in the midst of his ravings. . . . He said he and the other fisherman had been lost for two days. They were just floating around in the dory, and they hadn't the slightest idea where they were going. And this young Yves says they met in the fog—you wouldn't ever guess it in the world. . . . He says they met the Dead Man's Schooner, a phantom vessel with a crew of lost souls, that is condemned to roam the ocean for all eternity. What a crazy idea it is! It seems that all the Bretons believe in the Dead Man's Schooner. They tell the story to the little children, and the children never forget it, no matter how old they live to be. . . . But if you had heard Yves' poor, frightened voice when he told about it, and if you had seen the ghastly look in his poor feverish eyes! He described every part of the phantom vessel just as if he had really seen it through the fog. . . .

"We tried to do everything we could to soothe him, and to tell him he was safe now and nothing could happen to him. But whenever we said anything like that, he would answer back that he knew he was lost, because he had heard the Dead Man's Flute. . . .

"Because he said . . . isn't it the strangest story, Daddy? . . . he said that up in the bow of the phantom ship one of the sailors who has lost his soul sits and plays a flute made of the shin-bone of a man who was drowned. And he says that anybody who hears that awful flute has only a little while to live. He says it never fails. . . .

"Isn't it all crazy, and yet horrible, dear old Daddy? I think the whole thing is ridiculous. But I can't help feeling a little

bit creepy about it. Just suppose *we* should meet the Dead Man's Schooner and hear the Dead Man's Flute! . . . Brrr! . . . Of course I'm only joking. I don't believe one word of the poor boy's story. But that siren is getting on my nerves, more and more! I'm sure you must be able to hear the siren, too. And then that stupid bell —it sounds as if it were tolling for somebody's funeral. . . .

"Well, here comes Lieutenant Howard back. Good-bye for a little while, dear Daddy!"

"HELLO! . . . Hello! . . . This is Lieutenant Howard, chief of the radio service on the *Acadia*.

"I am sure I don't need to reassure our hearers about the absurd cock-and-bull story that the shipwrecked fisherman told the Duchess de Ballancourt. The poor fellow seems to have lost his mind temporarily, which is not to be wondered at after all the experiences he has gone through. No doubt he *did* see a Newfoundland schooner, and he imagined the ghosts, when what he really saw was a real everyday boat with solid flesh-and-blood sailors.

"The Honorable Ralph Glennor and his guests have no reason to be in the slightest degree uneasy over the situation on the *Acadia*. It is true that the fog is unusually dense, but every sort of precaution has been taken to prevent every possibility of an accident. It is known that there is no danger from icebergs in this region at this time of the year. And as far as collisions are concerned, even if one should occur, which is extremely unlikely, it could not do any serious injury to a great liner like the *Acadia*.

"And as for phantom boats, everybody knows they are harmless. . . .

"And now I will surrender the microphone again to the Duchess de Ballancourt."

"HELLO! . . . Hello! . . . This is Edith once more. I was interrupted just as I was about to send a message to Clara Whitechurch. . . .

"Oh! That frightful, frightful siren is splitting my ears! . . . I don't know whether I can make you hear me at all or not. . . .

"I wanted to ask you, dear Clara. . . .

"Oh, oh! . . . What's the matter on deck? . . . They're blowing a whistle over and over again like mad. . . . A ship's officer just ran by here as fast as he could. . . . Oh, heavens! How the siren screams! . . . They are rushing back and forth on deck, and crying and shouting! . . . Oh, what was that? . . . A terrible shock. . . . Daddy! I'm afraid . . . I wonder if——

"Help—oh, help! . . . Philippe! . . . Philippe! . . . Save me, Philippe, save me——"

"HELLO! . . . Hello! . . . Hello! . . . Hello! . . . This is Ralph Glennor.

"Edith, little Edith, my own darling, tell me what is the matter! It's your old Daddy talking to you, your old Daddy that loves you. . . . Tell me what happened . . . tell me. . . .

"Hello! . . . Hello! . . . Speak to me, tell me something! I'm listening. . . .

"God in Heaven! . . . Lord have mercy on my child, my Edith . . . Oh! . . . Oh! . . . Listen, all of you. I hear the flute, the flute of the lost souls, the flute you can't hear unless——"

(*And Ralph Glennor, the hale and cheerful New York captain of industry, fell to the floor lifeless, in his magnificent drawing-room, before his radio. It is true that the doctors had been warning him for some time that his heart action was imperfect.*)

Bacchante

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Men say the gods have flown;
The Golden Age is but a fading story,
And Greece was transitory:
Yet on this hill hesperian we have known
The ancient madness and the ancient glory.

Under the thyrse upholden,
We have felt the thrilling presence of the god;
And you, Bacchante, shod
With moonfire, and with moonfire all enfolden,
Have danced upon the mystery-haunted sod.

With every autumn blossom,
And with the brown and verdant leaves of vine,
We have filled your hair divine;
From the cupped hollow of your delicious bosom
We have drunk wine, Bacchante, purple wine.

About us now the night
Grows mystical with gleams and shadows cast
By moons forever past;
And in your steps, O dancer of our delight,
Wild phantoms move, invisible and fast.

Behind, before us sweep
Mænad and Bassarid in spectral rout
With many an unheard shout;
Cithæron looms with every festal steep
Over this hill resolved to dream and doubt.

What Power flows through us,
And makes the old delirium mount amain,
And brims each ardent vein
With passion and with rapture perilous?
Dancer, of whom our hearts and limbs are fain,

You are that magic urn
Wherefrom is poured the pagan gramarie;
Until, accordingly,
Within our bardic blood and spirit burn
The dreams and fevers of antiquity.



"Fire was a mystery to them, but they died by it and were long in so doing."

King of the World's Edge

By H. WARNER MUNN

The odyssey of a strange voyage to America in King Arthur's time—
a fascinating story of heroic adventure and eery thrills
—an absorbing weird tale, crammed with action

The Story Thus Far

VENTIDIUS VARRO, the narrator, centurion under Arthur, Imperator of Britain, sails after Arthur's death, in company with Merlin, the enchanter, to find a land of refuge in the west, where there are no Saxon invaders.

Saxon slaves are taken as rowers for the Prydwen, a huge dromon. Some die by fire; others are slain or taken prisoner by the Piasa, a monstrous fish-people who inhabit Florida's marshes, while the re-

mainder perish when the Prydwen is wrecked on the coast of North Carolina.

The surviving Romano-British explorers are taken prisoner by Tlapallicos, subjects of Tlapallan, country of the Mound Builders.

Making friends among their captors, Varro is taken as blood-brother by Hayonwatha, whose parents were from the unsubdued nation of the Onondagas. After having been kept prisoner for months in the City of the Snake, the explorers escape by means of Merlin's Druid magic, which as a converted Christian he rarely uses, and are led by Hayonwatha into the northern forests which Tlapallan has never been able to conquer.

After a winter in the wilderness, they contact the scattered tribes of the once powerful Onguy nation, broken and dispersed by the Mayas of Tlapallan, and Merlin by trickery and an opportune eclipse brings about their reunion and builds a powers in the North, the Hodenosaunee, the People of the Long House.

With these, he hopes to combat the Mayas.

The Miner's Road is seized, cutting off Tlapallan's copper supply from the mines of Lake Superior, and while engineers are being educated to smelt metal and cast bronze for catapults and other weapons, Varro, Merlin and a few other explorers journey westward to find the Land of the Dead, reputed to exist there, of which it has been prophesied to Merlin that he, in seeking, should surely find it.

It is not found, but reaching the Rocky Mountains, the explorers take them to be the literal edge of the world and seek no further.

In wandering southwesterly, they meet the Aztec people, who have been forced to seek safety in cliff dwellings because of constant slave raids from the powerful Empire of Tlapallan.

Arriving in the midst of a battle, they side with the Aztecs and bring victory with them.

Varro, who hates Tlapallan, because of the barbarous torture of his young nephew upon a sacrificial altar, resolves to create a new nation in the southwest that will march simultaneously with Merlin's followers to crush their enemy like a nut between the pincers.

With this end in view he spends six years of warfare in uniting the many small tribes and arming them with the new weapons of bow and sword.

Finally they march north to conquest beneath the battered bronze eagle of the Sixth Legion, Victrix, the Lost Legion of which Ventidius and his men are the only survivors. With them goes the Aztec wife of Varro, leaving her little son in Aztlan.

Near the borders of Tlapallan, Merlin bids them farewell, journeying to the Hodenosaunee to make them ready, leaving all command to Ventidius, whom the Aztecs have renamed Huitzilopochtli, God of War.

Eventually, Merlin sends a woods-imp as messenger, and the Aztecs march again. They take a fort, meet an immensely powerful army of Mayas and scatter it, pressing on to meet Merlin, while the savage frontier flames with rebellion.

The story continues:

PART IV

18. The New Kukulcan

THE strength of our enemy in the field was broken, but their spirit was not, and as they fled through the forests singly or in small groups, they snarled back their defiance and turned to fight like cornered tree-cats, when we came too close.

We crossed the fertile valley and entered a trackless wilderness between the rivers where we were constantly tormented by unexpected attacks. We never crossed a ford uncontested, never entered a rocky

defile without forcing our way, never entered a forest opening without hearing atlatl darts whistle across it at our scouts.

They distressed us immensely and we believed that we were well rid of them when we burst eventually into the cultivated country. It was a disappointment to find that the retreating bands of Mias had devastated the fields of growing grain and vegetables, burned buildings and stores of provisions, and stripped the sections of country in our path bare of anything which might be of use to us.

Occasionally a slave, skulking amid smoking ruins to grub for a morsel of charred food, came and attached himself to our force, hoping for better rations, but we were in bitter plight. There were many hungry days when no one ate and when the weakest lay by the way to rest and follow, if the gods willed, or to die and burden us no more. Thankful then were we that our women were secure in their strong fort at the junction of the rivers.

Our one thought was to push on and on, to drive through the heart of this country, make our connection with Myrdhinn and the Hodenosaunee, and to rest and eat again. We looked upon the new recruits as thieves, stealing the food out of our mouths; yet had it not been for one of these unwanted men, we might not have been so successful.

He directed us to a large underground winter storehouse of teocentli, put up in barrels of earthenware, hollow tree-trunks and bark baskets. It had been overlooked by our enemy, and we seized upon the grain with joy, ground it and made tamalli cakes, surely sweeter than ever food had tasted before to any man. Some ground it between stones and, without cooking, mixed the meal with water as we used to treat wheat when marching with the Sixth in Britain, drinking it down to ease the pain of their shriveled insides, before treating that space to more solid food.

We had enough for both cohorts, yea, and something left over for the next two days, though it was sparingly used.

From this man we learned that those we followed were massacring all slaves who were too old or too young to fight. Women and babes at the breast had been cut down by these red-handed sons of the Red Land and only those were left alive who swore allegiance to the Empire of Kukulcan. Thus a steadily enlarging force was preceding us in the direction of the Four Cities, though into which one it intended to enter and make a stand against us, we could not guess.

We could do nothing but follow in its track, so wide a strip of desolation was being made, and we did follow, hoping to come up with them and destroy them; but we never quite managed this, though often we saw flames burst out of buildings just ahead, or came upon butchered slaves still warm, though gone to the Land of the Dead.

Now we could guess that the Mias felt themselves in desperate straits, though they knew their own plight better than we. We learned from refugees that most of the frontier forts had fallen before the roaring fury that aroused Chichameca had, in its uniting, flung upon them. To the east, we were told, the land was overrun with war parties, acknowledging no master, burning, slaying, looting wherever occasion offered; so that no man's life was safe, except in the great towns, and fortified cities of refuge.

And there were rumors that in the North, the Holy City of the Snake had fallen, and no more would the Devourer there engorge herself on hapless slaves; but this I discredited, for I did not believe that all the Hodenosaunee could gather enough power to take that stronghold, providing the countrymen had sought shelter.

We did not know that Myrdhinn *had* taken the City of the Snake, gutted it, spar-

ing only women and children of the Mias, though giving quarter to all Tlapallicos who flung down their arms and sought mercy. The People of the Long House had slain the H'menes, torn down the pavilion and altar on the ill-famed Egg and erected there a twenty-foot cross, at Myrdhinn's orders, and afterward had quitted the city and were now coming to meet us, in all haste.

BEFORE we found out these things, we came to the southernmost of the Four Cities, the strong walled city of Tlacopan, and sat down outside the walls to make ourselves comfortable in the siege of it; none too soon either, for my men were beginning to murmur at the long wandering and empty bellies and no foe that they could meet to satisfy their numerous grudges upon since that one forest battle.

Truly, I think that were it not for my reputation as a living god of war, they would not have followed me so far; for, after all, they were only barbarians who were being forced by my will to actions foreign to anything in their previous experience. It is a perilous thing to be the midwife, when a nation is born.

If any among us had thought that the reduction of this fortified city would be a simple thing, they had the idea knocked out of them when we first stormed the palisades on all its four sides.

We learned then what a vast difference there could be in siege-fighting, depending entirely whether Aztlan or Tlapallan was on the inside of the earthworks.

They let us come on, much as we had enticed *our* pursuers, then all along the parapets we saw heads popping up, and slingstones began to whiz and whir. Very accurate they were, too, and deadly.

Most of the front rank went down on my side, I know, and the mortality was high elsewhere, but the battle was carried in close to the walls in the face of a stinging storm of darts, and we tried to set light to the logs. However, everything being wet from a three-day rain, fortune did not favor us, and being without shelter of any kind, we fell back to let nature fight for us.

Like most of these towns, a double earthwork and palisade led from the fortifications to a nearby river, for the procuring of water. This was a good protection against atlatl darts, which are thrown with an overhand cast and fly in a straight line, but was worthless against the dropping fire of our archers. We made life so miserable for the defenders by maintaining a steady drip of arrows, and by patrolling the river entrance to this path, that finally we were enabled to drive out those holding the gate, and seizing the earthworks we cut the city entirely off from its water supply.

Days went on, and we knew they must be suffering from thirst, if not from hunger. We, too, were famished, for the fish and game available was not nearly enough and we were living scantily upon grain that the scouts brought in from undestroyed villages and farms.

Then, one day when we all felt certain that surrender must be near, a wild-eyed scout came hurrying in with the news that a large army was marching upon us to relieve the fort. I knew that at all costs we must be behind the shelter of those walls when the new enemy came up; so I gave over the command to the tribunes, with orders to knock together a number of light ladders, to storm the walls, and make ready to receive us as we fell slowly back upon the town. I sallied out with ten centuries from Aztlan, five from Tolteca, and most of the freed Tlapallicos to be used as light wood-runners to find the enemy, engage him and entice him into a nearby pass where he would be at our mercy beneath falling rock.

With the works suffering the fiercest at-

tack of the siege, we left them, and not long after, high in the air, lying behind piles of hastily gathered boulders, hidden and waiting all tense for the fight, knowing that after the one sharp blow we must flee, we were praying that we would have a shelter to feel secure in.

We saw the naked bodies of our savage allies slipping silently among the undergrush in the pass below, and from our eminence could see the van of the enemy closely in pursuit.

What was this? Here were no antlered Tlapallican helmets! Nowhere slanted the repugnantly flattened brow of a Mia! Instead I saw the single dipping feathers of the Hodenosaunee, Myrdhinn's own nation! Friends, not foes!

"Hold your fire," I shouted and tumbled headlong to meet them. In no time I was hugging my old comrades—Valerius, Antoninus, Intinco, the Caledonian, Lucius—and gravely shook Myrdhinn's hand. I felt a strong palm on my shoulder.

"Atoharo, my brother."

And I hugged him in my glee till his ribs creaked against my lorica and I saw that stern face tighten into a grin, for once. Oh, he could laugh, that hero blood-brother of mine, but none but his friends and family ever knew it!

In haste I brought down my companies, and mingling, we hurried back to lend a hand in the battle but found that Tlacopan had fallen to my tribunes, who had immediately denied their pledged terms when the Mia weapons had been thrown down. They had allowed all Tlapallicos to retain their weapons and bidden them settle accounts with their former masters.

THE payment was about completed when we arrived, but I had the pleasure of demoting those tribunes to the ranks and raising six of my Valiants to their places, and I would have made Man-who-burns-hair one of them and given him authority over our new Tlapallico recruits, but when I looked for him he was gone from his place, and could not be found among the slain, either within or without the city.

He did not turn up the next day, so I was reluctantly forced to believe him dead in the forest, but could not hold the march for one centurion; so we razed the palisades and burned the buildings, marching the following day.

Three nations were we, and numbered over twenty thousand lances, counting our not very dependable Tlapallico allies who were too new to us for me to trust their loyalty if they became too hungry.

Our destination now was Colhuacan, the City of the Twisting Mound, where Mixcoatl, the Storm Serpent, was worshipped, second only in holiness and sacrifices to the foul City of the Snake. Thither the priest-king Kukulcan had fled, before his city had been taken, and only ten miles away lay the greatest citadel of Tlapallan—Miapan, whose earth ramparts were higher and thicker than Hadrian's Wall.

We might take Colhuacan, but would it be possible to enter Miapan in another status than that of captive? We marched. We would see.

Again we were obliged to fight our way, again we were annoyed in all the familiar manners.

The season now being far advanced, we dreaded that we might fail because of snows, if we were too long delayed, and Myrdhinn and I knew well that if we did fail, such a force would be impossible to bring together again. I wondered if I dared ask the help of sorcery and was on the point of it many times but did not, knowing Myrdhinn's views upon the matter.

As we approached the country where Colhuacan lay, we were surprised to find that resistance was growing less instead of greater, and pushed forward cautiously, ex-

pecting a trap, but soon resistance died down altogether and we came out of the glades into the cleared land and saw the walls of the city.

The gates were open and there was an affray there.

Men ran out and were followed by others, who cut them down; there was rebellion in the city, and the Mias were fleeing from the Tlapallico slaves!

"Forward, Aztlan!" I cried, and led the way at a run.

A scarred man I knew came out to meet me. It was Man-who-burns-hair! "Tecutli! Lord Huitzilopochtli!" he hailed, exultantly. "Behold your enemy!" And he flung a bleeding head at my feet.

One glance at the flabby cheeks and pouched eyes was enough, without the ornate golden circlet and antlers for corroboration.

The family resemblance to the ruler who had once sentenced me to death was strong. It was indeed the Kukulcan, the Mian ruler.

"How did you do it?" I joyously questioned, as we entered the city through a cheering host of armed slaves.

"Deserted, had myself taken prisoner, talked to the slaves when I was put with them—told of massacred Tlapallicos the Mias left on the road to Tlacopan, told of heroes, of living gods, of the men I led—told of the master who cut the flesh from my back with a copper whip—bade them rise when we knew you were near. Lord, may I lead men again?"

"You may indeed, and soon shall. It is well done."

And that day, in the sacred city of Colhuacan, he was raised to the post of tribune, delighting him greatly, though his glory was overshadowed; for that day by popular acclaim without a single dissenting voice, Myrdhinn was unanimously chosen the new Kukulcan, and Tlapallan for the first time in all history had a white ruler.

19. How We Came to Miapan

AS WE lay in the shelter of Mian walls, resting, and replacing broken weapons with new, our scouts went out spying upon Miapan and the reports they brought back made me thoughtful. It was almost impregnable. The city-fortress is divided in three parts; the North, Middle and South forts.

The whole is situated on a plateau three hundred feet above the nearby river, and deep gullies and ravines surround it like a moat at all points except in the northeast, the only point where the land joins the plateau in a level manner. Here is a great plain, with every tree and bush removed, so that no besieger can find shelter. Here the Mias were wont to hold their sports, as you shall learn.

Fronting this plain, the walls of the North Fort are at their strongest, being seventy feet thick at the base and twenty-three feet high. On the plain side is a wide and deep moat, filled with water to protect this most exposed portion of Miapan. There is also a moat, more shallow, just inside the wall. This was also filled with water, and sharp stakes were planted in it.

From this point, the gullies form natural defenses, and the walls are not so high or thick; yet they continue, zigzagging to protect every foot of level ground upon the surface of the plateau. They form a total length of more than three and a half miles, though a straight line from the north to the south walls is less than one mile.

There are five main gateways, and sixty-eight other gaps in this long wall, each opening being about ten feet wide, and each being protected by a blockhouse reaching out beyond the wall. From these bastions, defenders could enfilade the outside of the ramparts.

Along the top of the wall ran a sharpened palisade, also with openings for de-

fense, supplied with small wickets, easily closed and easily defended.

At many spots where the declivity beyond was quite inaccessible, a little platform was either built out, or cut into the wall itself. These were sentinel stands and were always occupied, except when under direct fire, thus rendering any surprise attack almost impossible.

In the North Fort was the military camp, which we must attack from the plain, for the Middle Fort and the South Fort were well protected by deep gullies whose walls were steep and composed of crumbling earth. Trapped in these, we must inevitably perish, even though above us lay only the families of the warriors.

In the military camp, our first interest, our spies estimated at least forty thousand men awaited us; fully armed, very active, was the report, and constantly drilling.

Possibly twenty thousand more occupied the other connected forts and manned the walls and blockhouses, while in the South Fort, well protected from us, their families dwelt.

Here then was the last stand of the Mias. Numbering, in all, possibly 150,000 people, they had gathered with all their household goods and implements of war in this, their citadel. They had built it for a home at their first coming into Tlapallan.

Laboriously, their ancestors and their slaves had borne on their backs the baskets of earth, containing from a peck to a half-bushel, that in the end created these formidable ramparts. Here they had found a home and from behind those walls they had expanded and grown into a nation.

Now, back they had come, reaping the fruits of their cruelty, to find all their world in arms against them, and once again, so great were their losses, they found the sheltering walls of Miapan broad enough to enclose the entire Mian nation.

"Conquer Miapan," said the spies, "and you have the whole of Tlapallan!"

So we lay in Colhuacan, three weeks and a little more, and every day brought recruits. By twos and threes and scores, they came flocking in, savage moor men, wifeless, childless, ragged, fierce and destitute. They never smiled or laughed, and spent most of their time sitting alone, sharpening their knives or hatchets, or learning the trick of archery. Scarred and maimed Tlapallico slaves, slinking in like cowed dogs. They cringed when spoken to sharply, but there was a fierce, furtive look in their eyes, like the yellow glare in the orbs of a tree-cat.

They brought their own war-paint. It was always black.

"Have you no gayer colors in your medicine-bag?" I asked one group.

One oldster, savagely marked with running weals which would never quite heal, looked up and said grimly:

"We will find red paint inside the walls of Miapan!"

A cold feeling came upon me and I walked away, hearing behind me the guttural grunts which pass for hearty laughter among this iron-hearted folk.

More loquacious and friendly were the newcomers from the free forest towns. Emboldened and cheered by news of successes, they trooped into camp, from Adriutha, Oswaya and Carenay, from Kayaderos and Danascara. Engineers, trained by Myrdhinn in his own town of Thendara, brought heavy loads of sharp copper arrowheads, bronze swords and fittings for siege artillery.

We distributed these smaller articles at once, but postponed the building of engines till we should be before the walls; for without beasts of burden we could only with difficulty drag such heavy pieces thither.

Little bands of Chichamecans came in and swore fealty, and one day we were

joined by some very curious strangers drawn with weariness of forced marches. They came from a far northern city, built entirely of stone they said, which they called Norumbega.

They were not swarthy like others we had seen in this country, but seemed whiter than any, though brown with tan. They were dressed and armed no differently than other Chichamecans, but there the similarity ended, for their faces were freckled, their eyes were blue, and their hair and beards were a bright flaring red!

NEVER before have I heard of a red-haired people and from what country they came I know not, nor could they tell aught, save that they came here in the morning of time, in stout ships. Behind them they left a land which had sunken beneath them, drowning a populous country.

They had never been bothered by the Mias and they had no interest in our cause, other than it promised fine fighting. They asked no reward, and wanted nothing but to fight beside us, for fighting seems to be their religion and only pleasure and it seems likely in the end to be their bane.

In the beginning, their legends say, they were many as the forest leaves, and the north country was theirs, even beyond Thule, and many were their cities. Wealthy they once were, with great store of jewels and fine things, but now they are poor through warfare, and so few that one city holds them all with room to spare.

Every male able to march, from stripling to oldster, had come at the news of war against Tlapallan, yet the total was less than four hundred; so I suppose in a few years, as things are going, Norumbega will live only in the legends of its neighbors.

But they fought stout-heartedly beside my valiants, for they have no love of life and no care for it.

Now I must speak of a shameful thing.

We had found some crocks of wine beneath one of the houses sacred to the Kukulcan and his women. It was thin stuff, but heady, and the first wine I had seen since the wreck of the Prydwen. I made a fool of myself without any trouble at all.

On the eve of our proposed march upon Miapan, I gathered my tribunes and centurions in my quarters for a celebration and we all got pleasantly drunk.

I was trying to teach them a drinking-song of the Sixth and having a terrible time, for very few could understand the words and none had any idea of how to carry a tune. Music, as we know it, is strange to them. I was roaring out the chorus, trying to outshout my leather-lunged friends, who were all singing to a rhythmic clashing of cups:

"Drink! Drink! Let the cannikins clink
And with wine let us make merry!
For with the dawn we must be gone
And there will be some to bury!"

Suddenly I found that I was singing alone and looked stupidly at my fellows, who were glaring at the door with expressions of awe and dread, and twisting about, I saw Myrdhinn there, eyeing us with a look of furious disgust, much as Moses must have looked upon the revelers around the Golden Calf.

"Swine!" he roared. "Wallowers in filth and iniquity! While you take your ease, your friends and fellows have been fallen upon by the Mias and are dying in torture. Swilling fools, your end is sorrow and destruction! I lay a word upon you, Ventidius. Your nation shall wander in search of a home and shall not find it for six hundred years. They shall be wanderers upon the face of the earth, until they find an island in a lake. Upon this, marked by an eagle with a snake in its mouth, let them settle, but they will not thrive.

"Their ways are bloody, they are be-

yond regeneration, they have cast aside my teachings and perverted them. I repudiate them, and Ventidius, yourself shall never see Rome! Now bestir yourself and follow me!"

"But how do you know?" I asked, a bit stupidly, still fuddled with the drink.

"Oh, hurry, dolt! Hurry!" he cried impatiently. "While you talk brave men are dying. The woods are full of my messengers.

You know I understand the language of the birds. It was folly for Hayonwatha to go scouting. I had already told all officers what lay before us, and how we must attack. Hayonwatha was at that council fire. Poor headstrong fool! He must see for himself, and so he has got himself taken and thirty others with him!

"Well, brave souls, they knew how to die, and most are already dead, but if they have followed the usual Mian custom and saved the leader for the last, there is yet a chance for your blood-brother if we are quick. Haste then. We will talk as we go."

My head had been rapidly clearing.

"Give your orders, Myrdhinn, but I fear it is useless. The host cannot reach Miapan in less than six hours."

Myrdhinn smiled a tight-lipped smile.

"No, the host cannot, but you and I will be there in that many minutes."

And as I gaped at him, wondering if my humming ears had heard him right, he snapped out an order to a staring tribune:

"Bid a trumpeter sound. March at sunrise." (The eastern sky was already pink.) "Say to all the host, that their commanders have gone ahead and will meet them on the road to Miapan. Let nothing stop you."

He saluted and turned away, and as Myrdhinn and I slipped into the forest, I heard a hundred shell trumpets braying their harsh reply to the clear sweet notes of my own trumpeter, with his instrument of bronze, and I knew that soon, perhaps for the last time, the old bronze eagle of the Sixth would look down on marching men.

ONCE in the seclusion of the trees, Myrdhinn seemed to forget the need for haste. He sat down upon a log and motioned me beside him.

From his breast he drew out a small vial and held it to the light. I could see a few small dark pills rattling within it.

"With these, Ventidius," he said, reflectively, "we shall conquer time and space, and in a few brief moments cover the miles that stretch between us and Miapan. I cannot tell you what is in them, nor how they are made. They were given me by a desirable Thessalian witch, with whom I dallied away a summer's days—long ago, when I was young. We used them to halt the swift pace of Chronos. We spent years of delight together, in one golden month of the time that others knew. She gave me the few that remained at our parting.

"Well, well, she is long since dust, and if there be black magic, or sin to account for, it lies in the compounding, not in the partaking!

"Come then, Varro. Let us each swallow a pellet. Perchance it will bring me memories of red-lipped Selene—and wicked days."

He rolled one out into my palm and I placed it on my tongue.

It was faintly bitter, I thought. Then, as it dissolved, my eyes became blurred. I rubbed them, but they remained misty for what seemed a long time; then as they cleared, it seemed that I had become stone-deaf.

Directly before me, a little bird had been singing to greet the sun. I saw him there upon this twig. His mouth was open, so I knew he still was singing, but I could not hear a note. I stared, trying to understand, and noticed also that the wind, which had been strong, had stopped entirely.

Myrdhinn was eyeing me with amusement.

"Come," he said, and I knew that I was not deaf. "Let us haste now, to Miapan."

I rose and followed him, in that strange and death-like hush which had come over the forest.

Behind us, at the gates of Colhuacan, a company was surging out, or had been. Now they stood as though frozen, some with one foot raised in midstride, but immobile, while above them floated a pennon, oddly twisted, but not fluttering. It was as though it had been suddenly changed from a flapping bit of cloth and feathers, to a replica of itself carven from wood or metal.

Myrdhinn led on. I noticed that when he pushed a branch out of his way, it did not fly back and strike me, but remained where it was.

We forded a shallow stream.

"Look down," said Myrdhinn.

I did so, and was amazed to find that the water did not rush in to fill up the holes that our feet left as they were withdrawn from it. Every footprint was to be seen as we looked back from the other shore. We might have walked in soft mud instead of water, so slowly did the liquid flow back.

We walked swiftly on. A wind began to blow in our faces. It was cool at first, then warm, and soon uncomfortably hot. I saw Myrdhinn pluck at his robe and draw it knee-high. It was becoming brown, as though crisped by the heat.

"We must go slower," he said finally, "or we will be burned by the friction of the air."

Then I understood! It was not the world that had suddenly become quiet about us. Our sense of time had been speeded up!

All at once I felt desperately hungry. My bodily resources were being exhausted by the unaccustomed demands upon them.

Time passed. We walked on and on. Hours apparently passed, yet the eastern sky grew no rosier. Morning, it seemed, had stopped and would never come.

"Look at the dawn, Ventidius. It is almost the same as when we started. Do you realize how far we have come in little time? Yet we have not hastened beyond a quick stride. We are not breathed. We have but walked briskly along, yet have covered miles in moments. Now you can understand how the legend arose, that witches were wont to anoint themselves with a foul salve and fly through the air in the form of a bird. No one guessed that the secret lay in a tiny swallowed pellet, and the witches never told."

"Look yonder, Myrdhinn," I interrupted. "The smokes of Miapan!"

"Aye, and thither are we bound."

"Had we the Mantle of Arthur, which I so foolishly lost, one of us might effect a rescue."

Myrdhinn looked at me oddly.

"Think no more of it. We shall pass the guards in safety."

We walked, slowly it seemed, though the wind blew not against us, around the ravine which bordered the South Fort. The sentries on their high platforms looked out at us like wooden men, without blinking an eye or shifting their position.

Then, quickly Myrdhinn drew me behind a rock. I felt a swimming of the senses and like the bursting of a bubble in my ears, sounds began again. Somewhere near the smoke, a multitude was shouting.

Stiffly, Myrdhinn shook out a pill for each of us. The sounds died as time froze around us again, and nothing moved but ourselves.

We resumed our journey along the ravine.

We came abreast of the Middle Fort, only five hundred feet wide, but very strong and well built. Here, too, the sen-

tries looked out at us and let us pass without alarm.

Now we could see that the smoke arose outside of the walls of the North Fort. A great crowd of people were gathered there, upon the broad flat plain I have previously described.

MYRDHINN calmly led the way, almost into the crowd, and I followed with some trepidation. If the effects of this drug should wear away unexpectedly, being old and perhaps uncertain in duration, we would be torn to scraps before Myrdhinn could reach for his vial.

We came to a little eminence and looked down upon horror.

Directly across from us, about sixty feet away, was another little mound, likewise unoccupied, as if for some religious reason. Beginning there, as also from our mound, a low earthen roadway ran, elevated a foot above the level of the plain, and about twelve feet wide. These two roadways ran parallel to each other for a little more than a quarter of a mile, where they were joined by a curve.

The roadways and curve were thick with people, facing the enclosure. Here the ground was hidden by a pavement of limestone slabs, upon which many fierce fires were burning, a little distance apart.

Between the fires were two lines of men, armed with sticks and whips. We could see that our captured comrades had been compelled to run between these lines, exposed to the cruel blows of their tormenters, until from weakness they could no longer leap through the many fires and must of necessity fall into one and be destroyed in great pain.

It was obvious that even the strongest of men had little or no hope of surviving such an ordeal, and indeed we later learned that if a captive should manage to cover the entire circuit of the enclosure, he did not earn release thereby, but was forced to run and leap, again and again, until the inevitable end.

Looking where a knot of men were clustered, whose slow, slow, squirming motion showed us that there was, for their own time, violent movement, we saw the stern, heroic face of Hayonwatha.

We had come in time, but not a moment too soon!

"Stay you here," I muttered, and unsheathing my sword, I bounced down from the mound.

At first I cut at the men before me, but I soon found that their passive resistance was not to be overborne. Though I might hew the arm from one, or slash the viscera out of another, it did no good, for the example did not frighten those about in time for them to react and withdraw from my path. I might waste all of the power of the drug and yet not hack through that statuesque gathering.

So I took the shortest way and leapt through a fire. In the time of those about me, it must have been a roaring, terrifying blaze.

On the contrary, I could see each pointed flame very distinctly. I was not burned or scorched as I passed through it. There was no smell of fire upon my clothing, nor was I more than faintly warmed.

So I came to the cluster around my blood-brother, and hurling them right and left, I sheathed my sword, threw him across my back and returned by the way I had come. In all that way, he did not twist or writhe in my grip.

As I reached the mound again, I saw faces turned toward the mound and knew that Myrdhinn had stood in one position long enough to be observed by those around him. The men I had attacked were beginning to fall toward the ground, but had not quite reached it, and upon their faces expressions of pain had just begun to form.

Those who saw Myrdhinn appear (sud-

denly to them) must have been astounded. I chuckled at their dismay at the unaccountable disappearance of their last captive, simultaneously with the advent and equally sudden disappearance of a white-robed, white-bearded ancient man, who for a moment trod their sacred mound and vanished into thin air. How could they construe this in any other manner, than to suppose that the gods were displeased with them?

Such an occurrence must necessarily dishearten them and weaken their courage.

So it proved. We lay in seclusion, where we could see the multitude, during the time we were waiting for the effect of the drug to wear away. It squirmed and seethed on the plain, like a disturbed hill of ants, scurrying panic-stricken and aimlessly in search of an intruder. It streamed, infinitely slow, toward the entrances of the North Fort.

Occasionally we pressed Hayonwatha back upon the soft turf, as he strove to rise, though after we had done this three times, he stopped his sluggish struggling, and the beginnings of a smile, very curious and horrible to see, could be discerned. Then we knew that we had remained in one position long enough for him to recognize us and to understand that all was well.

Before he had finished his smile, the power passed from us with a rush.

Quickly Myrdhinn explained, forced Hayonwatha to take a pellet, and we did likewise.

Instantly we started back along the road we had come. Somewhere, far behind us, thirty thousand lances were marching upon Miapan, and their commanders must hasten to take their proper posts!

20. The Fall of Miapan

"I ONCE knew a wise woman of Caledonia, who had the gift of seeing," said Myrdhinn thoughtfully, staring out over our earthworks across the plain at the lights of Miapan and the stars above.

"It was her prophecy to me, that should I seek to the westward when the time was ripe, there should I surely find the Land of the Dead. Well, I am in a western country of which she could have had no knowledge, and we have wandered far in it, yet there is nothing here to indicate the proximity of an earthly paradise. Other things which she foresaw have come to pass and I hesitate to believe her misled in this matter.

"But all my studies of the stars do not confirm her statements. Perhaps the time has not yet come."

"What do the stars say?" I asked, shivering in the cold wind.

"Too little. I feel that something is being concealed from me. All that I can learn is that something evil is about to befall, and soon."

"I know that myself. Look you, Myrdhinn. Two weeks we have been here, and to what good? First they meet us on the plain in pitched battle and we lose a thousand men. Then we attack the walls and find that they have developed bows and arrows since the death of their Kukulcan who forbade them to use such an innovation. True, their bows are not good and their arrows unfeathered, but with a strong pull even their archery finds a mark at the distance they shoot at. The fact is, Myrdhinn, that another two weeks of this will bring snow upon us and our army will disband in spite of all we can do.

"We can't carry on a long siege without proper provisions in this harsh, unfriendly country, and we have no reserves to fall back on. We are fighting an agricultural people who are well provisioned. On the contrary, our allies are a hunting people who have little thought for the morrow, if they are fed today. Our resources are used up, Myrdhinn. Snow means defeat. That is what *I* read in the stars."

Myrdhinn shook his head.

"Nay, this is a personal evil, meant for me alone. See yonder. There floats the Ghoul, the dark star—in my house, and in the ascendant."

"I know nought of mystic lore, nothing more than finding my way north by the Plow. I cannot help you."

"True," he said, somberly. "You are a man of war. Well, let us to thoughts of war. How are the ballistas coming?"

"Forty and six are ready to move up tomorrow. Fifty more will be complete within a week. Of arrow engines we have three score. That total used up all of the clamps. I have had enough boulders dug up to last three days. Arrows are plentiful and fire-lances are being made. I should say that day after tomorrow we may commence such a rain of missiles into the North Fort that they will be forced to evacuate."

"Good. Let us hope for a speedy conclusion to this bloody affair. What is that?"

A high wail began to our left, rose to a shriek and soared above us like a screaming ghost.

"A whistling arrow from a sentry," I snapped, startled and angry because of it. "Something is wrong in the artillery enclosure. Look, there are flames! An attack, Myrdhinn, a night attack! They are burning our engines!"

I set my bone whistle to my lips and blew a mighty blast.

Aztlan shot out of its sleep in a hurry. Three companies formed on the plain, and as I led them off at the double, the clouds, which had been scattering, came together again and rain pelted down upon us as though the heavens were weeping to watch us.

WE MET the raiding-party in the hollow of the eastern ravine. It was a dreary battle, with nothing in it to warm the blood. Darkness became complete, save when occasionally broken by very distant and unseasonable flashes of lightning. Nothing was right about this war, I thought; even the elements had turned against us, not realizing then, that but for this unexpected and untimely shower we would most likely have lost our entire park of siege weapons.

The rain was cold and froze upon our weapons and clothing. Many wounded died that night from exposure, or were drowned in the loose mud which washed down from the walls nearest the fortress.

They had ladders out against the walls, and hoping to cut off their retreat, I led a charge to capture these, but most of them were already drawn inside and we were too late, for such ladders as we took were destroyed by the stones which plunged down upon us as we clawed vainly at the slippery sides of the ravine in an attempt to follow. Three hundred men died uselessly that night, with nothing gained for so many lives. Fifty of them were Valiants.

And the taunts from the wall next day burnt our brains like fire.

Crazy with rage, I besought Myrdhinn for help. Twenty engines were totally destroyed, and more than half the ballistas were so weakened that they must be rebuilt.

The others were placed, some on the plain, others so that a steady downpour of stones could be kept up across the various ravines at the sides of the North Fort. But although we knew that we were doing execution, we heard no sounds of pain or fear from within, only jeers and mockery.

Again I begged Myrdhinn to use sorcery, but he refused as usual.

"No. Let it be a clean, honest war, with no magic mixed into it. However," he said, "now that you have learned that you cannot butt down these walls like a brainless aurochs, I will show you how the People of the Long House took the City of the Snake with little loss.

"Set up three ballistas for me, at the edge of the wood fronting the eastern wall, and tonight we will give them a surprise. We made some eggs in Thendara that will hatch out the Thunder Bird inside of Miapan!"

Just before dark we lit fires at the edge of the wood. Then up came the engineers trundling barrows laden with dark spheres, each of twenty-pound weight and about nine inches thick. Under Myrdhinn's direction, one of these was placed in a fire convenient to the nearest ballista. I could see then that its composition was partly of metal, for the hue changed with heat, from bronze to golden and then to shimmering pallor. It glowed, little crackling noises could be heard inside as rainbow colors raced across its surface.

Finally a glowing cloud surrounded it as the fiery vapors pent within began to issue forth from its pores.

Myrdhinn's assistants then removed it from the fire with tongs, placed it in the ballista pan and knocked out the chock.

It seemed to sail from us slowly, a train of glowing vapor following it as it soared over the ravine and fell into the city.

A deep rumble followed, the ground shook, an awful flare of light made the stars dim, and in the ensuing hush we heard the sounds of lamentation and of fear within the ramparts of Miapan.

Now another flew, shining even more brightly with the heat of its passing through the air.

Over the walls and out of sight it went, and instantly burst with a dreadful *splitting* crash, as when lightning rends a large oak from leaves to roots. Again the uprush of ghastly light, shining through the chinks of the log palisade and the wicket gates. Then utter darkness and the long screaming of the wounded and burned.

"What is it?" I gasped. "Hellfire?"

"Nay, son, naught but the fiery principles of earth, combined and blended, heated to bursting-point and ignited by the further friction of the air as each container rushes through that medium and is heated more than its walls can stand. Weakened, it bursts and drenches all with unquenchable fire.

"Have you forgotten how Ovid, in speaking of the leaden missiles used by slingers, writes:

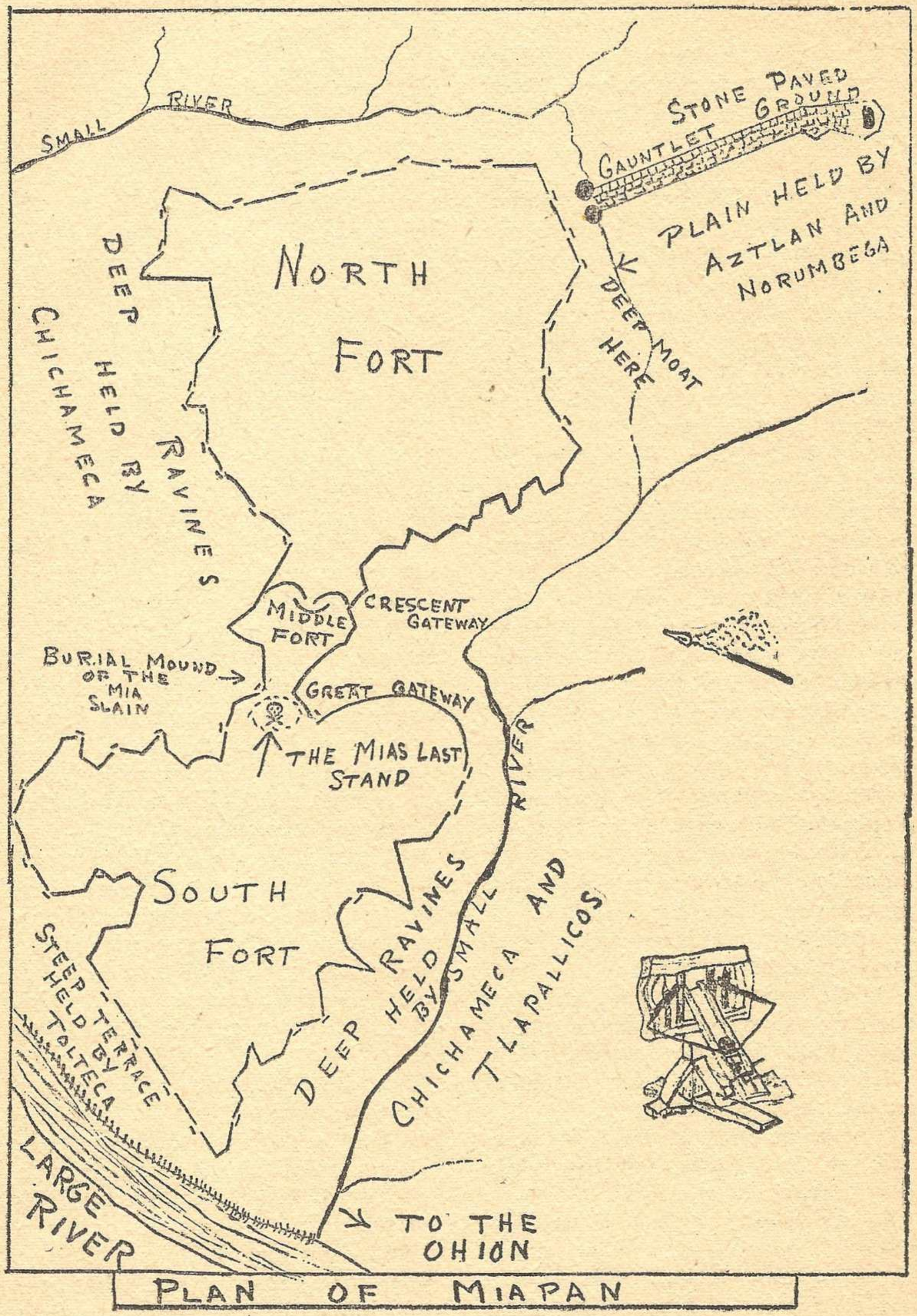
"Hermes was fired, as in the clouds he hung;
So the cold bullet that with fury slung
From Balearic engines, mounts on high,
Glows in the whirl, and burns along the sky."

"That gave me the idea, but the composition of the fiery material is old. Archimedes used this same preparation in another form to inflame the Roman ships at the siege of Syracuse, and Hannibal used it in still another form, when he split the rocks of the Alps and let his armies and elephants through. No, it is not new, only forgotten and that is well: else war might be too terrible."

Other missiles were now coming out of the fires, and the engineers began a persistent dropping upon the North Fort. One by one, they flew and fell, these awesome dangerous products of Myrdhinn's lore; terrible, hairy stars, soaring in the black night sky, bringing death, terror and destruction in their train.

The ground shook constantly, houses were blazing within, but the Mias steadfastly refused to give up, and dawn came and found them still in possession and strong enough to hurl our attack into the ravine again and pile it up there in confusion and utter rout.

At the same time, Aztlan, Norumbega, and a large force of Chichamecans charged across the plain and reached the walls, but were forced to retire in a shower of arrows, atlatl darts and slingstones, leaving



PLAN OF MIAPAN

many dead and most of their courage behind them.

Tolteca held the river safe and did not break ranks to attack, there being an almost perpendicular earth wall before them which it would have been suicide to scale.

NOW that daylight had come, we ceased throwing Myrdhinn's awesome missiles, though the ballistas kept on pounding the works with boulders, knocking great holes in the palisades, through which those arrow engines that could discharge phalaricas managed to place those flaming javelins with fine precision into both the North and Middle Forts.

We left the South Fort mostly untouched, hoping to take the other works first and drive the defenders out into the lower section where they would be compactly crowded and at our mercy.

Again night came, again the fire-balls flew and burst and scattered death. Sometime during those hours, the North Fort was quietly evacuated and at dawn of the second day of this new horror of war, I launched a half-hearted sally, with what remained of my Valiants, giving Man-who-burns-hair the command and allowing him to carry the bronze eagle of the Sixth, that they might know courage.

I really expected it to be thrown back again, but an attempt had to be made or the whole siege must be given up. Myrdhinn's fire-balls were gone!

On the contrary it reached and went over the wall without facing a dart or stone. I saw the eagle wave violently as its bearer danced on the firing-platform of the wall.

My trumpet caroled. Answering brays went up, and Aztlan and Norumbega poured into the North Fort!

By midmorning we had all the force which had held the plain placed to best advantage inside the walls, had set up a pair of ballistas to batter away the resistance ahead and were ready to advance along the isthmus.

As you can see by the map, two crescent-shaped mounds had long ago been built to barricade the narrowest section of the isthmus and protect the Middle Fort. These had been recently joined by a log wall several feet thick, its components inextricably tangled together, and sharpened stakes pointing out at us from every cranny.

Here the Mian warriors defied us and our artillery. After an hour of stone-throwing which did little good against this heap of splintered logs, we advanced, fought and retired with considerable loss.

Then I had a battering-ram constructed, but this only beat the logs more tightly together and our adversaries laughed at us while they cut our engineers down.

I was wild at being held back by this paltry agger, and calling a meeting of tribunes, I asked for suggestions.

Vicinius suggested using the testudo to reach the barricade and then a sudden sally. It seemed the only thing to do. Nothing but a direct assault would carry it, for the position could not be flanked owing to the steep declivities of loose and slippery earth which fell away on either side into the deep ravine.

So I instructed my picked Valiants, and in phalanxes three companies moved forward with shields in front, over our heads and at each side, all closely overlapping.

Above us, as we trotted, the boulders from the ballistas hummed and thudded into the twin mounds, black with fighting-men.

Their darts and stones rattled on our tortoise sides like hail, but did little damage. Then, as we neared the log wall, the engineers ceased firing lest we be struck. We charged, flinging down our shields upon the spikes, and over this protection we reached the top.

Then the cry from our men might have been heard in Rome, as they broke ranks

and, leaving cover, came charging down to support us.

We desperately needed help, being greatly outnumbered. The fighting was furious. It was hack and kill, pull out the blade and dodge, recover, poise and stab with pugio and gladius against the thrust of long lances. Reeling under a rain of blows we fought and fell. Vicinius died there, and Intinco the Caledonian killed his slayer and fell dead across his friend's body—and women were to mourn them both in Adriutha.

I had less than twenty men around me, when our men came up the wall like a wave and cheering, surrounded us and drove the Mias back, back, fiercely contesting the way until they were pressed against the Great Gateway of the South Fort and could go no farther.

The commander who had been in charge of the resistance sank to his knees with weakness from loss of blood. All his men were dead and he the last to defy us. Twice he strove to shorten his lance and fall upon it, but could not.

Then, through our press, came leaping Man-who-burns hair.

"I know him!" he howled. "My master who scourged my back to rags! He is mine!"

He whipped out his knife. The kneeling man looked up dauntlessly.

"Ha, slave. Wolves yap at the dying cougar!"

With a last quick motion he swept the antler circlet from his head and leaned forward that his scalp might be the easier taken, and as his remorseless enemy snatched away the bloody trophy, we knew the Middle Fort was ours.

Across the Great Gateway the defenders, though they must now have been fighting entirely without hope, had flung up a barricade of their house furnishings, dead bodies of animals and people, to make three parallel walls which we must take one after another. It being nearly dark, we made no attempt to essay this system of defense, but occupied ourselves in moving up twenty ballistas and catapults to command their forum, which was situated in the center of the South Fort, around a dewpond, their only remaining water supply.

The defenders were engaged during most of the night in strengthening their defenses, though loud voices and much waving of torches were reported by our stationerii and I took this to mean that there was some dissension among them.

What it might be we could not conceive, unless some counseled surrender and others would not agree.

We learned in the chill before dawn, when a savage sally broke out on the river side of the fort and at least five thousand men hurtled down the embankment, across a terrace and came howling upon the sleeping, poorly picketed camp which guarded our fleet of 250 coracles. And Tolteca, whose charge they were, broke its ranks like cravens, and let the Mias through!

So this fighting-force, still free and united to rally and attack again, made off down the river in search of allies from some of the tiny hilltop forts if there were any yet untaken by the wild rovers.

AT DAWN, a hawk-visaged man clambered over the barricade of corpses, to the sound of Mian trumpets. He was clad in the white doeskin shirt, embroidered with pearly shell beads, that is the emblem of a herald in Alata. In his left hand he bore a green branch as a request for a parley.

The stationerii let him through to me.

He bowed, but not humbly, and I could almost hear that stiff, proud neck creak as he bent his head and asked for terms.

"I have no terms to offer you," I said, "but immediate laying down of all your arms, removal of your defensive walls and

preparation for an evacuation to take place by midday."

His eyes flashed, but he answered not a word as he turned to go.

"After that is done, I will give you my terms," I called after him, and chuckled fiercely to myself as I smote my armored chest with my clenched fist. Marcus! Marcus! Look down and see this day!

21. The Passing of Myrdhinn

I SAT in my booth near the edge of the wood, looking out across the plain, while shaving. Along the isthmus and out of the North Fort were marching companies bearing tied bundles of darts, arrows and lances to be stacked above the piles of hatchets and knives, that all might be burned together.

Somehow, my pleasure in the sight was waning, knowing what was to follow, and knowing it to be foul treachery by any rules of war.

Myrdhinn came in and sat down. His face likewise was gloomy.

"Have you made plans for the evacuation, Ventidius?"

"Amnesty for all Tlapallicans who change their allegiance. Death to the rest and death to all Mias!"

Myrdhinn started from his seat in horror. I calmly went on shaving.

"That is massacre!"

"Extermination," I corrected.

"Ventidius, you have become too hard," Myrdhinn said softly. "You are no longer the eager fellow who sought adventure and new lands with the zest of a boy. Is nothing left of the old Ventidius? Does nothing remain but the man of war?"

"Nothing," I said quietly. "Did you expect more? I was born knowing of war's alarms. My mother fled from a burning city to save her life and mine. My father died there. I have been bred to war, it is all I know.

"There was one soft spot in my heart. Marcus had that. I loved the boy. You know what happened. On the Egg my heart became all hard.

"Have you forgotten the vow we made in that reeking pit? Have you forgotten that we swore to avenge Marcus?"

He looked at me steadily.

"How many lives do you need in repayment for one? Have you not heard the saying of Hernin, the Bard of the college of Llanveithin: 'The brave is never cruel'?"

"I never knew him. His words are words for others, not for me!" I crashed my fist down on the bench and stood up. "My last word, Myrdhinn. Death for all Mias!"

He took my hand and gently urged me down again.

"Ventidius, listen. I have just come out of Miapan. They are burying the dead there, son. If you were to see it, I think you would be moved to pity."

"What do I know of pity? What *can* such as I know of pity? Many times you have called me a man of war and I have not felt offended, for truly that *is* all I know—all that I am. Here in this new country I have carved out a dominion that is mine. My people worship me as a living god of war who delights in blood and offerings of bleeding hearts. I tell you, Myrdhinn, I am beginning to *enjoy* the sight of suffering!

"There is no love in my heart for anything—except perhaps for my wife and son. She very likely will soon be facing death at the hands of those Mian refugees gone down the river—and I idle here. No pity, no mercy, Myrdhinn. The earlier these folk are exterminated, the sooner I shall be free to set off to the rescue of my wife and the women of my nation.

"The civilization of these Mias rests on a foundation of corpses. Blood soaks the ground of every foot of Tlapallan. The cry of those oppressed by the Mias rises to

the stars for vengeance. Better that they be blotted out for ever than be permitted to go and rebuild again their cruel empire. They showed us, strangers and castaways, no mercy, no pity. That was left for their slaves to do!

"At midday, Myrdhinn, I turn Aztlan upon them, and if the Hodenosaunee hold back, let them also beware!"

"That would be a civil war."

"Call it that. But there is no danger. Your men are as eager for blood as are mine. Nothing could hold them back from a revenge for which they have so long waited. Not even you!"

"If I can," he said quietly, "will you call off your hordes?"

I laughed.

"*If* you can. But that would be a miracle, and the day for miracles has passed. Unless——"

A thought gave me pause. "You intend sorcery?"

"Not sorcery. I have told you I have forsworn it. Nothing could tempt me to use sorcery again and lose my soul. I will plead with them, reason with them."

That was funny. As well, I thought, plead with the wolves that have just brought down a stag, but have yet to rend him and fill their bellies.

"Tell me," I asked curiously, "why this change of heart. You loved Marcus. You wanted to avenge him."

"I have been in the fort and heard the moans of the dying, seen noble ladies tenderly caring for their wounded, mourning their losses, weeping over dead babies."

"That is war. It has always been so. A rat protects its children, cares for them! Should not other vermin, such as Mias, do the same?"

He looked at me in horror, but spoke sadly:

"Rats do not bury their dead, Ventidius. The Mias have thrown up a great mound of earth over the bodies of those brave men who held the two crescents at the Middle Fort and there they are praying to the Sun to receive those souls. Elsewhere the dead are being interred separately by their surviving loved ones. The warriors are being buried with their hunting-gear, the women placed in the ground among their household articles, their grain, their cooking-utensils.

"The little children——

"I saw, Ventidius, one little chap, a fine boy of whom any father might be proud. He was lying in his little grave with his toys by him. His right hand had been placed in a jar of food that he might not be hungry in the other world. You see? The men can hunt for their living, the women work for it, but the wee things can do neither and must be able to help themselves. So the food jars are set close! In his left hand he had a little red ball stuffed with feathers."

He gazed at me keenly.

"A little red ball — stuffed with feathers?"

I repeated the words in my mind. My brain seemed dull, my head heavy. All at once I felt old. Such a ball had I given my little son and it was the pride of his heart. He had waved me godspeed with it when I marched away from Azatlan.

And Myrdhinn, the old gray fox, had seen and remembered as he remembered everything!

IT WAS true, of course. All that he had said was true. These Mias were not demons, not inhuman—at least not more than other men—they knew loyalty and courage. I had met them in war and I knew that. Their women were beautiful and lovable in the eyes of their own men, and their children were beloved by both. We had smashed the system; must we exterminate the race as well?

A hard lump seemed to melt in my breast. I no longer hated anybody and I

wanted to weep, but did not know how—I had forgotten long ago.

"Go and speak to the men. Aztlan and Tolteca, too. If you can win them over, we will let the people go."

Gladness came into Myrdhinn's eyes. He gazed at me fondly and went out.

I did not follow, but sat there alone. I wanted to think upon my little son so far away. That is why I did not hear what Myrdhinn had to say to the army, but a great clamor and shouting brought me to my feet and with sword in hand I ran out to defend his life from the men he had roused to fury. I stood there with open mouth and must have looked a very fool. They were cheering him!

Cheering! Aye, the men from Adriutha and Caranay, side by side with my warriors of Aztlan! Even the red-haired killers from Norumbega and the savage Chichamecan barbarians! All were cheering.

And that I think was Myrdhinn's greatest triumph!

BY MIDDAY, Miapan was evacuated, and on the plain the people, mostly women and children, but still a great host, stood between our armed ranks and received my orders.

"March fifteen days' journey straight westward," I commanded, "then directly south to the Hot Lands of Atala, whence you came. Laggards or deserters will be killed." And I detailed ten companies of moor men to follow a day's journey behind, for that purpose.

One man in each hundred was allowed to keep his arms for hunting, otherwise all weapons were burned at the time of their exodus.

These instructions, I estimated, would take them into the open uninhabited grasslands, where the hairy cattle would feed them and they would meet no enemies, and looking upon them as they marched away without lamentations or backward looks, still proud in defeat, I could not but feel that after all this was the better way and Marcus, somewhere, would be pleased.

That day ended organized Mian resistance. The Eagle had conquered the Snake.

Although on widely separated hilltops throughout the broken Empire a few thousands of refugees still held out, I knew that their forts, however well built, were doomed to fall, for without exception they were watered only by dewponds and occasional rainfall, and being constructed only as a temporary refuge for people living close at hand, they could not stand a siege. Indeed, they had never faced a prolonged siege before our coming, for that was not a Chichamecan habit. We felt that we could safely leave these islands of Tlapallan to be overswept by the sea of Chichamecans around them.

Accordingly, in five coracles, all that remained of our fleet, I, Myrdhinn, my tribunes of Aztlan, and other doughty men, totaling over a hundred, set out toward our river fort which by now must be in danger from those still unsubdued and merciless men who had stolen our fleet. Short shrift could our women expect from them!

Following along the shores, pounded the Aztlan legion and behind them the unruly hordes of Tolteca, now burning to wipe out their shame.

Hayonwatha came with us, but his people invested Miapan, to wait for Myrdhinn's return, and the Norumbegans, fewer in number, set off for their far city, laden with loot.

Down the little river we went, entered the larger stream, finding evidences of those who fled before us, and days later, came to the junction of the two waterways where lay our fort, and none too soon.

It was attacked by the Mias, but not taken. On the walls, from our distant view, we could see the short wicked arms of bal-

listas, and catapults, jerking stones and javelins into the mass of coracles below, while clouds of arrows, darts and sling-stones were flying from both sides. We raised a mighty yell, plunged our paddles deep and almost flew down the broad Ohion.

As we came near them, we were seen from the fort and greeted loudly. Tumbling into their flimsy craft, the land force fell back and were coming up to meet us, when our following legion burst out into sight.

Dismayed at the sight of this pursuing force and greatly outnumbered, the Mias swung their prows about and made off downstream.

Our coracles shot into pursuit, hailed wildly as we passed the fort. I made out the dear form of Gold Flower of Day, waving a fluttering scarf. I swung my paddle in response and was seen.

Before we had left the fort far behind, we began to overhaul the last of the coracles, which now turned about to meet and destroy us. I stood up and fitted an arrow to my bow, well dressed with gray goose-feathers, but before I shot I made out from my greater height above the water an almost impossible sight.

Up the river was coming toward us, slowly against the current, a craft which I had never again expected to see. It was a Saxon dragon-ship!

Without an oar out to give it headway, it forged toward us with a bone in its teeth, swiftly coming nearer as we flew, pursuers and pursued, down the stream toward it.

Now it was seen and recognized as a new menace, by the fugitive Mias. A trumpet recalled those who had fallen back to meet us, and the whole mass of coracles drew compactly together, bristling with armed men, ready for whatever might occur.

As we drew almost together, an armored man sprang into view on the ship's tiny deck. He steadied himself with a hand on the dragon's neck, while above him its movable red tongue waggled viciously as though it were hissing at all of us. He shaded his eyes and peered at us as we rushed toward each other.

All at once I recognized him.

Guthlac! Guthlac, last of the Saxons! Guthlac, whom we had thought slain by the fish-people of the swamps!

I RAISED a long hail across the narrowing waters.

"Turn, Guthlac, turn! These be enemies!"

He knew me and swung his ax wildly to signify that he had heard.

"Well met, Wealas!" he shouted, seized a shell trumpet that hung there and blew an echoing blast.

At once we saw what had towed the ship so strongly up the stream, for breaking through the surface in a shower of spray came dozens of the hideous and scaly Piasa, who cast off their towing-collars and ropes and hurled themselves into the vanguard of the Mias.

Frantically they backwatered and tried to turn aside, but the Piasa tore wide holes in their bark craft and they sank in the rushing waters.

We withdrew, guessing that these creatures could distinguish little between friend and foe among the various races of man, and contented ourselves with maintaining an arrow fire into the confused mass of struggling enemies.

Now more Piasa tumbled over the sides of the dragon-ship and with exulting croaks took to the water, while from downstream came churning up a frothy shoal of others.

It was soon over. Not a coracle floated on the stream, and from the bank where our little flotilla had taken refuge, we saw the waters of the Ohion slipping redly toward the sea, while glutted, the monstrous man-like creatures rolled playfully in the

greasy ripples, supping up the floating scraps that bobbed about in the eddies.

At a series of notes from Guthlac's trumpet, some of these caught upon the trailing ropes and drew the dragon-ship upon our shore, just as our panting followers came hurrying up, to recoil in horror at the frightful beasts that stood up in the shallows and strode grimly toward them.

Guthlac leapt nimbly down, came laughing forward among his horde, forcing them back with rough cuffs which they did not resent, but fawned upon him like hounds upon their master. Then he came up and seized my hand, shaking it stoutly.

"A good killing, Wealas. Woden loves such tribute. Long since, I thought you in Hela's halls."

"And I you, Guthlac. How is it that you have made yourself king, among the Piasa?"

"The Piasa?" he looked blank, then laughed. "Oh, you mean my fish-folk. That may be how they are named by the red men, but they call themselves Gronks."

"Then they have a language men may learn?"

"Oh yes! A good language, mostly grunts, croaks and hisses, but they do not talk to men very often—usually they prefer to act."

Looking at the sinister refuse floating in the river, I could well believe him.

At Guthlac's command they took themselves out of the way, to a narrow strip of sandy shore, where with their long talons they scooped out shallow holes to accommodate their short unbending tails.

Presently they squatted above these holes and gazed at us coldly and, I thought, with appetite.

"After you deserted me," ironically began Guthlac, "to the tender mercies of the swamp denizens, I considered myself a dead man. They hustled me off over quaking morasses to an odd dank huddle of clustered hovels deep inland. Here they thrust me into a moss-grown hut of wet and rotting logs and brought me raw fish to eat.

"There I remained for a long time in dread of death, until I plucked up courage and ventured out. I was greeted with every sign of simple worship, and it was not long before I realized that they were in awe of me. When I made them understand that I wanted my ax, it was immediately brought to me and my seaxe as well. Obviously, then, I was not to be killed. I have been treated very well by them.

"It was almost two years before I finally learned enough of their speech to understand why I was preserved and all my companions torn to pieces.

"As you can see, they are on the way toward becoming men. That is their ambition. They imitate men, they believe that by eating the flesh of people they will sooner become men. Some time ago, one of their eldest announced that from the sea would appear a divine being, partly man, partly fish, who would become their ruler and teach them how to become human.

"When they saw my armor of fish-hide and found that their claws slid off it harmlessly, they took me for this deity, and I have profited by it.

"I have taught them a good deal, given them simple weapons, tried to give them fire, but they would have none of it. Fire makes them vastly afraid; so I have learned to prefer my own food raw in consideration of their feelings.

"I was another year building the ship, doing it mostly alone, though they carried the timbers for me and set them in place according to my orders. When it was done, I sailed south along the coast, thinking to follow you, for in that direction you were sailing when we parted.

"We came to open sea, still following southerly, and arrived at a land of little brown people, who call their country Chivim. I taught them the worship of

Woden, but could not be happy among them.

"After I had abode there a long time, hearing no word of you, I realized that I was searching in the wrong direction and that you must have rounded the cape I left behind me, and instead of going again to sea, you had probably turned north, following the seacoast. So, the next spring, my subjects towed me away from Chivim.

"There was never any lack of food. The Gronks can follow a fish under the water, doubling and darting till it is caught. We lived well, both at sea and searching along the coast.

"We went far north. You would scarcely dream how vastly far this land must stretch. We came to a point where the water numbed my subjects, and ice mountains floated in the sea. We turned back without any news of you, and that was another year.

"Back along the seacoast we went, sometimes capturing a fisherman too scared to tell us anything, until one day we saw wreckage in a cove and I knew it to be the Prydwen. We had passed close by on the northward voyage, but high tide must have covered it, for only a few timbers projected even then among the waves.

"So I landed there. We spied upon the outpost and took it, the Gronks feeding upon the garrison, but I learned before all were dead, what had befallen you, that there was war in the interior and that my friends" (he stressed the word in a sardonic way, I thought) "were fighting a powerful people. So, as my subjects cannot live long away from water, we hastened back to that river mouth and searching up the stream of the Misconzebe, found the right tributary at length and came hither as you see, and almost too late to join you in the fighting."

"But not too late to join us in peace," said Myrdhinn, enthusiastically. "Give up your savage subjects and dwell with men once more. We are kings among the heathen now."

Guthlac shook his head.

"I also am a king, and my subjects are no less faithful than yours. My place is with them. Yet I will bide with you a time, for I have work that must be done."

He grunted an order, and all of his followers, except a dozen to pull the ship, splashed back into the river and made off downstream.

MYRDHINN and I were carried back to the ship by two stout Piasa, and when Guthlac resumed his place in the prow, we were towed upriver to the fort, convoyed by our five coracles and followed by the warriors on the shore.

Royal was our welcome, as loving arms enfolded us, and though many of the women were lorn and husbandless because of the fighting, there was no keening for the dead.

Happy faces met us and tears were reserved for the privacy of the weikwaums.

At night I observed Myrdhinn glumly eyeing the stars. I clapped him on the shoulder.

"How now, for your prophecies of disaster? You said the stars portended doom for you, but the war is over and all is well. Come! Admit that even you can sometimes be wrong!"

"Often I have been wrong, Ventidius, but never the stars. There is a destiny yet to be completed."

And he would say nothing more that night.

In the morning a festival day was declared. During our absence the women had pounded flat a broad surface of hard ground to be used as a ball court. The Azteca are very fond of this game, sometimes wagering everything they possess upon the sport. It is played with a bouncing ball which must pass through a stone

hoop, set perpendicularly in the wall of the court, to score a point.

As the opening is but little larger than the ball itself and because a large number of players are striving to secure the ball for their own side, goals are difficult to make and people have been known to wager even their clothing against the possibility of one, which being made, drives them naked from the spectators amid laughter.

Guthlac, seeing several bet upon points which were not made and leave thus in shame and nudity, declared roundly that the trick was impossible. I laughed at him.

"I can do it easily," I said. "Even Myrdhinn, aged as he is, finds no difficulty in it."

"Do it then, and I will believe you. I have a jar of wine on board my ship that says the feat cannot be done."

Myrdhinn smiled. "That wine *I* shall earn, Ventidius."

Pressing back, he strode into the ball court.

A herald shouted:

"Make way! Make way for the Tecutli Quetzalcoatl!"

And the people bowed low before him as he took the ball.

He tucked up his long robes, ran, bounded, and in midair (as it must be done) threw the ball through the hoop without touching the sides, scoring a perfect point. How the people shouted!

He returned to his seat near me, and the game was resumed while Guthlac sent one of the Piasa down to the river after the wine.

Myrdhinn took it, sniffed the aroma with appreciation and laughed. I handed him my drinking-horn.

"You must pay me a drink for the use of that!" I cried.

Guthlac said nothing, but smiled a strange smile. Whether it was the sudden gleam of ferocity in his eyes, quickly masked, or perchance only a wild suspicion, I know not, but all at once I distrusted the Saxon.

"Hold, Myrdhinn!" I shouted.

Too late! He had drained the cup to the dregs. His face went pale and haggard and he looked ancient beyond the power of words to tell. He struggled to speak, choked, then said thickly, "So this is the dark destiny the stars withheld!" and sank into the arms of Cronach Hên, the last remaining of his nine faithful bards.

Before we could gather our wits, Cronach Hên let his harp fall, laid Myrdhinn gently down and spitting curses like a cat, he dashed at Guthlac.

One of the Piasa was quicker than any of us. He caught up the bard, sinking his long curved talons deep through the flesh, hooking them among the ribs. Then easily he tore him asunder as a man might rend a roasted pigeon.

Women screamed in the crowd, and Guthlac croaked a command to his monstrous following as he backed warily among them.

"Now I have satisfied the souls of my brother and my men! Now I have avenged myself upon the murderer who led us here, who sacrificed us all in a mad search for a worthless land. Come, Wealas, take me if you can!"

The Piasa sprang at us, long scaly arms spreading wide to grapple, talons hooked to tear.

Though the sight of these horrors chilled the hearts of my men, none refused the battle, but would not at first close in, hurling hatchets and spears from a little distance, which they kept easily, for these creatures were agile only in the water.

So, during our first surprise, his group won almost through us to the river gate. With twenty Valiants about me, hastily re-armored, we fell upon him there.

"Stand back, Wealas," he bellowed at me, as he retreated deeper among his Piasa, swinging his short ax to fend off spear

strokes from three Hodenosaunee that were pressing him close.

"Stand back, lest I cleave ye to the teeth!"

The three red men rushed recklessly in, shouting their war-cry, "Sassakway! Sassakway!" The Piasa seized them. I heard bones crack and crunch and three brave souls were fled without a groan or whimper of pain.

I felt immortal. I ran at them.

GUTHLAC'S eyes lit with savage joy. He snapped an order to his creatures. They gave way and opened a lane, through which he strode, buckler to the fore, ax whistling in a glistening circle.

"Take it, Wealas," he roared, and flung it at my head.

It flew harmlessly by. I hurled my pilum.

Now, he understood spears and lances, but he underestimated the difference between them and the Roman pilum.

He laughed and caught the point deftly on his buckler. The bronze head penetrated and clung, the soft copper shank bent, the heavy shaft trailed on the ground and dragged his buckler low.

I leapt forward and stepped upon the shaft. He had one breath of time to realize that he was a dead man, before my shortsword beat down his defending seaxe and shore deep between neck and shoulder.

He fell. Myrdhinn was avenged!

At that instant, I felt myself seized from behind in an agonizing grip.

A Piasa raised me high above his head, and hanging there for an instant I saw Myrdhinn lying in a little open circle in the crowd.

He opened his eyes and caught my gaze, strangely and lovingly as a fond father might follow with his look a wilful and erring son who had foolishly plunged himself into danger.

His lips moved. The grip relaxed and I was flung down. Surprisingly I was not stunned by the impact. I scarcely felt the ground.

Like Antæus, the earth seemed to give me superhuman strength. I *knew* that I was invincible! The Piasa snatched for me. I laughed at him, brushed his grip away like a feather. I seized him by the scaly throat and broke his neck like a bird's.

All the multitude flung themselves upon the remaining Piasa, forcing them down, overwhelming them by sheer numbers.

I hurried to Myrdhinn and bent over him. I must have been a horrid sight, all dabbled with gore, my armor clawed away and my hands dripping red on his white robes, but he smiled faintly.

"I did it, Ventidius, for you. That time, it *was* sorcery! I gave you all my strength, that you might not die. I have loved you like a son—I never had a son—how could I let you die? God forgive me, I used sorcery again——"

"God will, Myrdhinn," I said softly, but his eyes closed and I do not know if he heard me or not.

I thought him sped. Then he spoke again, very low, and I bent to catch the words.

"So this is what was meant by the saying that I should find the Land of the Dead —beyond the sunset—at the end of the world. Come then, show me the way! Must I go alone?"

He stared about, but it was plain that he saw none of us.

Suddenly he sat upright and his face glowed with joy.

Out of the west came flying rapidly a great white bird such as I had never seen before. It approached, circled us thrice without alighting or giving voice, and flapped away again, speedily as it had come.

The aged body relaxed. I laid him down with care, and kneeling there, I buried my

face in my hands, for I knew him gone at last.

Over me swept a dreary loneliness. I had lost a dear friend, a revered man, whose wisdom had saved me often from my follies. At last, I realized that I had loved him like a parent, but it was too late—too late—I could not tell him now.

Through tears, I saw those around me kneel in parting reverence, and very far away, a white bird flying on and on—into the western sky and far beyond.

So we buried his body, and over it we made a tesselated pavement of colored pebbles, showing a picture of a man treading upon a snake, symbolical of his destruction of the Mian Empire, for his was the glory, seeing that without him all our efforts would have come to naught.

Above his grave we built a large mound, in the following days of our encampment there, but that night the Royanehs of Myrdhinn's young nation demanded the persons of the few remaining Piasa left alive.

I shrugged as I turned away, and the cold-blooded scaly monsters gazed after me, fishily staring with an unblinking look.

What were their thoughts, I wonder, as they saw the people gathering brush and fixing stakes in the ground?

Fire was a mystery to them, strange, cruel water creatures. But they died by it and were long in so doing.

"Houp! Houp!" shouted the dancing warriors, mimicking their death croaks, prancing high, circling the flames.

"Houp! Houp!"

And there were no scalps to take, for nowhere upon their bodies was there any hair.

22. Twenty Years Later

IN THE northwest, far from Aztlan, near the mountains which fence off the Edge of the World, there dwells today (twenty years after the death of Myrdhinn) a miserable people, called by their neighbors the Flatheads. If they be Mian refugees, I know not, for I have learned of them only by rumor, but their skulls are similarly shaped by binding against a board when the infant is very young.

And in the moorlands, every lonely wanderer got himself a wife, so that many a noble, gently reared Mian lady has drudged away her life in tanning hides, bearing burdens and savage children for a cruel spouse.

From some of these, we know that many perished wandering in the moors. A few may have got through to the Hot Lands of Atala, but most were scattered and slain by those I sent to guard their journey.

So perished the haughty and valiant Mian nation, and with them, their far-flung Empire of the Mounds.

Back once more in the cliff dwellings, we have known peace. We led war into the swamps of the Piasa and well-nigh exterminated them.

Tolteca, south of us, is newly turbulent and the time is coming when there must again be war.

In the north, I hear from Hayonwatha, who still lives, though all my British friends are dead from age or bottle, that the nation of the Hodenosaunee is growing yet more powerful. My soldiers, or allies, hold all the forts that once represented the Mian frontier. The Chichamecans, too, are friendly.

Your legate then, wherever he may land, oh my Emperor, will receive a welcome, for all expect the coming of white men again and the word is out everywhere to receive them kindly and in peace as sons of the Fair God, Quetzalcoatl, the man who spoke of peace, but could be stern in war to end it quickly.

Treat my son, Gwalchmai, Hawk of Battle as Myrdhinn once called his godson, kindly I beg. He will be unaccustomed to great cities, though he has read of them in Myrdhinn's books and has learned, I

fear, other more dangerous things. He has performed some peculiar feats that smack of sorcery to me.

Come then, at once while I still live. I dream of Roman keels grating on the shingle of Alata. I long to hear the sounds of Roman trumpets. I have conquered a continent for Rome, but there is none that will hold it undivided after I am gone.

Already they forget the Christian prayers that Myrdhinn taught his worshippers, forgetting the meanings of the words. My Azteca grow restless with liberty and long to wander.

Come before it is too late. Come and take your empire!

Vale.

EPILOG

I LAID down the ancient pages and turned to my veteran friend. "That is the end of the writing," I said.

"But not the end of the story?"

"How can it be? Why wasn't the message carried farther than Key West? What happened to the son of Ventidius? How was the message lost?"

"I think I can guess. Do you know how Key West got its name?"

I shook my head.

"When the Spaniards discovered the island, it was covered deep with skeletons where a battle had been fought. So many were there that they called it Cayo de los Huessos (Island of the Bones), which was Englished as Key West. Suppose that those bones were the remains of the ship's crew, sent with the message, and killed by the Piasa who had been driven from the Florida swamps by Ventidius' men!"

"Then that perhaps was the real end of the Piasa?"

He nodded.

"And the end of Gwalchmai, Ventidius' only son?" I hazarded.

"I wonder," thoughtfully said my veteran friend, "I wonder."

"After all, he was Merlin's godson. If any came out of that battle alive, it must have been he. But that was a thousand years ago, and we shall probably never know."

Weird Things

By VIVIAN STRATTON

The weirdest things have happened since he died.
A phantom hound sat on the porch and cried;
And scent of moldy earth is on the breeze,
While shapeless *things* at night flit through the trees!
The water pipes sweat drops of bloody red,
As ghostly footsteps fall with measured tread,
And basement lights grow dim, while at the door
Come clawing noises, never heard before!
Gigantic shadows flicker on the wall
When candles flare to smoke-plumes, black and tall;
And curtains wave when not a breath of air
Is stirring, eery noise is everywhere!
He was so kind, I know it can't be he
Who does these things, but, oh, what *can* it be!



The Copper Bowl

By MAJOR GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

YUAN LI, the mandarin, leaned back in his rosewood chair.

"It is written," he said softly, "that a good servant is a gift of the gods, whilst a bad one——"

The tall, powerfully built man standing humbly before the robed figure in the chair bowed thrice, hastily, submissively.

Fear glinted in his eye, though he was armed, and moreover was accounted a brave soldier. He could have broken the little smooth-faced mandarin across his knee, and yet——

"Ten thousand pardons, beneficent one," he said. "I have done all—having regard to your honorable order to slay the man not nor do him permanent injury—I have done all that I can. But——"

"But he speaks not!" murmured the mandarin. "And you come to me with a tale of failure? I do not like failures, Captain Wang!"

The mandarin toyed with a little paper-knife on the low table beside him. Wang shuddered.

"Well, no matter for this time," the mandarin said after a moment. Wang breathed a sigh of most heartfelt relief, and the mandarin smiled softly, fleetingly. "Still," he went on, "our task is yet to be accomplished. We have the man—he has the information we require; surely some way may be found. The servant has failed; now the master must try his hand. Bring the man to me."

Wang bowed low and departed with considerable haste.

The mandarin sat silent for a moment, looking across the wide, sunlit room at a pair of singing birds in a wicker cage hanging in the farther window. Presently he nodded—one short, satisfied nod—and struck a little silver bell which stood on his beautifully inlaid table.

Instantly a white-robed, silent-footed servant entered, and stood with bowed head awaiting his master's pleasure. To him Yuan Li gave certain swift, incisive orders.

The white-robed one had scarcely departed when Wang, captain of the mandarin's guard, re-entered the spacious apartment.

"The prisoner, Benevolent!" he announced.

The mandarin made a slight motion with his slender hand; Wang barked an order,

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and there entered, between two heavily-muscled, half-naked guardsmen, a short, sturdily built man, barefooted, clad only in a tattered shirt and khaki trousers, but with fearless blue eyes looking straight at Yuan Li under the tousled masses of his blond hair.

A white man!

"Ah!" said Yuan Li, in his calm way, speaking faultless French. "The excellent Lieutenant Fournet! Still obstinate?"

Fournet cursed him earnestly, in French and three different Chinese dialects.

"You'll pay for this, Yuan Li!" he wound up. "Don't think your filthy brutes can try the knuckle-torture and their other devil's tricks on a French officer and get away with it!"

Yuan Li toyed with his paper-knife, smiling.

"You threaten me, Lieutenant Fournet," he answered, "yet your threats are but as rose-petals wafted away on the morning breeze—unless you return to your post to make your report."

"Why, damn you!" answered the prisoner. "You needn't try that sort of thing—you know better than to kill me! My commandant is perfectly aware of my movements — he'll be knocking on your door with a company of the Legion at his back if I don't show up by tomorrow at reveillé!"

Yuan Li smiled again.

"Doubtless—and yet we still have the better part of the day before us," he said. "Much may be accomplished in an afternoon and evening."

Fournet swore again.

"You can torture me and be damned," he answered. "I know and you know that you don't dare to kill me or to injure me so that I can't get back to Fort Deschamps. For the rest, do your worst, you yellow-skinned brute!"

"A challenge!" the mandarin exclaimed. "And I, Lieutenant Fournet, pick up your glove! Look you—what I require from you is the strength and location of your outpost on the Mephong River. So——"

"So that your cursed bandits, whose murders and lootings keep you here in luxury, can rush the outpost some dark night and open the river route for their boats," Fournet cut in. "I know you, Yuan Li, and I know your trade—mandarin of thieves! The military governor of Tonkin sent a battalion of the Foreign Legion here to deal with such as you, and to restore peace and order on the frontier, not to yield to childish threats! That is not the Legion's way, and you should know it. The best thing you can do is to send in your submission, or I can assure you that within a fortnight your head will be rotting over the North Gate of Hanoi, as a warning to others who might follow your example."

THE mandarin's smile never altered, though well he knew that this was no idle threat. With Tonkinese tirailleurs, even with Colonial infantry, he could make some sort of headway, but these thrice-accursed Legionnaires were devils from the very pit itself. He—Yuan Li, who had ruled as king in the valley of the Mephong, to whom half a Chinese province and many a square mile of French Tonkin had paid tribute humbly—felt his throne of power tottering beneath him. But one hope remained: down the river, beyond the French outposts, were boats filled with men and with the loot of a dozen villages—the most successful raiding-party he had ever sent out. Let these boats come through, let him have back his men (and they were his best), get his hands on the loot, and perhaps something might be done. Gold, jewels, jade—and though the soldiers of France were terrible, there were in Hanoi certain civilian officials not wholly indifferent to these things. But on the banks of the Mephong, as though they knew his hopes, the Foreign Legion had established an outpost—he must know exactly where, he

must know exactly how strong; for till this river post was gone, the boats could never reach him.

And now Lieutenant Fournet, staff officer to the commandant, had fallen into his hands. All night his torturers had reasoned with the stubborn young Norman, and all morning they had never left him for a minute. They had marked him in no way, nor broken bones, nor so much as cut or bruised the skin—yet there are ways! Fournet shuddered all over at the thought of what he had gone through, that age-long night and morning.

To Fournet, his duty came first: to Yuan Li, it was life or death that Fournet should speak. And he had taken measures which now marched to their fulfilment.

He dared not go to extremes with Fournet; nor yet could French justice connect the Mandarin Yuan Li with the bandits of the Mephong.

They might suspect, but they could not prove; and an outrage such as the killing or maiming of a French officer in his own palace was more than Yuan Li dared essay. He walked on thin ice indeed those summer days, and walked warily.

Yet—he had taken measures.

"My head is still securely on my shoulders," he replied to Fournet. "I do not think it will decorate your gate-spikes. So you will not speak?"

"Certainly not!"

Lieutenant Fournet's words were as firm as his jaw.

"Ah, but you will. Wang!"

"Magnanimous!"

"Four more guards. Make the prisoner secure."

Wang clapped his hands.

Instantly four additional half-naked men sprang into the room; two, falling on their knees, seized Fournet round the legs; another threw his corded arms round the lieutenant's waist; another stood by, club in hand, as a reserve in case of—what?

The two original guards still retained their clutch on Fournet's arms.

Now, in the grip of those sinewy hands, he was held immovable, utterly helpless, a living statue.

Yuan Li, the mandarin, smiled again. One who did not know him would have thought his smile held an infinite tenderness, a divine compassion.

He touched the bell at his side.

Instantly, in the farther doorway, appeared two servants, conducting a veiled figure—a woman, shrouded in a dark drapery.

A word from Yuan Li—rough hands tore the veil aside, and there stood drooping between the impassive servants a vision of loveliness, a girl scarce out of her teens, dark-haired, slender, with the great appealing brown eyes of a fawn: eyes which widened suddenly as they rested on Lieutenant Fournet.

"Lily!" exclaimed Fournet, and his five guards had their hands full to hold him as he struggled to be free.

"You fiend!" he spat at Yuan Li. "If a hair of this girl's head is touched, by the Holy Virgin of Yvetot I will roast you alive in the flames of your own palace! My God, Lily, how——"

"Quite simply, my dear lieutenant," the mandarin's silky voice interrupted. "We knew, of course—every house-servant in North Tonkin is a spy of mine—that you had conceived an affection for this woman; and when I heard you were proving obdurate under the little attentions of my men, I thought it well to send for her. Her father's bungalow is far from the post—indeed, it is in Chinese and not French territory, as you know—and the task was not a difficult one. And now——"

"André! André!" the girl was crying, struggling in her turn with the servants. "Save me, André—these beasts——"

"Have no fear, Lily," André Fournet replied. "They dare not harm you, any

more than they dare to kill me. They are bluffing——"

"But have you considered well, lieutenant?" asked the mandarin gently. "You, of course, are a French officer. The arm of France—and it is a long and unforgiving arm—will be stretched out to seize your murderers. The gods forbid I should set that arm reaching for me and mine! But this girl—ah, that is different!"

"Different? How is it different? The girl is a French citizen——"

"I think not, my good Lieutenant Fournet. She is three-quarters French in blood, true; but her father is half Chinese, and is a Chinese subject; she is a resident of China—I think you will find that French justice will not be prepared to avenge her death quite so readily as your own. At any rate, it is a chance I am prepared to take."

FOURNET'S blood seemed to turn to ice in his veins. The smiling devil was right! Lily—his lovely white Lily, whose only mark of Oriental blood was the rather piquant slant of her great eyes—was not entitled to the protection of the tricolor.

God! What a position! Either betray his flag, his regiment, betray his comrades to their deaths—or see his Lily butchered before his eyes!

"So now, Lieutenant Fournet, we understand each other," Yuan Li continued after a brief pause to let the full horror of the situation grip the other's soul. "I think you will be able to remember the location and strength of that outpost for me—now?"

Fournet stared at the man in bitter silence, but the words had given the quick-minded Lily a key to the situation, which she had hardly understood at first.

"No, no, André!" she cried. "Do not tell him. Better that I should die than that you should be a traitor! See—I am ready."

Fournet threw back his head: his wavering resolution reincarnate.

"The girl shames me!" he said. "Slay her if you must, Yuan Li—and if France will not avenge her, *I will!* But traitor I will not be!"

"I do not think that is your last word, Lieutenant," the mandarin purred. "Were I to strangle the girl, yes—perhaps. But first she must cry to you for help, and when you hear her screaming in agony, the woman you love, perhaps then you will forget these noble heroics!"

Again he clapped his hands; and again silent servants glided into the room. One bore a small brazier of glowing charcoal; a second had a little cage of thick wire mesh, inside of which something moved horribly; a third bore a copper bowl with handles on each side, to which was attached a steel band that glittered in the sunlight.

The hair rose on the back of Fournet's neck. What horror impended now? Deep within him some instinct warned him that what was now to follow would be fiendish beyond the mind of mortal man to conceive. The mandarin's eyes seemed suddenly to glow with infernal fires. Was he in truth man—or demon?

A sharp word in some Yunnan dialect unknown to Fournet—and the servants had flung the girl upon her back on the floor, spread-eagled in pitiful helplessness, upon a magnificent peacock rug.

Another word from the mandarin's thin lips—and roughly they tore the clothing from the upper half of the girl's body. White and silent she lay upon that splendid rug, her eyes still on Fournet's: silent, lest words of hers should impair the resolution of the man she loved.

Fournet struggled furiously with his guards: but they were five strong men, and they held him fast.

"Remember, Yuan Li!" he panted. "You'll pay!—damn your yellow soul——"

The mandarin ignored the threat.

"Proceed," he said to the servants. "Note carefully, Monsieur le Lieutenant Fournet,

what we are doing. First, you will note, the girl's wrists and ankles are lashed to posts and to heavy articles of furniture, suitably placed so that she cannot move. You wonder at the strength of the rope, the number of turns we take to hold so frail a girl? I assure you, they will be required. Under the copper bowl, I have seen a feeble old man tear his wrist free from an iron chain."

The mandarin paused; the girl was now bound so tightly that she could scarcely move a muscle of her body.

Yuan Li regarded the arrangements.

"Well done," he approved. "Yet if she tears any limb free, the man who bound that limb shall have an hour under the bamboo rods. Now—the bowl! Let me see it."

He held out a slender hand. Respectfully a servant handed him the bowl, with its dangling band of flexible steel. Fournet, watching with eyes full of dread, saw that the band was fitted with a lock, adjustable to various positions. It was like a belt, a girdle.

"Very well," the mandarin nodded, turning the thing over and over in fingers that almost seemed to caress it. "But I anticipate—perhaps the lieutenant and the young lady are not familiar with this little device. Let me explain, or rather, demonstrate.

"Put the bowl in place, Kan-su. No, no—just the bowl, this time."

Another servant, who had started forward, stepped back into his corner. The man addressed as Kan-su took the bowl, knelt at the side of the girl, passed the steel band under her body and placed the bowl, bottom up, on her naked abdomen, tugging at the girdle till the rim of the bowl bit into the soft flesh. Then he snapped the lock fast, holding the bowl thus firmly in place by the locked steel belt attached to its two handles and passing round the girl's waist. He rose, stood silent with folded arms.

Fournet felt his flesh crawling with horror—and all this time Lily had said not one word, though the tight girdle, the pressure of the circular rim of the bowl, must have been hurting her cruelly.

But now she spoke, bravely.

"Do not give way, André," she said. "I can bear it—it does—it does not hurt!"

"It does not hurt!" the mandarin echoed the girl's last words. "Well, perhaps not. But we will take it off, notwithstanding. We must be merciful."

At his order the servant removed bowl and girdle. An angry red circle showed on the white skin of the girl's abdomen where the rim had rested.

"And still I do not think you understand, *Mademoiselle* and *Monsieur,*" he went on. "For presently we must apply the bowl again—and when we do, under it we will put—*this!*"

WITH a swift movement of his arm he snatched from the servant in the corner the wire cage and held it up to the sunlight.

The eyes of Fournet and Lily fixed themselves upon it in horror. For within, plainly seen now, moved a great gray rat—a whiskered, beady-eyed, restless, scabrous rat, its white chisel-teeth shining through the mesh.

"Dieu de Dieu!" breathed Fournet. His mind refused utterly to grasp the full import of the dreadful fate that was to be Lily's; he could only stare at the unquiet rat—stare—stare——

"You understand *now,* I am sure," purred the mandarin. "The rat under the bowl—observe the bottom of the bowl, note the little flange. Here we put the hot charcoal—the copper becomes heated—the heat is overpowering—the rat cannot support it—he has but one means of escape: he gnaws his way out through the lady's body! And now about that outpost, Lieutenant Fournet?"

"No—*no*—*NO!*" cried Lily. "They will not do it—they are trying to frighten us—they are human; men cannot do a thing like that—be silent, André, be silent, whatever happens; don't let them beat you! Don't let them make a traitor of you! Ah——"

At a wave from the mandarin, the servant with the bowl again approached the half-naked girl.

But this time the man with the cage stepped forward also. Deftly he thrust in a hand, avoided the rat's teeth, jerked the struggling vermin out by the scruff of the neck.

The bowl was placed in position. Fournet fought desperately for freedom — if only he could get one arm clear, snatch a weapon of some sort!

Lily gave a sudden little choking cry.

The rat had been thrust under the bowl.

Click! The steel girdle was made fast—and now they were piling the red-hot charcoal on the upturned bottom of the bowl, while Lily writhed in her bonds as she felt the wriggling, pattering horror of the rat on her bare skin, under that bowl of fiends.

One of the servants handed a tiny object to the impassive mandarin.

Yuan Li held it up in one hand.

It was a little key.

"This key, Lieutenant Fournet," he said, "unlocks the steel girdle which holds the bowl in place. It is yours—as a reward for the information I require. Will you not be reasonable? Soon it will be too late!"

Fournet looked at Lily. The girl was quiet, now, had ceased to struggle; her eyes were open, or he would have thought she had fainted.

The charcoal glowed redly on the bottom of the copper bowl. And beneath its carven surface, Fournet could imagine the great gray rat stirring restlessly, turning around and around, seeking escape from the growing heat, at last sinking his teeth in that soft white skin, gnawing, burrowing desperately. . . .

God!

His duty — his flag — his regiment — France! Young Sous-lieutenant Pierre Desjardins—gay young Pierre, and twenty men —to be surprised and massacred, horribly, some saved for the torture, by an overwhelming rush of bandit-devils, through his treachery? He knew in his heart that he could not do it.

He must be strong—he must be firm. . . .

If only he might suffer for Lily—gentle, loving little Lily, brave little Lily who had never harmed a soul. . . .

Loud and clear through the room rang a terrible scream.

André, turning in fascinated horror, saw that Lily's body, straining upward in an arc from the rug, was all but tearing asunder the bonds which held it. He saw, what he had not before noticed, that a little nick had been broken from one edge of the bowl —and through this nick and across the white surface of the girl's heaving body was running a tiny trickle of blood!

The rat was at work.

Then something snapped in André's brain. He went mad.

With the strength that is given to madmen, he tore loose his right arm from the grip that held it—tore loose, and dashed his fist into the face of the guard. The man with the club sprang forward unwarily; the next moment André had the weapon, and was laying about him with berserk fury. Three guards were down before Wang drew his sword and leaped into the fray.

WANG was a capable and well-trained soldier. It was cut, thrust and parry for a moment, steel against wood—then Wang, borne back before that terrible rush, had the reward of his strategy.

The two remaining guards, to whom he had signalled, and a couple of the servants

flung themselves together on Fournet's back and bore him roaring to the floor.

The girl screamed again, shattering the coarser sounds of battle.

Fournet heard her—even in his madness he heard her. And as he heard, a knife-hilt in a servant's girdle met his hand. He caught at it, thrust upward savagely; a man howled; the weight on Fournet's back grew less; blood gushed over his neck and shoulders. He thrust again, rolled clear of the press, and saw one man sobbing out his life from a ripped-open throat, while another, with both hands clasped over his groin, writhed in silent agony upon the floor.

André Fournet, gathering a knee under him, sprang like a panther straight at the throat of Wang the captain.

Down the two men went, rolling over and over on the floor. Wang's weapons clashed and clattered—a knife rose, dripping blood, and plunged home. . . .

With a shout of triumph André Fournet sprang to his feet, his terrible knife in one hand, Wang's sword in the other.

Screaming, the remaining servants fled before that awful figure.

Alone, Yuan Li the mandarin faced incarnate vengeance.

"The key!"

Hoarsely Fournet spat out his demand; his reeling brain had room for but one thought: "The key, you yellow demon!"

Yuan Li took a step backward into the embrasured window, through which the jasmine-scented afternoon breeze still floated sweetly.

The palace was built on the edge of a cliff; below that window-ledge, the precipice fell sheer fifty feet down to the rocks and shallows of the upper Mephong.

Yuan Li smiled once more, his calm unruffled.

"You have beaten me, Fournet," he said, "yet I have beaten you, too. I wish you joy of your victory. Here is the key." He held it up in his hand; and as André sprang forward with a shout, Yuan Li turned, took one step to the window-ledge, and without another word was gone into space, taking the key with him.

Far below he crashed in red horror on the rocks, and the waters of the turbulent Mephong closed for ever over the key to the copper bowl.

Back sprang André—back to Lily's side. The blood ran no more from under the edge of the bowl; Lily lay very still, very cold. . . .

Her heart was silent in her tortured breast.

André tore vainly at the bowl, the steel girdle—tore with bleeding fingers, with broken teeth, madly—in vain. He could not move them.

And Lily was dead.

Or was she? What was that?

In her side a pulse beat—beat strongly and more strongly. . . .

Was there still hope?

The mad Fournet began chafing her body and arms.

Could he revive her? Surely she was not dead—could not be dead!

The pulse still beat—strange it beat only in one place, on her soft white side, down under her last rib——

He kissed her cold and unresponsive lips.

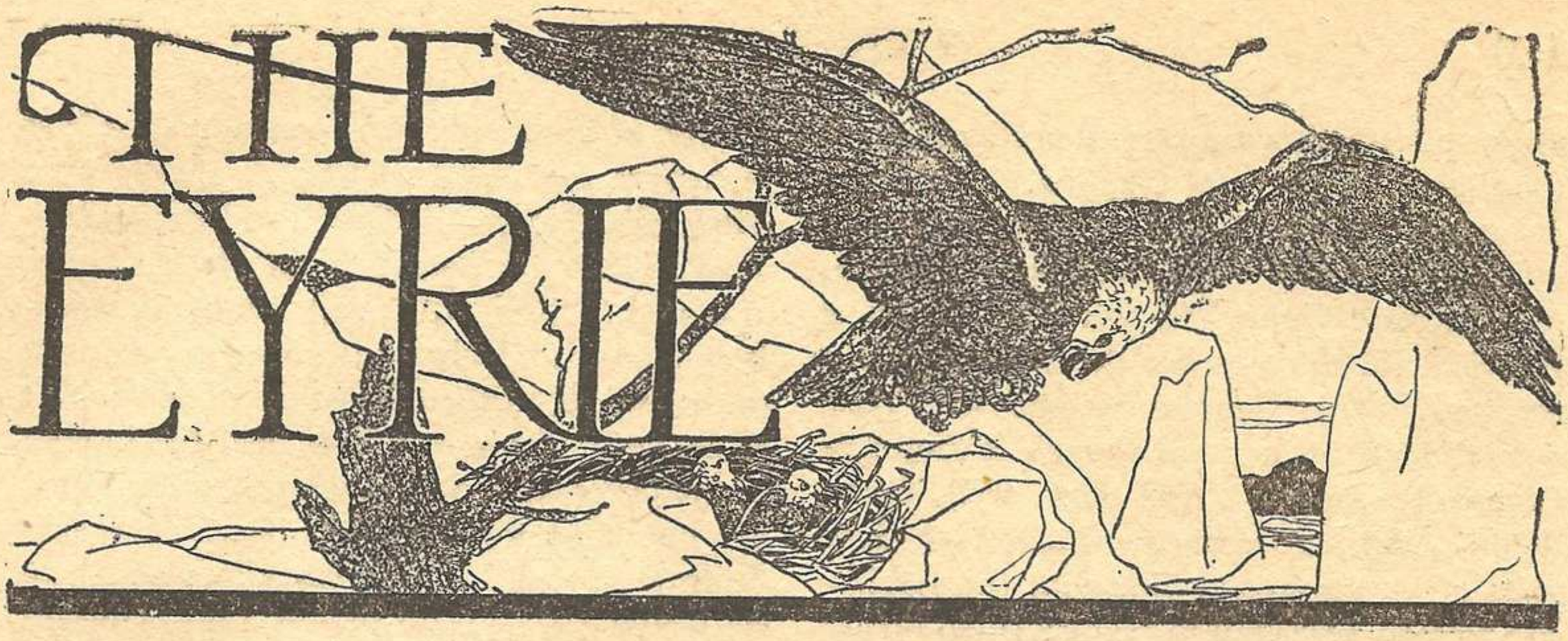
When he raised his head the pulse had ceased to beat. Where it had been, blood was flowing sluggishly — dark venous blood, flowing in purple horror.

And from the midst of it, out of the girl's side, the gray, pointed head of the rat was thrust, its muzzle dripping gore, its black eyes glittering beadily at the madman who gibbered and frothed above it.

So, an hour later, his comrades found André Fournet and Lily his beloved—the tortured maniac keening over the tortured dead.

But the gray rat they never found.

THE EYRIE



WE HAVE received so many letters suggesting a change in our Weird Story Reprint policy that we have decided to let you, the readers, determine what our future policy shall be. Shall we continue, as in the past, to select the bulk of our reprints from stories which originally appeared in WEIRD TALES, with an occasional reprint from other sources? Shall we publish only an occasional reprint, or shall we follow the advice of those who want the reprints discontinued entirely, and use the space for new stories? Let us have your opinion on this.

A Weird Tales Club

Ralph Rayburn Phillips writes from Portland, Oregon: "It's time I arose and addressed the Eyrie Council. I am sure I voice the sentiment of many WEIRD TALES braves and squaws when I again plead for a Weird Tales Club. In February, 1938, Gertrude Greazeale of Oregon voiced this same plea, but apparently the Chief has ignored it. Why? This is a much needed feature, for we kindred spirits might know each other, as we wish to do, if the Editor will kindly make this possible. He thinks the publishing of names and addresses of Eyrie correspondents is not satisfactory. Again I ask why? Is this the sentiment of readers? I think not. A WEIRD TALES Club department will be a real improvement and this service will be greatly appreciated by many. I trust my voice is heard and my plea heeded. At this time the only story I wish to comment on is *Washington Nocturne* by Seabury Quinn, May, 1939. This story I consider a very poor one, certainly not up to Mr. Quinn's high standard. The picture he has drawn of a fine woman ardently devoted to the greatest of causes, that of Peace, suddenly turning into a rabid militarist because a spirit had appeared to her, seems to me ridiculous and it is a sad spectacle also. In real life a true woman of character would not perform like one of the mindless masses." [Far from opposing the organization of a WEIRD TALES Club, we are all for it. We welcome suggestions as to the purposes, and the method of conducting such a club. Do you, the readers, want to exchange names and addresses for correspondence about weird stories and our magazine? Would you like us to furnish you with artistic WEIRD TALES seals for your letters? It all depends on you, the readers of WT. Washington, D. C., already has a lively WEIRD TALES club, which calls itself The Outsiders and numbers among its members such authors as Seabury Quinn, Everil Worrell, Earl Peirce, Jr., and Bruce Bryan; and such loyal Eyrie fans as Julius Hopkins.—THE EDITOR.]

Those Undead Things

Caroline Ferber writes from Chicago: "Now to cover the September issue with its grand cover of the Raven—illustrating my favorite poem. Thorp McClusky gave us a real treat of his individual style in *While Zombies Walked*. He has a knack of describing so horribly those undead beings—be they zombie, vampire or what. I like this person, if for that reason only. *Spanish Vampire* proved an entertaining piece—the narrative style—the

matter-of-fact acceptance by the college boy of the strange existence of Catalina. Yep, it was an amusing vampire tale. So we come to a sad, sweet tale of deep romance—written as only Seabury Quinn can write. Our patient Griselda did come to her share of happiness eventually. This Chinese bamboo stick business, though, sounded as though it might be frightfully serious. And how well friend Quinn describes women's interest — 'eight pairs of eyes were on him with the fascination women never fail to register when occultism is discussed.' That hits the head on the nail. But now!—here is something unlike all I've read in WT—as far as I can remember—*King of the World's Edge.* It combines one of my pet heroes, King Arthur—and his times —it brings us to this country and the Indians —the maps are helpful also. It looks like a real corker—I'm already sold on it. *Spawn of the Maelstrom* was a shuddery thing—with Finlay's drawing helping to make it the more so. *Cool Air,* although by Lovecraft, wasn't so appealing. The theme is good, but I didn't care so much for the drawn-out style. Smith's *A Night in Malneant* had a nightmarish quality, and fascinating in the utter hopelessness of the terrible gray city."

An Estimable Magazine

Samuel V. Cox writes from Indianapolis: "Again I wish to add my views to your estimable magazine. In the past year or so a large group of magazines have appeared on the market treating of semi-weird fiction, but I can honestly say that none has as yet come up to your standards. The illustrations of a magazine are quite often the deciding factor, along with the grade of stories, that makes or breaks a magazine. Your retention of Finlay and his full-page drawings of some weird poems makes your magazine tops. The reduction in price of course fits my purse but I never had kicked on that. I was always willing to pay a quarter for it. I hope the price reduction does not allow the grade reduction of its stories. WEIRD TALES has a reputation of many years' standing that must not slip, and I am quite sure that while you sit in the editor's chair you will not let it do so. In the October issue I also like the work of Harry Ferman; it has a sense of both reality and unreality that is so necessary for weird effects. I always liked Howard's *Worms of Earth,* and enjoyed rereading it. In the past issues in which *Almuric* appeared, I read with avid hunger, particularly *Almuric* which I was very sorry to come to the end of. Although not weird in the true sense, yet it was a story that held the interest to the bitter end. How often we readers wonder just what we would do if we were suddenly transported to another clime and how we would react. Here in this story, Howard gives what we all would like to think as our true reactions, in this counterpart of earth. Keep up the good work, editor, and count me as a lifelong friend."

Lovecraft Autographs

Willis Conover, Jr., writes from Cumberland, Maryland: "You will forgive me if I register my complete, unadulterated disgust at the so-called 'fan group' for permitting an unbelievable state of affairs to exist. The Lovecraft Memorial Volume—ah, what a fine, noble thing it is for Messrs. Derleth and Wandrei to gather the writings of the beloved HPL for presentation in book form! We, the loyal fans of this late great one, rejoice and cry Hosanna! Nuts. There's a better word, but you don't find it in print. The 'fans' are generous with words, but when it comes to actually supporting the venture, every fist hides itself in a pocket. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei have worked on this volume for two years, confident that HPL's followers would back them up when the time came. Well, the time has come, and what's happened? About *one tenth* of the money necessary to pay for publication has been received! If all the Lovecraft fans came through, there would be no difficulty in putting out this book, plus succeeding volumes of selected letters, etc. Derleth says he and Wandrei are going ahead anyway with the publication —but I don't doubt that their faith in the dependability of the fan group is as shaken as mine, and as is the faith of every *real* friend and follower of H. P. Lovecraft. The kindly, erudite Lovecraft is dead—but we who profess to be his fans are handing him another, a more complete, more final death. Not only

are we slurring his memory, we are killing his chances for literary immortality. If we of his own circle do not accept him, who can believe that the world will? No additional 'inducement' should be necessary; but to the first five persons, and then to the tenth, fifteenth, twentieth, twenty-fifth, and thirtieth, who mention this letter in sending their subscriptions ($3.50 per copy) to August Derleth, Sauk City, Wisconsin, for the Lovecraft volume, I will mail a specimen of H. P. Lovecraft's own handwriting—his signature—either as an autograph to be kept with the book, or as an individual treasure, the personal mark of a man who deserves some small return from what he put into life. Lovecraft gave me these ten autographs just before he died, to dispose of as I wished, and I am disposing of them in this manner. Derleth will forward those names and addresses to me. Whether or not you receive one of the prize autographs, you will be the possessor of the first great monument to H. P. Lovecraft: the complete volume of his choice stories, some of which you may not have read before, and may never read elsewhere."

The Lovecraft Volume

Many of you have written to the Eyrie, asking what stories from WT the Lovecraft memorial volume will contain. August Derleth, who with Donald Wandrei is publishing the volume, tells me that *all* the Lovecraft stories from WEIRD TALES, from *Dagon* down to *Cool Air*, will appear in the book, together with *The Color Out of Space, The Shadow Over Innsmouth,* and several others. The contents of *The Outsider and Others* (as the volume is called) would fill four book-length novels.

A Toss Up

Gene Taylor writes from Knoxville, Tennessee: "In the Eyrie many readers classify the stories printed in WEIRD TALES. I'm afraid I'm entirely unable to do that. I've been a constant reader of your magazine since I first found it on the newsstand about six or eight years ago, and have often thought of writing you about the enjoyment I get out of it, but have hesitated because I so seldom find

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an issue in which I like one story better than another. They are all excellent entertainment. I especially like the stories of Dr. Jules de Grandin and Dr. Trowbridge, by Seabury Quinn, and also enjoy all of the illustrations in the magazine, although to name my favorite illustrator would be impossible, as it would be a toss up between Virgil Finlay and an old favorite who used to do so many of the covers, Brundage. . . . Here's wishing your magazine many more long years of success."

A Nice Ghoulish Touch

Harry Warner, Jr. writes from Hagerstown, Maryland: "The cover for the October WEIRD TALES had a nice ghoulish touch which I much admire. It seems as though all of your artists have a certain something that sets them off from others—from artists out of your magazine; and each in your pages has an entirely different style of 'attack'. Finlay's full-page drawing this time is superb—why the dickens didn't you publish *The Raven* in its entirety? It would be long, I know, but worth it. Top honors this issue go to Sterling and Lovecraft for *In the Walls of Eryx*. Really a great idea behind the yarn; a better writing, and magnificent ending. And how easily it could have been spoiled by a different writing method! *The Witch's Cat* draws down second place (leaving out of consideration the reprint) easily. A real weird tale, it seems to me—give us more like this. Farley's little short is excellent—reminds me a little of *The Transgressor*. *The Lady of the Bells* is good, but Quinn is writing less and less weird lately, Give us more like *More Lives Than One* and *Roads*, if you don't mind. Rest of the issue is also enjoyable, as always—poetry is truly marvelous; the short-short most intriguing, and readers' section—the longer the better."

Fulfilling An Ideal

B. H. Clegg writes from Macon, Georgia: "Your last issue of WEIRD TALES was the best ever. I have been reading this little magazine ever since the first copy appeared on the newsstands, and have always considered it in a class by itself. All the stories have just the right amount of occultism to make one think of Shakespeare's observation that there are more things in heaven and earth than Horatio's philosophy dreams of, and are yet not so utterly devoid of possibility as to make them ludicrous. Every story in the last issue fulfilled this ideal. I note with great satisfaction that you have also reduced the price. This is, I believe, a wise policy, in that it will open up a market in the lower-income class, which will more than double your volume of sales in this territory. . . . In every way I wish you to continue the policy of our favorite periodical, and hurry up with the next issue."

Superlative

Mrs. Loretta Beasley writes from Lyndon, Kansas: "I have just read your October issue, and it's so superlative that it makes me write.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of WEIRD TALES, published monthly, at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1939. State of New York, County of New York, ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared T. Raymond Foley, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the President of WEIRD TALES, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers:* WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.; *Editor:* Farnsworth Wright, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.; *Managing Editor:* None; *Business Manager:* W. J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

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3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

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(*Signed*) T. RAYMOND FOLEY, *President.*

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 20th day of September 1939.

[SEAL]

(*Signed*) M. J. Hagger, Notary Public Westchester Co. New York Clerk's No. 731; New York Register's No. 1H459.

My commission expires March 30, 1941.

This is my first letter to you, although I am a fan of old standing and have every copy of WT ever published! *The Witch's Cat* is a little gem, and I hope to see more by Gans T. Field, with the same atmosphere. I especially like your poems and illustrations, and think DeLay's cover beats Finlay's covers, as DeLay's color work is more definite. Brundage does beautiful work; can't we have some covers by her now and then? I would like to see a short weird article, now and then. Also, why not reprint some of the *earlier* stories from WT? Lots of fans have copies back as far as 1932, when you published Robert E. Howard's *Worms of the Earth,* but they would love the opportunity of reading some really *old* reprints. Please don't change the policy of your magazine, because all the fans love it the way it is."

Smith's Glorious Verse

Ralph C. Hamilton writes from Wooster, Ohio: "DeLay has done unusually well on the cover for the October issue. It was his rich colors which made the painting what it was. And I am pleased to see that Finlay's portrayal of a poetic selection dealt with that masterpiece *The Hashish-Eater.* That particular poem should prove as rich a source for those drawings as has Sterling's *Wine of Wizardry;* in fact, Finlay could draw upon Clark Ashton Smith's poetry for several years without exhausting his source of inspiration; and I'm sure that some of the bizarre and fantastic descriptions contained in it would provide fascinating material. It is hard to decide, but I think that the best story in the issue was *In the Walls of Eryx;* and *The Witch's Cat* comes not far behind. I exclude the Howard reprint from that reckoning. Undoubtedly Quinn must find it difficult to produce an original story once a month, and it is inevitable that many of his stories should closely resemble one another. His excellent style and smooth narration make up for that deficiency to a large degree; but I'd like to suggest that he has used the plot behind *The Lady of the Bells* about often enough. The same might be said for most of his de Grandin tales; and the only remedy that I can see against a slow failing of originality is that he contribute less



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often. The heightened quality of the stories then produced would probably atone for the lack of frequency. I suppose that to many this would seem an unthinkable rupture of a long-standing tradition—blasphemy, in fact. As it is, I marvel at the high percentage of excellent material that Quinn has produced, and at the extraordinary fertility of his brain. I have been somewhat surprised that Smith's *The Double Shadow* received no more acclaim than it did; I think that it is one of the best short stories I've ever read in WEIRD—a masterpiece of literary art. Smith and Lovecraft have no equals among your contributors (I'm beginning to wonder, by the way, if Lovecraft's stock of posthumous tales is inexhaustible. They keep coming. And a fine thing, too.)

Mr. Chandler's comment in the Eyrie struck me as being most appropriate; and I'd like to second his censure of F. B. Long's perpetual idealization of love. It seems to be a making concrete of an abstraction—Love personified, materialized, and set upon a pinnacle. But I suppose it makes a Glorious Thought. You know, I think that more stories of the *Celephais* and *Iranon* type would be welcomed—if there is anyone that is up to writing them. Such stories are a refreshing relief from spooks, monsters, evil gods and powers, terror, dread, and so forth. But WEIRD seldom has overdone the latter type, to its credit."

Worth the Munn

Bruce Bryan writes from Washington, D. C.: "Don't throw anything at me, but the last couple of issues are certainly worth the Munn. It bids fair to please me more than any serial I have yet read in WT. I suppose that Varro ultimately has some sort of hand in Hiawatha's founding of the Iroquois League of the Six Nations. The story reminds me of Arthur Howden-Smith's *Beyond the Sunset*—though the two are in no way similar."

Picture of the Month

Charles Hidley writes from New York City: "Report on October issue. Illustrations: exceedingly well done as compared to those of last month. Why not have the readers vote for the most popular illustration along with

the most popular story? This would give newcomers like Ferman, DeLay, Mooney, etc., an incentive to excell the mighty Finlay each month and would then provide the readers with a series of faultless art pieces. My choice this month goes to the illustrated Clark Ashton Smith poem, *The Hashish-Eater*. The combination of horror and frost-like delicacy is masterful in the extreme. Virgil can even make grotesque monsters and slimy leeches appear fragile. The close second is Ferman's for his *In the Walls of Eryx* illustration. His style, almost the direct opposite of V.F., has that glaring highlight and midnight shadow that enable him to be the perfect 'foil' for the latter artist; it gives WT the variety in art that has been lacking for so long. Third—the astounding characterization of Merlin and the flittermouse, so many times greater than last month's drawing for the same serial, and fourth—*The Witch's Cat*. Stories: 1—*The Witch's Cat*. The simplicity and sincerity with which this interesting little work was written is startling to say the least. I believed, without a moment's doubt, that the cat actually spoke and that the witch really performed her feats of magic. This story had a difference, a modern sophistication and humor that is also imbued in E. Hoffmann Price's two new shorts, *Apprentice Magician* and *Spanish Vampire*. Humor without ridicule. By the way, will Price write any more of his rug stories? Those were gems, too. [He is writing one now.—THE ED.] *Worms of the Earth* came in second and almost surpassed the winner. Your recent reprints have been remarkably good, but I'm sorry Poe got such a razzing from the readers. I don't mind re-reading *good* literature and would like to see some of his lesser known work in WT. Show place, unfortunately, must go to *In the Walls of Eryx*. In any other magazine it would easily have been first, but because of the rather banal plot and the dragged action, with the added inclusion of better stories, it must needs take third prize. *Suggestion of the Month*—why don't you have all reprints exceeding ten pages in length illustrated? As an instance, take Robert E. Howard's weird novelette of the netherworld and the horrors therein. Nineteen pages long and with numerous scenes that are worth il-

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lustration, it had none at all. If you don't care to incur the cost of a drawing by one of your present artists, why not use original illustrations? This would be a treat for newer readers and would also relieve the monotony of a pictureless last twenty pages. How about it, fans?"

Tops

H. Roland writes from Wayne, Pennsylvania: "A nice loud cheer for WEIRD TALES, which is without a doubt the best magazine of its kind published today. I haven't been reading WEIRD TALES long, and only wish I had started sooner; however, I am collecting back issues and surely am glad I have been able to get so many. Tops in the September issue was *King of the World's Edge*. This promises to be a great serial. I wish we could have a little less de Grandin and a little more Jirel of Joiry. I haven't seen her since the April issue and think it's about time for another of her adventures. I certainly hope you keep having those grand Finlay covers, as he is an artist in every sense of the word. What an illustration for *The Metal Chamber!* It isn't very often that you open a magazine to find a drawing like that heading the first story. That was a marvelous cover on the August issue and I thought the portrayal of Edgar Allan Poe and the Raven was a great idea. I know that WEIRD TALES is bought as reading matter and not as a picture book, but since there is such an artist as Finlay illustrating it and since he is so popular with the readers, don't you think it would be a good idea to get together a collection of Finlay's drawings for those readers, with perhaps a picture of the artist himself included? Finlay's drawings remind me of Lovecraft's stories, downright weird yet beautifully done."

[The idea is good, but not practicable—THE EDITOR.]

A Word for de Grandin

Henry D. Barnett writes from Crystal City, Missouri: "Ever since I was seven years old I have been collecting and reading all the weird fiction I could obtain, and for the last five years I have been making a careful study of the supernatural. Therefore I feel well

qualified to make the following criticisms: Some of those who have written to you object to Quinn's de Grandin stories. I would like to remark that Quinn without de Grandin is like Doyle without Sherlock Holmes, Rohmer without Fu Manchu, or Van Dine without Philo Vance. I'm sure a majority of the readers will join me in asking for more de Grandin stories. . . . The best story in your September issue is Derleth and Schorer's *Spawn of the Maelstrom*. It was excellent and very weird. Second best is Lovecraft's *Cool Air*. . . . I would like to say a few words about Price's *Spanish Vampire*. Is Mr. Price trying to destroy all the vampirical tradition so vigilantly guarded by Stoker and Le Fanu? Where did he get the idea that alcohol harmed a vampire, or that garlic killed one? For his information, garlic is used to frighten away vampires. Also, Mr. Price disregarded one factor essential to every bona fide vampire—their power of hypnotism. If a vampire loves a person, the person is hypnotized and his or her blood drained by the vampire so that the demon ghost may have that person for a mate. And, of all things, Price's vampire 'didn't really make the bite'! Every other vampire uses its teeth, Mr. Price! Also, the wise-cracking, slangy style of writing ruined any weird fascination the story may have had. However, after the above singeing of Mr. Price's work, I hope he gives us another vampire tale (without comedy) in the near future."

[He can do it! He is thoroughly steeped in the vampire tradition—THE EDITOR.]

Most Popular Story

It will help us to keep the magazine in accord with your wishes if you will let us know which stories you like best, and which, if any, you do not like. Write a letter, or a post card, to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City. Your favorite in the October issue, as shown by your votes and letters, was *The Witch's Cat*, that curious tale by Gans T. Field; but this was closely pressed for first place by that shuddery reprint story, *Worms of the Earth*, By Robert E. Howard.

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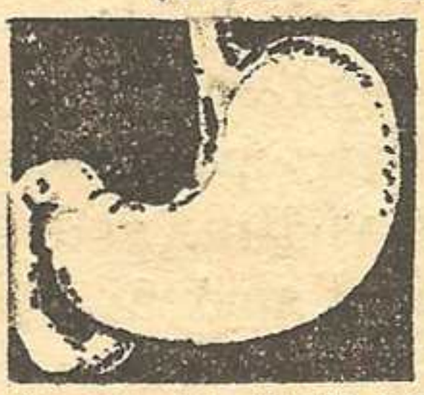
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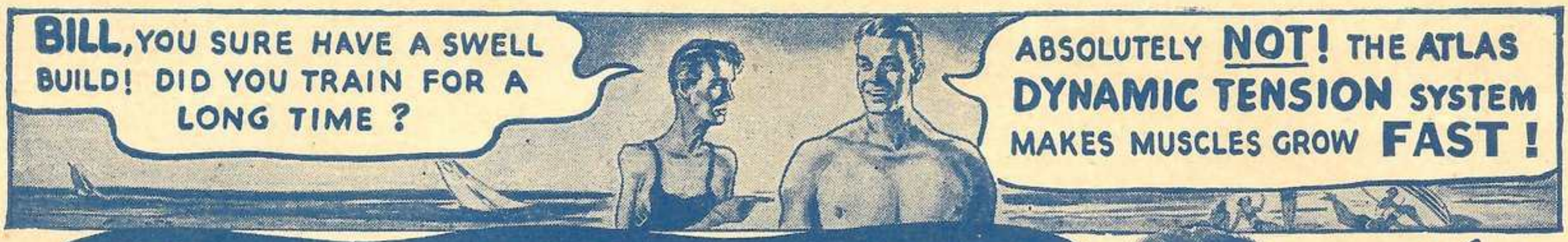
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