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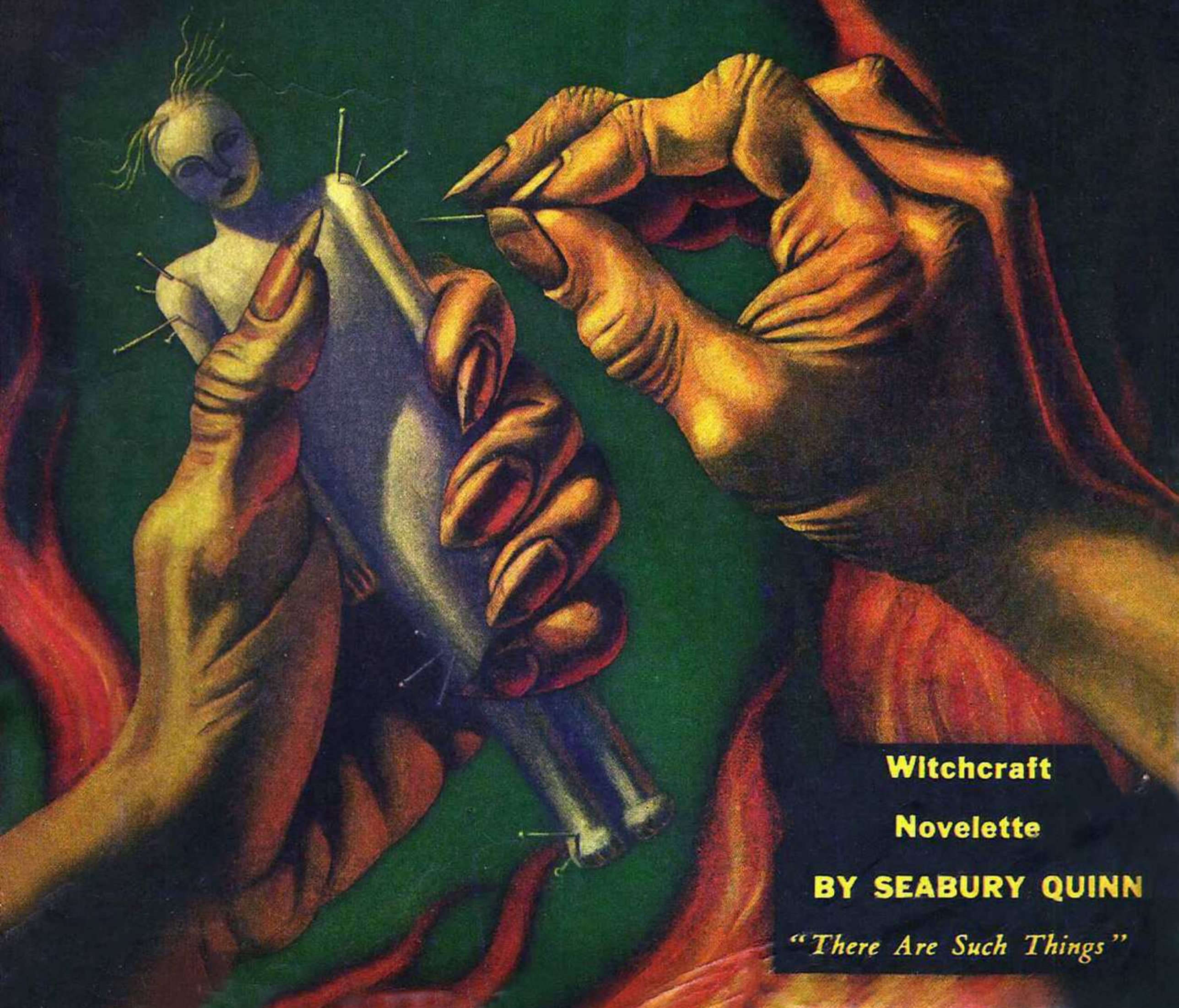

Witchcraft Novelette

BY SEABURY QUINN

"There Are Such Things"

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Inside
Front
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The Magic *of Mind*

WERE the great personages of the past victims of a stupendous hoax? Could such eminent men of the ancient world as Socrates, Pericles, and Alexander the Great have been deluded and cast under the spell of witchcraft—or did the oracles whom they consulted actually possess *a mysterious faculty of foresight?* That *the human mind can truly exert an influence over things and conditions* was not a credulous belief of the ancients, but a known and demonstrable fact to them. That there exists a wealth of infinite knowledge just beyond the border of our daily thoughts, which can be aroused and commanded at will, was not a fantasy of these sages of antiquity, but a dependable aid to which they turned in time of need.

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ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

MAY, 1941

Cover by Hannes Bok

THE CASE OF CHARLES DEXTER WARD . . H. P. Lovecraft 6
(In two parts—part I)
The Finest and Most Thrilling Novel Ever Written by the World's Acknowledged Master of the Weird Tale.

NOVELETTE

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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Vol. 35, No. 9

D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.* H. AVELINE PERKINS, *Associate Editor.*

DO THE DEAD RETURN?

A strange man in Los Angeles, known as "The Voice of Two Worlds," tells of astonishing experiences in far-off and mysterious Tibet, often called the land of miracles by the few travelers permitted to visit it. Here he lived among the lamas, mystic priests of the temple. "In your previous lifetime," a very old lama told him, "you lived here, a lama in this temple. You and I were boys together. I lived on, but you died in youth, and were reborn in England. I have been expecting your return."

The young Englishman was amazed as he looked around the temple where he was believed to have lived and died. It seemed uncannily familiar, he appeared to know every nook and corner of it, yet—at least in this lifetime—he had never been there before. And mysterious was the set of circumstances that had brought him. Could it be a case of reincarnation, that strange belief of the East that souls return to earth again and again, living many lifetimes?

Because of their belief that he had formerly been a lama in the temple, the lamas welcomed the young man with open arms and taught him rare mysteries and long-hidden practices, closely guarded for three thousand years by the sages, which have enabled many to perform amazing feats. He says that the system often leads to almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind, can be used to achieve brilliant business and professional success as well as great happiness. The young man himself later became a noted explorer and geographer, a successful publisher of maps and atlases of the Far East, used throughout the world.

"There is in all men a sleeping giant of mindpower," he says. "When awakened, it can make man capable of surprising feats, from the prolonging of youth to success in many other worthy endeavors." The system is said by many to promote improvement in health; others tell of increased bodily strength, courage and poise.

"The time has come for this long-hidden system to be disclosed to the Western world," declares the author, and offers to send his amazing 9000 word treatise—which reveals many startling results—to sincere readers of this publication, free of cost or obligation. For your free copy, address the Institute of Mentalphysics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. 201N, Los Angeles, Calif. Readers are urged to write promptly, as only a limited number of the free treatises have been printed.

THE SHAPE OF THRILLS TO COME

Peer into the future with us for a few minutes — and take a look at what is coming in the next

WEIRD TALES

FINAL TERRIFYING CHAPTERS OF THE LOVECRAFT NOVEL

There's only one word to describe the closing pages of *Charles Dexter Ward* — terrific! In your next issue Lovecraft builds his story up to its breathtaking, tremendous climax. You won't find so much as a hint here about what is going to happen.

It's all waiting for you in the July issue — so keep your fingers crossed until May 1st peels off the calendar, and brings you the final installment of *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* by H. P. Lovecraft.

GODDESS OF THE ROBOT WORLD

— the novelette by *Ray Cummings* — tells of the revolution of the man-made "men." When science perfects robots which in every way are human, can serve more efficiently and intelligently than any human worker — the machines that boss machines break loose and form the nucleus of a robot empire on a deserted asteroid!

Led by a godlike golden robot, the freed mechanical slaves limber up for interplanetary blitzkrieg . . .

Seabury Quinn **does it again — this time a "*Song Without Words.*" Seriously, it's one of his best stories yet. The phantom of a girl sings a song, whose words few can hear. Those who do — have a date with death. Wait till you meet this ghost who is amazingly realistic and believable — almost alive!**

THE ENCHANTRESS OF SYLAIRE, by Clark Ashton Smith, is a fantasy set in oldentime France — and features the sorceress whose lovers become werewolves when she tires of them.

THE BELIEVERS, by Robert Arthur. There's tremendous suspense in this tale of an occult broadcaster, whose radio audience's belief creates the "Thing" that he has imagined.

Four other grand, gripping weird tales balance this next number. Don't miss The July Issue — on Sale at Your Favorite Newsstand May 1st.

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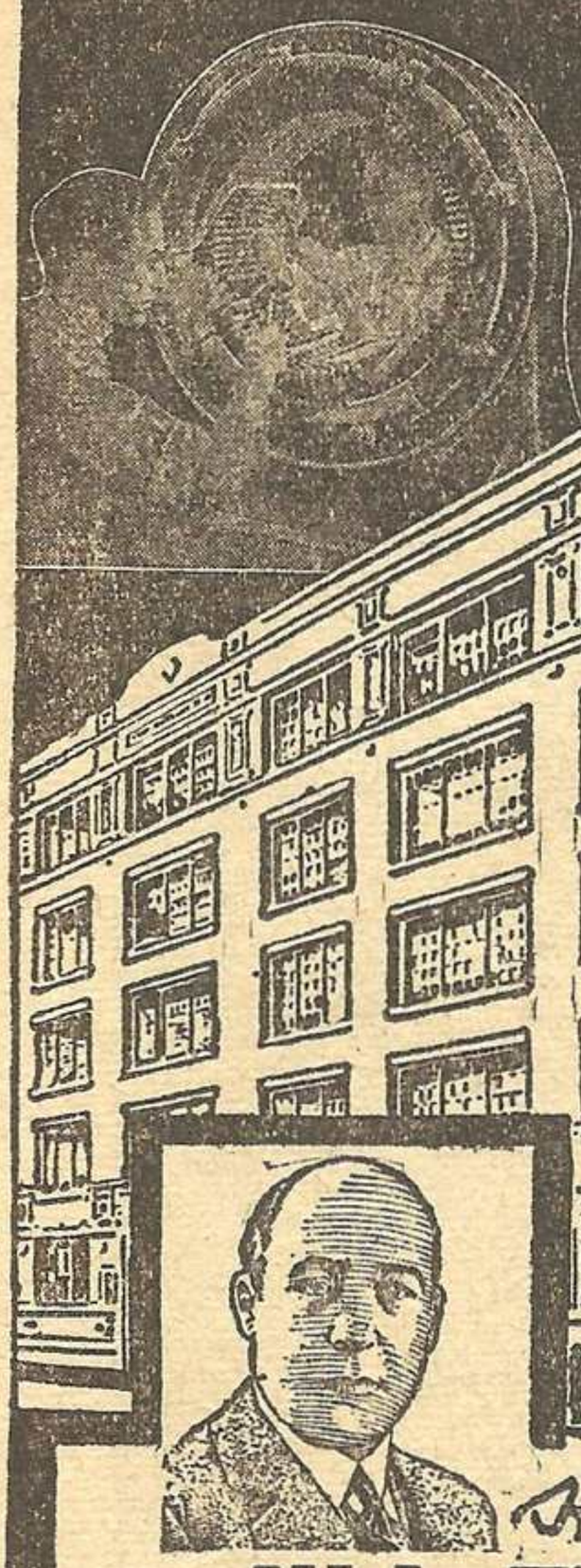

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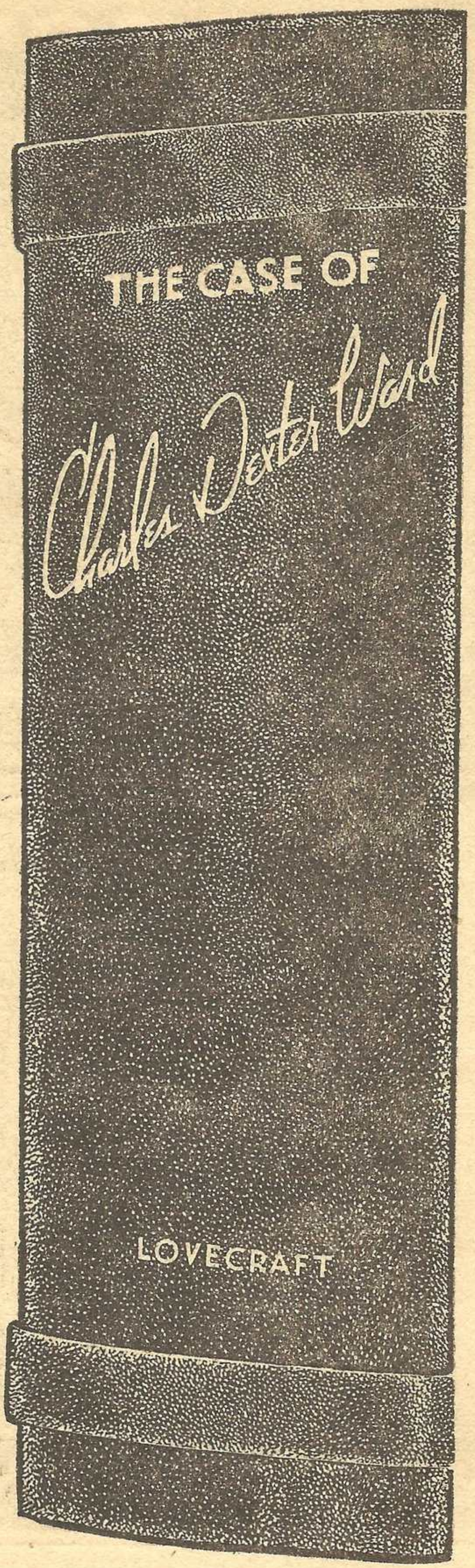
The manuscript, gathered over the course of many years from attics, forgotten strong boxes and old bureaus, is published now—in WEIRD TALES.

In it you are going to read again of Cthulhu and the fearful Necronomicon; in these pages you will also find a perfect wealth of new thrills. In *Charles Ward* you will read . . . but why go on, when you're just raring to get ahead with the story?

So just turn the page—and on with the show!



THE CASE OF
CHARLES DEXTER WARD
H. P. LOVECRAFT
HARRY FERMAN

The Case of Charles Dexter Ward

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

The essential Saltes of Animals may be so prepared and preserved, that an ingenious Man may have the whole Ark of Noah in his owne Studie and raise the fine shape of an Animal out of its Ashes at his Pleasure; and by the lyke method from the essential Saltes of humane Dust, a Philosopher may, without any criminal Necromancy, call up the Shape of any dead Ancestour from the Dust whereinto his Bodie has been incinerated.

BORELLUS.

1. A Result and a Prologue

FROM a private hospital for the insane near Providence, Rhode Island, there recently disappeared an exceedingly singular person. He bore the name of Charles Dexter Ward, and was placed under restraint most reluctantly by his grieving father.

The patient seemed oddly older than his twenty-six years would warrant; his face had taken on a subtle cast which only the very aged usually acquire. While his organic processes showed a certain queerness of proportion which nothing in medical experience can parallel. Respiration and heart action had a baffling lack of symmetry, the voice was lost, so that no sounds above a whisper were possible, digestion was incredibly prolonged and minimized. The skin had a morbid chill and dryness, and the cellular structure of the tissue seemed exaggeratedly coarse and loosely-knit. Even a large olive birthmark on his right hip had disappeared, whilst there had formed on his chest a very peculiar mole or blackish spot of which no trace existed before.

Psychologically, too, Charles Ward was unique. His madness held no affinity to any sort recorded in even the latest and most exhaustive of treatises, and was conjoined to a mental force which would have made him a genius or a leader had it not been twisted into strange and grotesque forms.

Only Dr. Willett, who brought Charles Ward into the world and watched his growth of body and mind ever since, seemed frightened at the thought of his future freedom. He had had a terrible experience and had made a terrible discovery which he dared not reveal to his skeptical colleagues. Willett, indeed, presents a minor mystery all his own in his connection with the case. He was the last to see the patient before his flight, and emerged from that final conversation in a state of mixed horror and relief which several recalled when Ward's escape became known three hours later. That escape itself is one of the unsolved wonders of Dr. Waite's hospital. A window open above a sheer drop of sixty feet could hardly explain it, yet after that talk with Willett the youth was undeniably gone.

He had found Ward in his room, but shortly after his departure the attendants knocked in vain. When they opened the door the patient was not there, and all they found was the open window with a chill April breeze blowing in a cloud of fine bluish-gray dust that almost choked them. True, the dogs had howled some time before; but that was while Willett was still present, and they had caught nothing and shown no disturbance later on. Ward's

father was told at once over the telephone, but he seemed more saddened than surprised. By the time Dr. Waite called in person, Dr. Willett had been talking with him, and both disavowed any knowledge or complicity in the escape. Only from certain closely confidential friends of Willett and the senior Ward have any clues been gained, and even these are too wildly fantastic for general credence. The one fact which remains is that up to the present time no trace of the missing madman has been unearthed.

CHARLES WARD was an antiquarian from infancy, no doubt gaining his taste from the venerable town around him, and from the relics of the past which filled every corner of his parent's old mansion in Prospect Street on the crest of the hill. With the years his devotion to ancient things increased; so that history, genealogy, and the study of Colonial architecture, furniture, and craftsmanship at length crowded everything else from his sphere of interests. These tastes are important to remember in considering his madness. One would have fancied the patient literally transferred to a former age through some obscure sort of auto-hypnosis. The odd thing was that Ward seemed no longer interested in the antiquities he knew so well. He had, it appears, lost his regard for them through sheer familiarity; and all his final efforts were obviously bent toward mastering those common facts of the modern world which had been so totally and unmistakably expunged from his brain. His whole program of reading and conversation was determined by a frantic wish to imbibe such knowledge of his own life and of the ordinary practical and cultural background of the twentieth century as ought to have been his by virtue of his birth in 1902 and his education in the schools of our own time. Alienists are of the dominant opinion that the escaped patient is "lying low" in some humble and unexacting position till his stock of modern information can be brought up to the normal.

The beginning of Ward's madness is a matter of dispute among alienists. Dr. Lyman, the eminent Boston authority, places it in 1919 or 1920, during the boy's last year at the Moses Brown School, when he suddenly turned from the study of the past to the study of the occult, and refused to qualify for college on the ground that he had individual researches of much greater importance to make.

It is, broadly speaking, undeniable that the winter of 1919-20 saw a great change in Ward; whereby he abruptly dropped his general antiquarian pursuits and embarked on a desperate delving into occult subjects both at home and abroad, varied only by this strangely persistent search for his forefather's grave.

From this opinion, however, Dr. Willett substantially dissents, basing his verdict on his close and continuous knowledge of the patient, and on certain frightful investigations and discoveries which he made toward the last.

Those investigations and discoveries have left their mark upon him; so that his voice trembles when he tells them, and his hand trembles when he tries to write of them.

The true madness, he is certain, came with a later change; after the Curwen portrait and the ancient papers had been unearthed; after a trip to strange foreign places had been made, and some terrible invocations chanted under strange and secret circumstances; after certain *answers* to these invocations had been plainly indicated, and a frantic letter penned under agonizing and inexplicable conditions; after the wave of vampirism and the ominous Pawtuxet gossip; and after the patient's memory commenced to exclude contemporary images whilst his voice failed and his physical aspect underwent

the subtle modification so many subsequently noticed.

It was only about this time, Willett points out with much acuteness, that the nightmare qualities became indubitably linked with Ward, and the doctor feels shudderingly sure that enough solid evidence exists to sustain the youth's claim regarding his crucial discovery. There were the mysteries and coincidences of the Orne and Hutchinson letters, and the problem of the Curwen penmanship and of what the detectives brought to light about Dr. Allen; these things, and the terrible message in mediaeval minuscules found in Willett's pocket when he gained consciousness after his shocking experience.

And most conclusive of all, there are the two hideous *results* which the doctor obtained from a certain pair of formulae during his final investigations; results which virtually proved the authenticity of the papers and of their monstrous implications at the same time that those papers were borne for ever from human knowledge.

ONE must look back at Charles Ward's earlier life as at something belonging as much to the past as the antiquities he loved so keenly.

His home was a great Georgian mansion atop the well-nigh precipitous hill that rises just east of the river, and from the rear windows of its rambling wings he could look dizzily out over all the clustered spires, domes, roofs and skyscraper summits of the lower town to the purple hills of the countryside beyond. Here he was born, and from the lovely classic porch of the double-bayed brick façade his nurse had first wheeled him in his carriage; past the little white farmhouse of two hundred years before that the town had long ago overtaken, and on toward the stately colleges along the shady, sumptuous street, whose old square brick mansions and smaller wooden houses with narrow, heavy-columned Doric porches dreamed solid and exclusive amidst their generous yards and gardens.

He had been wheeled, too, along sleepy Congdon Street, one tier lower down on the steep hill, and with all its eastern houses on high terraces. The small wooden houses averaged a greater age here, for it was up this hill that the growing town had climbed. One of the child's first memories is of the great westward sea of hazy roofs and domes and steeples and far hills which he saw one winter afternoon from that great railed embankment, all violet and mystic against a fevered, apocalyptic sunset of reds and golds and purples and curious greens. The vast marble dome of the State House stood out in massive silhouette, its crowning statue haloed fantastically by a break in one of the tinted stratus clouds that barred the flaming sky.

When he was larger his famous walks began; first with his impatiently dragged nurse and then alone in dreamy meditation. One may picture him yet as he was in those days; tall, slim, and blond, with studious eyes and a slight stoop, dressed somewhat carelessly, and giving a dominant impression of harmless awkwardness rather than attractiveness.

He would seek for vivid contrasts; spending half a walk in the crumbling colonial regions northwest of his home, where the hill drops to the lower eminence of Stampers Hill with its ghetto and Negro quarter clustering round the place where the Boston stagecoach used to start before the Revolution, and the other half in the gracious southerly realm about George, Benevolent, Power, and Williams Streets, where the old slope holds unchanged the fine estates and bits of walled garden and steep green lane in which so many fragrant memories linger.

Dr. Willett is certain that, up to this ill-omened winter of first change, Charles Ward's antiquarianism was free from every

trace of the morbid. Graveyards held for him no particular attraction beyond their quaintness and historic value, and of anything like violence or savage instinct he was utterly devoid. Then, by insidious degrees, there appeared to develop a curious sequel to one of his genealogical triumphs of the year before; when he had discovered among his maternal ancestors a certain very long-lived man named Joseph Curwen, who had come from Salem in March of 1692, and about whom a whispered series of highly peculiar and disquieting stories clustered.

WARD'S great-great-grandfather Welcome Potter had in 1785 married a certain "Ann Tillinghast, daughter to Mrs. Eliza, daughter to Capt. James Tillinghast," of whose paternity the family had preserved no trace. Late in 1918, whilst examining a volume of original town records in manuscript, the young genealogist encountered an entry describing a legal change of name, by which in 1772 a Mrs. Eliza Curwen, widow of Joseph Curwen, resumed, along with her seven-year-old daughter Ann, her maiden name of Tillinghast; on the ground "that her Husband's name was become a public Reproach by Reason of what was knowne after his Decease; the which confirming antient common Rumour, tho' not to be credited by a loyall Wife till so proven as to be wholely past Doubting." This entry came to light upon the accidental separation of two leaves which had been carefully pasted together and treated as one by a labored revision of the page numbers.

It was at once clear to Charles Ward that he had indeed discovered a hitherto unknown great-great-great-grandfather. Having discovered his own relationship to this apparently "hushed-up" character, he at once proceeded to hunt out as systematically as possible whatever he might find concerning him. In this excited quest he eventually succeeded beyond his highest expectations, for old letters, diaries and sheaves of unpublished memoirs in cobwebbed Providence garrets and elsewhere yielded many illuminating passages which their writers had not thought it worth their while to destroy. One important sidelight came from a point as remote as New York, where some Rhode Island colonial correspondence was stored in the Museum at Fraunces' Tavern. The really crucial thing, though, and what in Dr. Willett's opinion formed the definite source of Ward's undoing, was the matter found in August, 1919, behind the panelling of the crumbling house in Olney Court. It was that, beyond a doubt, which opened up those black vistas whose end was deeper than the pit.

2. An Antecedent and a Horror

JOSEPH CURWEN, as revealed by the rambling legends embodied in what Ward heard and unearthed, was a very astonishing, enigmatic, obscurely horrible individual. He had fled from Salem to Providence—that universal haven of the odd, the free, and the dissenting—at the beginning of the great witchcraft panic; being in fear of accusation because of his solitary ways and queer chemical or alchemical experiments. He was a colorless-looking man of about thirty, and was soon found qualified to become a freeman of Providence; thereafter buying a home lot just north of Gregory Dexter's at about the foot of Olney Street. His house was built on Stampers Hill west of the Town Street, in what later became Olney Court; and in 1761 he replaced this with a larger one, on the same site, which is still standing.

Now the first odd thing about Joseph Curwen was that he did not seem to grow much older than he had been on his arrival. He engaged in shipping enterprises, purchased wharfage near Mile-End Cove, helped rebuild the Great Bridge in 1713, and in 1723 was one of the founders of

the Congregational Church on the hill; but always did he retain the nondescript aspect of a man not greatly over thirty or thirty-five. As the decades mounted up, this singular quality began to excite wide notice; but Curwen always explained it by saying that he came of hardy forefathers, and practiced a simplicity of living which did not wear him out. How such simplicity could be reconciled with the inexplicable comings and goings of the secretive merchant, and with the queer gleamings of his windows at all hours of night, was not very clear to the townsfolk; and they were prone to assign other reasons for his continued youth and longevity. It was held, for the most part, that Curwen's incessant mixings and boilings of chemicals had much to do with his condition. At length, when over fifty years had passed since the stranger's advent, and without producing more than five years' apparent change in his face and physique, the people began to whisper more darkly; and to meet more than halfway that desire for isolation which he had always shown.

Private letters and diaries of the period reveal, too, a multitude of other reasons why Joseph Curwen was marvelled at, feared, and finally shunned like a plague. His passion for graveyards, in which he was glimpsed at all hours and under all conditions, was notorious; though no one had witnessed any deed on his part which could actually be termed ghoulish. On the Pawtuxet Road he had a farm, at which he generally lived during the summer, and to which he would frequently be seen riding at various odd times of the day or night. Here his only visible servants, farmers, and caretakers were a sullen pair of aged Narragansett Indians; the husband dumb and curiously scarred, and the wife of a very repulsive cast of countenance, probably due to a mixture of Negro blood. In the lean-to of this house was the laboratory where most of the chemical experiments were conducted. Curious porters and teamers who delivered bottles, bags or boxes at the small rear door would exchange accounts of the fantastic flasks, crucibles, alembics, and furnaces they saw in the low-shelved room; and prophesied in whispers that the close-mouthed "chymist"—by which they meant *alchemist*—would not be long in finding the Philosopher's Stone. The nearest neighbors to this farm—the Fenners, a quarter of a mile away—had still queerer things to tell of certain sounds which they insisted came from the Curwen place in the night. There were cries, they said, and sustained howlings; and they did not like the large number of livestock which thronged the pastures. Then, too, there was something very obnoxious about a certain great stone outbuilding with only high narrow slits for windows.

Great Bridge idlers likewise had much to say of Curwen's town house in Olney Court; not so much the fine new one built in 1761, when the man must have been nearly a century old, but the first low gambrel-roofed one with the windowless attic and shingled sides, whose timbers he took the peculiar precaution of burning after its demolition. Here there was less mystery, it is true; but the hours at which lights were seen, the secretiveness of the two swarthy foreigners who comprised the only manservants, the hideous indistinct mumbling of the incredibly aged French housekeeper, the large amounts of food seen to enter a door within which only four persons lived, and the *quality* of certain voices often heard in muffled conversation at highly unseasonable times, all combined with what was known of the Pawtuxet farm to give the place a bad name.

IN CHOICER circles, too, the Curwen home was by no means undiscussed; for as the newcomer had gradually worked

into the church and trading life of the town, he had naturally made acquaintances of the better sort, whose company and conversation he was well fitted by education to enjoy.

His birth was known to be good, since the Curwens or Carwens of Salem needed no introduction in New England. It developed that Joseph Curwen had traveled much in very early life, living for a time in England and making at least two voyages to the Orient; and his speech, when he deigned to use it, was that of a learned and cultivated Englishman. There seemed to lurk in his bearing some cryptic, sardonic arrogance, as if he had come to find all human beings dull through having moved among stranger and more potent entities.

In 1746 Mr. John Merritt, an elderly English gentleman of literary and scientific leanings, came from Newport to the town which was so rapidly overtaking it in standing, and built a fine country seat on the Neck in what is now the heart of the best residence section where he lived in considerable style and comfort. Hearing of Curwen as the owner of the best library in Providence, Mr. Merritt early paid him a call, and was more cordially received than most other callers at the house had been. Curwen suggested a visit to the farmhouse and laboratory whither he had never invited anyone before; and the two drove out at once in Mr. Merritt's coach.

Mr. Merritt maintained that the titles of the books in the special library of thaumaturgical, alchemical, and theological subjects which Curwen kept in a front room were alone sufficient to inspire him with a lasting loathing. This bizarre collection, besides a host of standard works which Mr. Merritt was not too alarmed to envy, embraced nearly all the cabbalists, demenologists, and magicians known to man; and was a treasure-house of lore in the doubtful realms of alchemy and astrology. Hermes Trismogistus in Mesnard's edition, the *Turba Philosopharum,* Geber's *Liber Investigationis,* and Artephous' *Key of Wisdom* all were there; with the cabalistic *Zohar,* Peter Jammy's set of Albertus Magnus, Raymond Lully's *Ars Magna et Ultima* in Zetzner's edition, Roger Bacon's *Thesaurus Chemicus,* Fludd's *Clavis Alchimiae,* and Trithemius' *De Lapide Philosophico* crowding them close. Mediaeval Jews and Arabs were represented in profusion, and Mr. Merritt turned pale when, upon taking down a fine volume conspicuously labeled as the *Qunoon-e-Islam,* he found it was in truth the forbidden *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred, of which he had heard such monstrous things whispered some years previously after the exposure of nameless rites at the strange little fishing village of Kingsport, in the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay.

But the worthy gentleman owned himself most impalpably disquieted by a mere minor detail. On the huge mahogany table there lay face downward a badly worn copy of Borellus, bearing many cryptical marginalia and interlineations in Curwen's hand.

The book was open at about its middle, and one paragraph displayed such thick and tremulous pen-strokes beneath the lines of mystic black-letters that the visitor could not resist scanning it through. He recalled it to the end of his days, writing it down from memory in his diary and once trying to recite it to his close friend Dr. Checkley, till he saw how greatly it disturbed that urbane rector. It read:

> The esential Saltes of Animals may be so prepared and preserved, that an ingenious Man may have the whole Ark of Noah in his owne Studie, and raise the fine Shape of an Animal out of its Ashes at his Pleasure; and by the lyke Method from the essential Saltes of humane Dust, a Philosopher may, without any criminal Necromancy, call up the Shape of any dead Ancestour from the Dust whereinto his Bodie has been incinerated.

IT WAS near the docks along the southerly part of the Town Street, however, that the worst things were muttered about Joseph Curwen. Sailors are superstitious folk; and all made strange furtive signs of protection when they saw the slim, deceptively young-looking figure with its yellow hair and slight stoop entering the Curwen warehouse in Doubloon Street or talking with captains and supercargos on the long quay where the Curwen ships rode restlessly. Curwen's own clerks and captains hated and feared him, and all his sailors were mongrel riff-raff from Martinique, St. Eustatius, Havana, or Port Royal. It was, in a way, the frequency with which these sailors were replaced, which inspired the acutest and most tangible part of the fear in which the old man was held, and in time it became exceedingly difficult for Curwen to keep his oddly assorted hands.

By 1760 Joseph Curwen was virtually an outcast, suspected of vague horrors and daemoniac alliances which seemed all the more menacing because they could not be named, understood, or even proved to exist.

Meanwhile the merchant's worldly affairs were prospering. He had a virtual monopoly of the town's trade in saltpetre, black pepper, and cinnamon, and easily led any other one shipping establishment save the Browns in his importation of brassware, indigo, cotton, woollens, salt, rigging, iron, paper and English goods of every kind, Curwen was, in fact, one of the prime exporters of the Colony.

THE sight of this strange, pallid man, hardly middle-aged in aspect yet certainly not less than a full century old, seeking at last to emerge from a cloud of fright and detestation too vague to pin down or analyze, was at once a pathetic, a dramatic, and a contemptible thing. Such is the power of wealth and of surface gestures, however, that there came indeed a slight abatement in the visible aversion displayed toward him; especially after the rapid disappearances of his sailors abruptly ceased. He must likewise have begun to practice an extreme care and secrecy in his graveyard expeditions, for he was never again caught at such wanderings; whilst the rumors of uncanny sounds and maneuvers at his Pawtuxet farm diminished in proportion.

But the effect of all this belated mending was necessarily slight. Curwen continued to be avoided and distrusted, as indeed the one fact of his continued air of youth at a great age would have been enough to warrant; and he could see that in the end his fortunes would be likely to suffer. So about this time the crafty scholar hit upon a last desperate expedient to regain his footing in the community. Hitherto a complete hermit, he now determined to contract an advantageous marriage; securing as a bride some lady whose unquestioned position would make all ostracism of his home impossible. It may be that he also had deeper reasons for wishing an alliance; reasons so far outside the known cosmic sphere that only papers found a century and a half after his death caused anyone to suspect them; but of this nothing certain can ever be learned. Naturally he was aware of the horror and indignation with which any ordinary courtship of his would be received, hence looked about for some likely candidate upon whose parents he might exert a suitable pressure. Such candidates, he found, were not at all easy to discover; since he had very particular requirements in the way of beauty, accomplishments, and social security. At length his survey narrowed down to the household of one of his best and oldest ship-captains, a widower of high birth and unblemished standing named Dutie Tillinghast, whose only daughter Eliza seemed dowered with every conceivable advantage save prospects as an heiress. Captain Tillinghast was com-

pletely under the domination of Curwen; and consented, after a terrible interview in his cupolaed house on Power's Lane hill, to sanction the blasphemous alliance.

ELIZA TILLINGHAST was at that time eighteen years of age, and had been reared as gently as the reduced circumstances of her father permitted. Her arguments with her father concerning the proposed Curwen marriage must have been painful indeed; but of these we have no record. Certain it is that her engagement to young Ezra Weeden, second mate of the Crawford packet *Enterprise,* was dutifully broken off, and that her union with Joseph Curwen took place on the seventh of March, 1763, in the Baptist church, in the presence of one of the most distinguished assemblages which the town could boast; the ceremony being performed by the youngest Samuel Winson. The *Gazette* mentioned the event very briefly, and in most surviving copies the item in question seems to be cut or torn out. Ward found a single intact copy after much search in the archives of a private collector of note, observing with amusement the meaningless urbanity of the language:

> Monday evening last, Mr. Joseph Curwen, of this Town, Merchant, was married to Miss Eliza Tillinghast, Daughter of Captain Dutie Tillinghast, a young Lady who has real Merit, added to a beautiful Person, to grace the connubial State and perpetuate its Felicity.

The social influence of the Tillinghasts, however, was not to be denied; and once more Joseph Curwen found his house frequented by persons whom he could never otherwise have induced to cross his threshold. His acceptance was by no means complete, and his bride was socially the sufferer through her forced venture; but at all events the wall of utter ostracism was somewhat worn down. In his treatment of his wife the strange bridegroom astonished both her and the community by displaying an extreme graciousness and consideration. The new house in Olney Court was now wholly free from disturbing manifestations, and although Curwen was much absent at the Pawtuxet farm which his wife never visited, he seemed more like a normal citizen than at any other time in his long years of residence. Only one person remained in open enmity with him, this being the youthful ship's officer whose engagement to Eliza Tillinghast had been so abruptly broken. Ezra Weeden had frankly vowed vengeance; and though of a quiet and originally mild disposition, was now gaining a hate-bred, dogged purpose which boded no good to the usurping husband.

On the seventh of May, 1765, Curwen's only child Ann was born; and was christened by the Reverend John Graves of King's Church, of which both husband and wife had become communicants shortly after their marriage, in order to compromise between their respective Congregational and Baptist affiliations. The record of this birth, as well as that of the marriage two years before, was stricken from most copies of the church and town annals where it ought to appear; and Charles Ward located both with the greatest difficulty after his discovery of the widow's change of name had apprised him of his own relationship, and engendered the feverish interest which culminated in his madness. The birth entry, indeed, was found very curiously through correspondence with the heirs of the loyalist Dr. Graves, who had taken with him a duplicate set of records when he left his pastorate at the outbreak of the Revolution. Ward had tried this source because he knew that his great-great-grandmother, Ann Tillinghast Potter, had been an Episcopalian.

Shortly after the birth of his daughter, an event he seemed to welcome with a fervor greatly out of keeping with his

usual coldness, Curwen resolved to sit for a portrait. This he had painted by a very gifted Scotsman named Cosmo Alexander, then a resident of Newport, and since famous as the early teacher of Gilbert Stuart. The likeness was said to have been executed on a wall-panel of the library of the house in Olney Court, but neither of the two old diaries mentioning it gave any hint of its ultimate disposition.

In 1766 came the final change in Joseph Curwen. It was very sudden, and gained wide notice amongst the curious townsfolk; for the air of suspense and expectancy dropped like an old cloak, giving instant place to an ill-concealed exaltation of perfect triumph. It was after this transition, which appears to have come early in July, that the sinister scholar began to astonish people by his possession of information which only their long-dead ancestors would seem to be able to impart.

But Curwen's feverish secret activities by no means ceased with this change. On the contrary, they tended rather to increase; so that more and more of his shipping business was handled by the captains whom he now bound to him by ties of fear as potent as those of bankruptcy had been. He altogether abandoned the slave trade, alleging that its profits were constantly decreasing. Every possible moment was spent at the Pawtuxet farm; though there were rumors now and then of his presence in places which, though not actually near graveyards, were yet so situated in relation to graveyards that thoughtful people wondered just how thorough the old merchant's change of habits really was. Ezra Weeden, though his periods of espionage were necessarily brief and intermittent on account of his sea voyaging, had a vindictive persistence which the bulk of the practical townsfolk and farmers lacked; and subjected Curwen's affairs to a scrutiny such as they had never had before.

Smuggling and evasion were the rule in Narragansett Bay, and nocturnal landings of illicit cargoes were continuous commonplaces. But Weeden, night after night, following the lighters or small sloops which he saw steal off from the Curwen warehouses at the Town Street docks, soon felt assured that it was not merely His Majesty's armed ships which the sinister skulker was anxious to avoid. The lighters were wont to put out from the black silent docks, and they would go down the bay some distance, perhaps as far as Namquit Point, where they would meet and receive cargo from strange ships of considerable size and widely varied appearance. Curwen's sailors would then deposit this cargo at the usual point on the shore, and transport it overland to the farm; locking it in the same cryptical stone building which had formerly received the Negroes. The cargo consisted almost wholly of boxes and cases, of which a large proportion were oblong and heavy, and disturbingly suggestive of coffins.

Weeden always watched the farm with unremitting assiduity, visiting it each night for long periods, and seldom letting a week go by without a sight except when the ground bore a footprint revealing snow. Finding his own vigils interrupted by nautical duties, he hired a tavern companion named Eleazar Smith to continue the survey during his absences; and between them the two could have set in motion some extraordinary rumors. That they did not do so was only because they knew the effect of publicity would be to warn their quarry and make further progress impossible.

IT IS gathered that Weeden and Smith became early convinced that a great series of tunnels and catacombs, inhabited by a very sizable staff of persons besides the old Indian and his wife, underlay the farm. The house was an old peaked relic of the middle seventeenth century with

enormous stack chimney and diamond-paned lattice windows, the laboratory being in a lean-to toward the north, where the roof came nearly to the ground. This building stood clear of any other; yet judging by the different voices heard at odd times within, it must have been accessible through secret passages beneath. These voices ran the gamut betwixt dronings of dull acquiescence and explosions of frantic pain or fury, rumblings of conversation and whines of entreaty, pantings of eagerness and shouts of protest. They appeared to be in different languages, all known to Curwen, whose rasping accents were frequently distinguishable in reply, reproof, or threatening.

Weeden had many verbatim reports of overheard scraps in his notebook, for English, French, and Spanish, which he knew, were frequently used; but of these nothing has survived. He did, however, say that besides a few ghoulish dialogues in which the past affairs of Providence families were concerned, most of the questions and answers he could understand were historical or scientific; occasionally pertaining to very remote places and ages. Once, for example, an alternately raging and sullen figure was questioned in French about the Black Prince's massacre at Limoges in 1370, as if there were some hidden reason which he ought to know. Curwen asked the prisoner—if prisoner it were—whether the order to slay was given because of the Sign of the Goat found on the altar in the ancient Roman crypt beneath the cathedral, or whether The Dark Man of the Haute Vienne Coven had spoken the Three Words. Failing to obtain replies, the inquisitor had seemingly resorted to extreme means; for there was a terrific shriek followed by silence and muttering and a bumping sound.

None of these colloquies was ever ocularly witnessed, since the windows were always heavily draped. Later, no more conversations were ever heard in the house, and Weeden and Smith concluded that Curwen had transferred his field of action to regions below.

That such regions in truth existed, seemed amply clear from many things. Faint cries and groans unmistakably came up now and then from what appeared to be the solid earth in places far from any structure; whilst hidden in the bushes along the river-bank in the rear, where the high ground sloped steeply down to the valley of the Pawtuxet, there was found an arched oaken door in a frame of heavy masonry, which was obviously an entrance to caverns within the hill.

IT WAS in January, 1770, whilst Weeden and Smith were still debating vainly on what, if anything, to think or do about the whole bewildering business, that the incident of the *Fortaleza* occurred. Exasperated by the burning of the revenue sloop *Liberty* at Newport during the previous summer, the customs fleet under Admiral Wallace had adopted an increased vigilance concerning strange vessels; and on this occasion His Majesty's armed schooner *Cygnet,* under Captain Charles Leshe, captured after a short pursuit one early morning the scow *Fortaleza* of Barcelona, Spain, under Captain Manual Arruda, bound according to its log from Grand Cairo, Egypt, to Providence. When searched for contraband material, this ship revealed the astonishing fact that its cargo consisted exclusively of Egyptian mummies, consigned to "Sailor A. B. C.," who would come to remove his goods in a lighter just off Namquit Point, and whose identity Captain Arruda felt himself in honor bound not to reveal. The Vice-Admiralty Court at Newport, at a loss what to do in view of the non-contraband nature of the cargo on the one hand and of the unlawful secrecy of the entry on the other hand, compromised on Collector Rob-

inson's recommendation by freeing the ship but forbidding it a port in Rhode Island waters. There were later rumors of its having been seen in Boston Harbor, though it never openly entered the Port of Boston.

This extraordinary incident did not fail of wide remark in Providence and there were not many who doubted the existence of some connection between the cargo of mummies and the sinister Joseph Curwen; it did not take much imagination to link him with a freakish importation which could not conceivably have been destined for anyone else in the town. Weeden and Smith, of course, felt no doubt whatsoever of the significance of the thing; and indulged in the wildest theories concerning Curwen and his monstrous labors.

The following spring, like that of the year before, had heavy rains; and the watchers kept careful track of the river-bank behind the Curwen farm. Large sections were washed away, and a certain number of bones discovered; but no glimpse was afforded of any actual subterranean chambers or burrows. Something was rumored, however, at the village of Pawtuxet about a mile below, where the river flows in falls over a rocky terrace to join the placid landlocked cove. The fisherfolk about the bridge did not like the wild way that one of the things stared as it shot down to the still water below, or the way that another half cried out although its condition had greatly departed from that of objects which normally cry out.

That rumor sent Smith—for Weeden was just then at sea—in haste to the river-bank behind the farm; where surely enough there remained the evidences of an extensive cave-in. Smith went to the extent of some experimental digging, but was deterred by lack of success—or perhaps by fear of possible success. It is interesting to speculate on what the persistent and revengeful Weeden would have done had he been ashore at the time.

BY THE autumn of 1770 Weeden decided that the time was ripe to tell others of his discoveries; for he had a large number of facts to link together, and a second eye-witness to refute the possible charge that jealousy and vindictiveness had spurred his fancy. As his first confidant he selected Captain James Mathewson of the *Enterprise,* who on the one hand knew him well enough not to doubt his veracity, and on the other hand was sufficiently influential in the town to be heard in turn with respect. The colloquy took place in an upper room of Sabin's Tavern near the docks, with Smith present to corroborate virtually every statement; and it could be seen that Captain Mathewson was tremendously impressed. Like nearly everyone else in the town, he had had black suspicions of his own anent Joseph Curwen; hence it needed only this confirmation and enlargement of data to convince him absolutely. At the end of the conference he was very grave, and enjoined strict silence upon the two younger men.

The right persons to tell, he believed, would be Dr. Benjamin West, whose pamphlet on the late transit of Venus proved him a scholar and keen thinker; Reverend James Manning, President of the College; ex-Governor Stephen Hopkins, who had been a member of the Philosophical Society at Newport, and was a man of very broad perceptions; John Carter, publisher of the *Gazette;* all four of the Brown brothers, John, Joseph, Nicholas and Moses, who formed the recognized local magnates; old Dr. Jabez Bowen, whose erudition was considerable, and who had much first-hand knowledge of Curwen's odd purchases; and Captain Abraham Whipple, a privateersman of phenomenal boldness and energy who could be counted on to lead in any active measures needed.

The mission of Captain Mathewson prospered beyond his highest expectations; for whilst he found one or two of the chosen confidants somewhat skeptical of the possible ghostly side of Weeden's tale, there was not one who did not think it necessary to take some sort of secret and coördinated action. Curwen, it was clear, formed a vague potential menace to the welfare of the town and Colony; and must be eliminated at any cost.

Late in December, 1770, a group of eminent townsmen met at the home of Stephen Hopkins and debated tentative measures. Weeden's notes, which he had given to Captain Mathewson, were carefully read; and he and Smith were summoned to give testimony anent details. Something very like fear seized the whole assemblage before the meeting was over, though there ran through that fear a grim determination which Captain Whipple's bluff and resonant profanity best expressed. They would not notify the Governor, because a more than legal course seemed necessary. With hidden powers of uncertain extent apparently at his disposal, Curwen was not a man who could safely be warned to leave town. He must be surprised at his Pawtuxet farm by a large raiding-party of seasoned privateersmen and given one decisive chance to explain himself. If he proved a madman, amusing himself with shrieked and imaginary conversations in different voices, he would be properly confined. If something graver appeared, and if the underground horrors indeed turned out to be real, he and all with him must die. It could be done quietly, and even the widow and her father need not be told how it came about.

WHILE these serious steps were under discussion there occurred in the town an incident so terrible and inexplicable that for a time little else was mentioned for miles around. In the middle of a moonlight January night with heavy snow underfoot there resounded over the river and up the hill a shocking series of cries which brought sleepy heads to every window; and people around Weybosset Point saw a great white thing plunging frantically along the badly cleared space in front of the Turk's Head. There was a baying of dogs in the distance, but this subsided as soon as the clamor of the awakened town became audible. Parties of men with lanterns and muskets hurried out to see what was happening, but nothing rewarded their search. The next morning, however, a giant, muscular body, stark naked, was found on the jams of ice around the southern piers of the Great Bridge, where the Long Dock stretched out beside Abbott's distil-house, and the identity of this object became a theme for endless speculation and whispering. It was not so much the younger as the older folk who whispered, for only in the patriarchs did that rigid face with horror-bulging eyes strike any chord of memory. They, shaking as they did so, exchanged furtive murmurs of wonder and fear; for in those stiff, hideous features lay a resemblance so marvelous as to be almost an identity—and that identity was with a man who had died full fifty years before.

Ezra Weeden was present at the finding; and remembering the baying of the night before, set out along Weybosset Street and across Muddy Dock Bridge whence the sound had come. He had a curious expectancy, and was not surprised when, reaching the edge of the settled district where the street merged into the Pawtuxet Road, he came upon some very curious tracks in the snow. The naked giant had been pursued by dogs and many booted men, and the returning tracks of the hounds and their masters could be easily traced. They had given up the chase upon coming too near the town. Weeden smiled grimly, and as a perfunctory detail traced the footprints

back to their source. It was the Pawtuxet farm of Joseph Curwen, as he well knew it would be; and he would have given much had the yard been less confusingly trampled. As it was, he dared not seem too interested in full daylight. Dr. Bowen, to whom Weeden went at once with his report, performed an autopsy on the strange corpse, and discovered peculiarities which baffled him utterly. The digestive tracts of the huge man seemed never to have been in use, whilst the whole skin had a coarse, loosely-knit texture impossible to account for. Impressed by what the old man whispered of this body's likeness to the long dead blacksmith Daniel Green, whose great-grandson Aaron Hoppin was a supercargo in Curwen's employ, Weeden asked casual questions till he found where Green was buried. That night a party of ten visited the old North Burying Ground opposite Herrenden's Lane and opened a grave. They found it vacant, precisely as they had expected.

MEANWHILE arrangements had been made with the post riders to intercept Joseph Curwen's mail, and shortly before the incident of the naked body there was found a letter from one Jedediah Orne of Salem which made the coöperating citizens think deeply. Parts of it, copied and preserved in the private archives of the Smith family where Charles Ward found it, ran as follows:

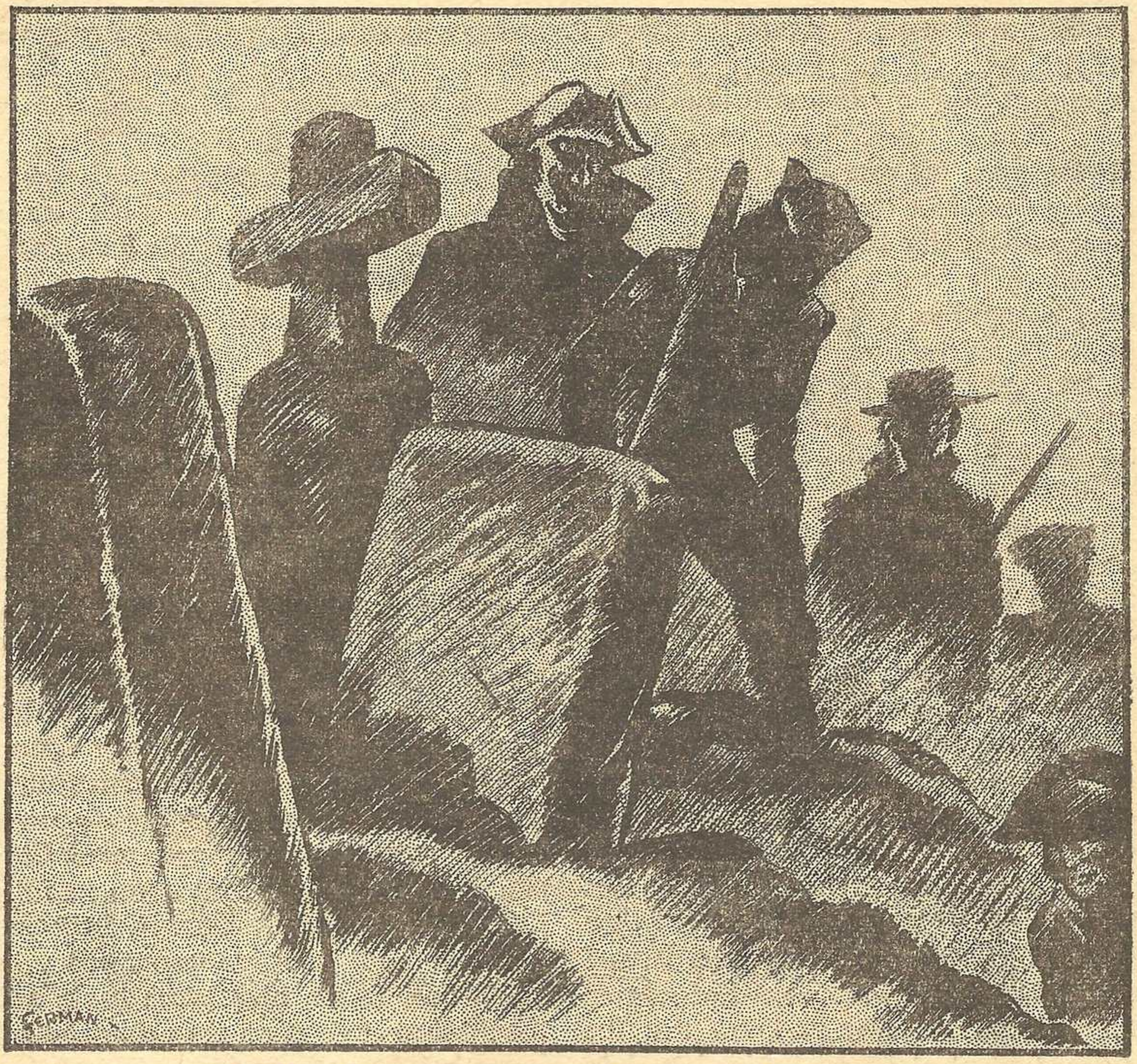
I delight that you continue in ye getting at Olde Matters in your Way, and doe not think better was done at Mr. Hutchinson's in Salem-Village. Certainly, there was Noth'g butt ye liveliest Awfulness in that which H. rais'd upp from what he cou'd gather onlie a part of. What you sente, did not Worke, whether because Any Thing miss'g, or because ye Wordes were not Righte from my Speak'g or yr copy'g. Alone am at a Loss. I have not ye Chymicall art to followe Borellus, and owne my Selfe confounded by ye VII. Booke of ye Necronomicon that you recommende. But I wou'd have you Observe what was tolde to us aboute tak'g Care whom to calle up, for you are Sensible what Mr. Mather writ in ye Magnalia of ————, and can judge how truely that Horrendous thing is reported. I say to you againe, doe not call upp Any that you can not put downe; by the Which I meane, Any that can in Turne call up somewhat against you, whereby your Powerfullest Devices may not be of use. Ask of the Lesser, lest the greater shall not wish to Answer, and shall commande more than you. I was frighted when I read of your know'g what Ben Zariatnatmik hadde in his Ebony Boxe, for I was conscious who must have told you. And againe I ask that you shalle write me as Jedediah and not Simon. In this Community a Man may not live too long, and you knowe my Plan by which I came back as my Son. I am desirous you will Acquaint me with what ye Blacke Man learnt from Sylvanus Cocidius in ye Vault, under ye Roman wall, and will be oblig'd for ye Lend'g of ye MS. you speak of.

Another and unsigned letter from Philadelphia provoked equal thought, especially for the following passage:

I will observe what you say respecting the sending of Accounts only by yr Vessels, but can not always be certain when to expect them. In the Matter spoke of, I require only one more thing; but wish to be sure I apprehend you exactly. You inform me, that no Part must be missing if the finest Effects are to be had, but you can not but know how hard it is to be sure. It seems a great Hazard and Burthen to take away the whole Box, and in Town (i. e. St. Peter's, St. Paul's, St. Mary's, or Christ Church) it can scarce be done at all. But I know what Imperfections were in the one rais'd up October last, and how many live Specimens you were forced to imploy before you hit upon the right Mode in the year 1766; so will be guided by you in all Matters. I am impatient for yr Brig, and inquire daily at Mr. Biddle's Wharf.

A third suspicious letter was in an unknown tongue and even an unknown alphabet. In the Smith diary found by Charles Ward a single oft-repeated combination of characters is clumsily copied; and authorities at Brown University have pronounced the alphabet Amharic or Abyssinian, although they do not recognize the word. None of these epistles was ever delivered to Curwen, though the disappearance of Jedediah Orme from Salem as recorded shortly afterward showed that the Providence men took certain quiet steps.

Curwen, despite all precautions, apparently felt that something was in the wind;



"They found the grave vacant—precisely as they had expected."

for he was now remarked to wear an unusually worried look. His coach was seen at all hours in the town and on the Pawtuxet Road, and he dropped little by little the air of forced geniality with which he had latterly sought to combat the town's prejudice. The nearest neighbors to his farm, the Fenners, one night remarked a great shaft of light shooting into the sky from some aperture in the roof of that cryptical stone building with the high excessively narrow windows; an event which they quickly communicated to John Brown in Providence.

Mr. Brown had become the executive leader of the select group bent on Curwen's extirpation, and had informed the Fenners that some action was about to be taken. To them Mr. Brown had entrusted the duty of watching the Curwen farmhouse, and of regularly reporting every incident which took place there.

THE probability that Curwen was on guard and attempting unusual things, as suggested by the odd shaft of light, precipitated at last the action so carefully devised by the band of serious citizens. According to the Smith diary a company of about one hundred men met at ten P.M. on Friday, April twelfth, 1771, in the great room of Thurston's Tavern at the Sign of

the Golden Lion on Weybosset Point across the Bridge. Of the guiding group of prominent men in addition to the leader, John Brown, there were present Dr. Brown, with his case of surgical instruments, President Manning without the great periwig (the largest in the Colonies) for which he was noted, Governor Hopkins, wrapped in a dark cloak and accompanied by his seafaring brother Eseh whom he had initiated at the last moment with the permission of the rest, John Carter, Captain Mathewson, and Captain Whipple, who was to lead the actual raiding party. These chiefs conferred apart in a rear chamber, after which Captain Whipple emerged to the great room and gave the gathered seamen their last oaths and instructions. Eleazar Smith was with the leaders as they sat in the rear apartment awaiting the arrival of Ezra Weeden, whose duty was to keep track of Curwen and report the departure of his coach for the farm.

About ten-thirty a heavy rumble was heard on the Great Bridge, followed by the sound of a coach in the street outside; and at that hour there was no need of waiting for Weeden in order to know that the doomed man had set out for his last night of unhallowed wizardry. A moment later, as the receding coach clattered faintly over the Muddy Dock Bridge, Weeden appeared; and the raiders fell silently into military order in the street, shouldering the firelocks, fowling-pieces, or whaling harpoons which they had with them. Weeden and Smith were with the party, and of the deliberating citizens there were present for active service Captain Whipple, the leader, Captain Eseh Hopkins, John Carter, President Manning, Captain Mathewson, and Dr. Bowen; together with Moses Brown, who had come up at the eleventh hour though absent from the preliminary session in the tavern. All these freemen and their hundred sailors began the long march without delay, grim and a trifle apprehensive as they left the Muddy Dock behind and mounted the gentle rise of Broad Street toward the Pawtuxet Road.

An hour and a quarter later the raiders arrived, as previously agreed, at the Fenner farmhouse; where they heard a final report on their intended victim. He had reached his farm more than half an hour before, and the strange light had soon afterward shot once into the sky. There were no lights in any visible windows, but this was always the case of late. Even as this news was given another great glare arose toward the south, and the party realized that they had indeed come close to the scene of awesome and unnatural wonders. Captain Whipple now ordered his force to separate into three divisions; one of twenty men under Eleazar Smith to strike across to the shore and guard the landing-place against possible reinforcements for Curwen until summoned by a messenger for desperate service; a second of twenty men under Captain Eseh Hopkins to steal down into the river valley behind the Curwen farm and demolish with axes or gunpowder the oaken door in the high, steep bank; and the third to close in on the house and adjacent buildings themselves. Of this last division one third was to be led by Captain Mathewson to the cryptical stone edifice with high narrow windows, another third to follow Captain Whipple himself to the main farmhouse, and the remaining third to preserve a circle around the whole group of buildings until summoned by a final emergency signal.

The river party would break down the hillside door at the sound of a single whistle-blast, waiting and capturing anything which might issue from the regions within. At the sound of two whistle blasts it would advance through the aperture to oppose the enemy or join the rest of the raiding contingent. The party at the stone building would accept these respective sig-

nals in an analogous manner; forcing an entrance at the first, and at the second descending whatever passage into the ground might be discovered, and joining the general or focal warfare expected to take place within the caverns. A third or emergency signal of three blasts would summon the immediate reserve from its general guard duty; its twenty men dividing equally and entering the unknown depths through both farmhouse and stone building. Captain Whipple's belief in the existence of catacombs was absolute, and he took no alternative into consideration when making his plans. He had with him a whistle of great power and shrillness and did not fear any mistaking or misunderstanding of signals. The final reserve at the landing, of course, was nearly out of the whistle's range; hence, would require a special messenger if needed for help. Moses Brown and John Carter went with Captain Hopkins to the riverbank, while President Manning was detailed with Captain Mathewson to the stone building. Dr. Bowen, with Ezra Weeden, remained in Captain Whipple's party which was to storm the farmhouse itself. The attack was to begin as soon as a messenger from Captain Hopkins had joined Captain Whipple to notify him of the river party's readiness. The leader would then deliver the loud single blast, and the various advance parties would commence their simultaneous attack on three points. Shortly before one A.M. the three divisions left the Fenner farmhouse; one to guard the landing, another to seek the river valley and the hillside door, and the third to subdivide and attend to the actual buildings of the Curwen farm.

ELEAZAR SMITH, who accompanied the shore-guarding party, records in his diary an uneventful march and a long wait on the bluff by the bay; broken once by what seemed to be the distant sound of the signal whistle and again by a peculiar muffled blend of roaring and crying and a powder blast which seemed to come from the same direction. Later on one man thought he caught some distant gunshots, and still later Smith himself felt the throb of titanic thunderous words resounding in upper air. It was just before dawn that a single haggard messenger with wild eyes and a hideous unknown odor about his clothing appeared and told the detachment to disperse quietly to their homes and never again think or speak of the night's doings or of him who had been Joseph Curwen. Something about the bearing of the messenger carried a conviction which his mere words could never have conveyed; for though he was a seaman well known to many of them, there was something obscurely lost or gained in his soul which set him for evermore apart. It was the same later on when they met other old companions who had gone into that zone of horror. Most of them had lost or gained something imponderable and indescribable. They had seen or heard or felt something which was not for human creatures, and could not forget it. From them there was never any gossip, for to even the commonest of mortal instincts there are terrible boundaries. And from that single messenger the party at the shore caught a nameless awe which almost sealed their own lips. Very few are the rumors which ever came from any of them, and Eleazar Smith's diary is the only written record which has survived from that whole expedition which set forth from the Sign of the Golden Lion under the Stars.

CHARLES WARD, however, discovered another vague sidelight in some Fenner correspondence which he found in New London, where he knew another branch of the family had lived. It seems that the Fenners, from whose house the doomed farm was distantly visible, had watched the departing columns of raiders; and had

heard very clearly the angry barking of the Curwen dogs, followed by the first shrill blast which precipitated the attack. This blast had been followed by a repetition of the great shaft of light from the stone building, and in another moment, after a quick sounding of the second signal ordering a general invasion, there had come a subdued rattle of musketry followed by a horrible roaring cry which the correspondent Luke Fenner had represented in his epistle by the characters "Waaaahrrrrr—R'waaahrrr." This cry, however, had possessed a quality which no mere writing could convey, and the correspondent mentions that his mother fainted completely at the sound. It was later repeated less loudly, and further but more muffled evidences of gunfire ensued; together with a loud explosion of powder from the direction of the river. About an hour afterward all the dogs began to bay frightfully, and there were vague ground rumblings so marked that the candlesticks tottered on the mantelpiece. A strong smell of sulphur was noted; and Luke Fenner's father declared that he heard the third or emergency whistle signal, though the others failed to detect it. Muffled musketry sounded again, followed by a deep scream less piercing but even more horrible than those which had preceded it; a kind of throaty, nastily plastic cough or gurgle whose quality as a scream must have come more from its continuity and psychological import than from its actual acoustic value.

Then the flaming thing burst into sight at a point where the Curven farm ought to lie, and the human cries of desperate and frightened men were heard. Muskets flashed and cracked, and the flaming thing fell to the ground. A second flaming thing appeared, and a shriek of human origin was plainly distinguished. Fenner wrote that he could even gather a few words belched in frenzy: "Almighty, protect thy lamb!" Then there were more shots, and the second flaming thing fell. After that came silence for about three-quarters of an hour; at the end of which time little Arthur Fenner, Luke's brother, exclaimed that he saw "a red fog" going up to the stars from the accursed farm in the distance. No one but the child can testify to this, but Luke admits the significant coincidence implied by the panic of almost convulsive fright which at the same moment arched the backs and stiffened the fur of the three cats then within the room.

Five minutes later a chill wind blew up, and the air became suffused with such an intolerable stench that only the strong freshness of the sea could have prevented its being noticed by the shore party or by any wakeful souls in Pawtuxet village. This stench was nothing which any of the Fenners had ever encountered before, and produced a kind of clutching, amorphous fear beyond that of the tomb or the charnel-house. Close upon it came the awful voice which no hapless hearer will ever be able to forget. It thundered out of the sky like a doom, and windows rattled as its echoes died away. It was deep and musical; powerful as a bass organ, but evil as the forbidden books of the Arabs. What it said no man can tell, for it spoke in an unknown tongue, but this is the writing Luke Fenner set down to portray the daemoniac intonations: "DEESMEES — JESHET—BONEDOSEFEDUVEMA — ENITE-MOSS." Not till the year 1919 did any soul link this crude transcript with anything else in mortal knowledge, but Charles Ward paled as he recognized what Mirandola had denounced in shudders as the ultimate horror among black magic's incantations.

An unmistakably human shout or deep chorused scream seemed to answer this malign wonder from the Curwen farm, after which the unknown stench grew complex with an added odor equally intolerable. A wailing distinctly different from the scream

now burst out and was protracted ululantly in rising and falling paroxysms. At times it became almost articulate, though no auditor could trace any definite words; and at one point it seemed to verge toward the confines of diabolic and hysterical laughter. Then a yell of utter, ultimate fright and stark madness wrenched from scores of human throats; a yell which came strong and clear despite the depth from which it must have burst; after which darkness and silence ruled all things. Spirals of acrid smoke ascended to blot out the stars, though no flames appeared, and no buildings were observed to be gone or injured on the following day.

Toward dawn two frightened messengers with monstruous and unplaceable odor saturating their clothing knocked at the Fenner door and requested a keg of rum for which they paid very well indeed. One of them told the family that the affair of Joseph Curwen was over, and that the events of the night were not to be mentioned again. Arrogant as the order seemed, the aspect of him who gave it took away all resentment and lent it a fearsome authority; so that only these furtive letters of Luke Fenner, which he urged his Connecticut relative to destroy, remain to tell what was seen and heard. The non-compliance of that relative, whereby the letters were saved after all, has alone kept the matter from a merciful oblivion. Charles Ward had one detail to add as a result of a long canvass of Pawtuxet residents for ancestral traditions. Old Charles Slocum of that village said that there was known to his grandfather a queer rumor concerning a charred, distorted body found in the fields a week after the death of Joseph Curwen was announced. What kept the talk alive was the notion that this body, so far as he could be seen in its burnt and twisted condition, was neither thoroughly human nor wholly allied to any animal which Pawtuxet folk had ever seen or read about.

NOT one man who participated in that terrible raid could ever be induced to say a word concerning it, and every fragment of the vague data which survives comes from those outside the final fighting party. There is something frightful in the care with which these actual raiders destroyed each scrap which bore the least allusion to the matter.

Eight sailors had been killed, but although their bodies were not produced their families were satisfied with the statement that a clash with customs officers had occurred. The same statement also covered the numerous cases of wounds, all of which were extensively bandaged and treated only by Dr. Jabez Bowen, who had accompanied the party. Hardest to explain was the nameless odor clinging to all the raiders, a thing which was discussed for weeks. Of the citizen leaders, Captain Whipple and Moses Brown were most severely hurt, and letters of their wives testify the bewilderment which their reticence and close guarding of their bandages produced. Psychologically every participant was aged, sobered, and shaken. It is fortunate that they were all strong men of action and simple, orthodox religionists, for with more subtle introspectiveness and mental complexity they would have fared ill indeed. President Manning was the most disturbed; but even he outgrew the darkest shadow, and smothered memories in prayers. Every man of those leaders had a stirring part to play in later years, and it is perhaps fortunate that this is so. Little more than a twelvemonth afterward Captain Whipple led the mob who burnt the revenue ship *Gaspee*, and in this bold act we may trace one step in the blotting out of unwholesome images.

There was delivered to the widow of Joseph Curwen a sealed leaden coffin of curious design, obviously found ready on the spot when needed, in which she was told her husband's body lay. He had, it was explained, been killed in a customs

battle about which it was not politic to give details. More than this no tongue ever uttered of Joseph Curwen's end, and Charles Ward had only a single hint wherewith to construct a theory. This hint was the merest thread—a shaky underscoring of a passage in Jedediah Orne's confiscated letter to Curwen, partly copied in Ezra Weeden's handwriting. The copy was found in the possession of Smith's descendants; and we are left to decide whether Weeden gave it to his companion after the end, as a mute clue to the abnormality which had occurred, or whether, as is more probable, Smith had it before, and added the underscoring himself from what he had managed to extract from his friend by shrewd guessing and adroit cross-questioning. The underlined passage is merely this:

> I say to you againe, doe not call up Any that you cannot put downe; by the which I meane, Any that can in turn calle up somewhat against you, whereby your powerfullest Devices may not be of use. Ask of the Lesser, lest the Greater shall not wish to Answer, and shall commande more than you.

In the light of this passage, and reflecting on what last unmentionable allies a beaten man might try to summon in his direst extremity, Charles Ward may well have wondered whether any citizen of Providence killed Joseph Curwen.

The deliberate effacement of every memory of the dead man from Providence life and annals was vastly aided by the influence of the raiding leaders. They had not at first meant to be so thorough, and had allowed the widow and her father and child to remain in ignorance of the true conditions; but Captain Tillinghast was an astute man, and soon uncovered enough rumors to whet his horror and cause him to demand that his daughter and granddaughter change their name, burn the library and all remaining papers, and chisel the inscription from the slate slab above Joseph Curwen's grave. He knew Captain Whipple well, and probably extracted more hints from that bluff mariner than anyone else ever gained respecting the end of the accursed sorcerer.

From that time on the obliteration of Curwen's memory became increasingly rigid, extending at last by common consent even to the town records and files of the *Gazette*. It can be compared in spirit only to the hush that lay on Oscar Wilde's name for a decade after his disgrace, and in extent only to the fate of that sinful King of Runagur in Lord Dunsany's tale, whom the gods decided must not only cease to be, but must cease ever to have been.

Mrs. Tillinghast, as the widow became known after 1772, sold the house in Olney Court and resided with her father in Power's Lane till her death in 1817. The farm at Pawtuxet, shunned by every living soul, remained to molder through the years; and seemed to decay with unaccountable rapidity. By 1780 only the stone and brickwork were standing, and by 1800 even these had fallen to shapeless heaps. None ventured to pierce the tangled shrubbery on the river bank behind which the hillside door may have lain, nor did any try to frame a definite image of the scenes amidst which Joseph Curwen departed from the horrors he had wrought.

Only robust old Captain Whipple was heard by alert listeners to mutter once in awhile to himself, "Pox on that ———, but he had no business to laugh while he screamed. 'Twas as though the damn'd ——— had some 'at up his sleeve. For half a crown I'd burn his ——— house."

3. A Search and an Evocation

CHARLES WARD, as we have seen, first learned in 1918 of his descent from Joseph Curwen. That he at once took an intense interest in everything pertaining to the bygone mystery is not to be won-

dered at; for every vague rumor that he had heard of Curwen now became something vital to himself, in whom flowed Curwen's blood.

In his first delvings there was not the slightest attempt at secrecy; he talked freely with his family—though his mother was not particularly pleased to own an ancestor like Curwen—and with the officials of the various museums and libraries he visited. In applying to private families for records thought to be in their possession he made no concealment of his object, and shared the somewhat amused skepticism with which the accounts of the old diarists and letter-writers were regarded.

When he came across the Smith diary and archives and encountered the letter from Jedediah Orne he decided to visit Salem and look up Curwen's early activities and connections there, which he did during the Easter vacation of 1919. At the Essex Institute, which was well known to him from former sojourns in the glamorous old town of crumbling Puritan gables and clustered gambrel roofs, he was very kindly received, and unearthed there a considerable amount of Curwen data. He found that his ancestor was born in Salem-Village, now Danvers, seven miles from town, on the eighteenth of February (O. S.) 1662-3; and that he had run away to sea at the age of fifteen, not appearing again for nine years, when he returned with the speech, dress, and manners of a native Englishman and settled in Salem proper. At that time he had little to do with his family, but spent most of his hours with the curious books he had brought from Europe, and the strange chemicals which came for him on ships from England, France, and Holland. Certain trips of his into the country were the objects of much local inquisitiveness, and were whisperingly associated with vague rumors of fires on the hills at night.

Curwen's only close friends had been one Edward Hutchinson of Salem-Village and one Simon Orne of Salem. Hutchinson had a house well out toward the woods, and it was not altogether liked by sensitive people because of the sounds heard there at night. He was said to entertain strange visitors, and the lights seen from his windows were not always of the same color. The knowledge he displayed concerning long-dead persons and long-forgotten events was considered distinctly unwholesome, and he disappeared about the time the witchcraft panic began, never to be heard from again. At that time Joseph Curwen also departed, but his settlement in Providence was soon learned of. Simon Orne lived in Salem until 1720, when his failure to grow visibly old began to excite attention. He thereafter disappeared, though thirty years later his precise counterpart and self-styled son turned up to claim his property. The claim was allowed on the strength of documents in Simon Orne's known hand, and Jedediah Orne continued to dwell in Salem till 1771, when certain letters from Providence citizens to the Reverend Thomas Barnard and others brought about his quiet removal to parts unknown.

CERTAIN documents by and about all of these strange matters were available at the Essex Institute, the Court House, and the Registry of Deeds, and included both harmless commonplaces such as land titles and bills of sale, and furtive fragments of a more provocative nature. There were four or five unmistakable allusions to them on the witchcraft trial records; as when one Hepzibah Lawson swore on July sixteenth, 1692, at the Court of Oyer and Terminen under Judge Hathorne, that "fortie Witches and the Blacke Man were wont to meete in the Woodes behind Mr. Hutchinson's house," and one Amity How declared at a session of August eighth before Judge Gedney that "Mr. G. B.

(George Burroughs) on that Nighte put the Divell his Marke upon Bridget S., Jonathan A., *Simon O.*, Deliverance W., *Joseph C.*, Susan P., Mehitable C., and Deborah B." Then there was a catalogue of Hutchinson's uncanny library as found after his disappearance, and an unfinished manuscript in his handwriting, couched in a cipher none could read. Ward had a photostatic copy of this manuscript made, and began to work casually on the cipher as soon as it was delivered to him. After the following August his labors on the cipher became intense and feverish, and there is reason to believe from his speech and conduct that he hit upon the key before October or November. He never stated, though, whether or not he had succeeded.

But of greatest immediate interest was the Orne material. It took Ward only a short time to prove from identity of penmanship a thing he had already considered established from the text of the letter to Curwen; namely, that Simon Orne and his supposed son were one and the same person. As Orne had said to his correspondent, it was hardly safe to live too long in Salem, hence he resorted to a thirty-year sojourn abroad, and did not return to claim his lands except as a representative of a new generation. Orne had apparently been careful to destroy most of his correspondence, but the citizens who took action in 1771 found and preserved a few letters and papers which excited their wonder. There were cryptic formulae and diagrams in his and other hands which Ward now either copied with care or had photographed, and one extremely mysterious letter in a chirography that the searcher recognized from items in the Registry of Deeds as positively Joseph Curwen's.

Providence, I May

Brother:

My honour'd Antient friend, due Respects and earnest Wishes to Him whom we serve for yr Eternall Power. I am just come upon That Which you ought to knowe, concern'g the Matter of the Laste Extremite and What to doe regard' yt. I am not dispos'd to followe you in go'g Away on acct. of my yeares, for Providence hath not ye Sharpeness of ye Bay in hunt'g oute uncommon Things and bringinge to Tryall. I am ty'd up in Shippes and Goodes, and cou'd not doe as you did, besides the Whiche my Farme, at Pawtuxet hatht under it What you Knowe, that Wou'd not Waite for my com'g Backe as an Other.

But I am not unreadie for harde fortunes, as I have tolde you, and have longe Work'd upon ye Way of get'g Backe after ye Laste. I laste Night strucke on ye Wordes that bringe up YOGGE-SOTHOTHE, and sawe for ye Firste Time that face spoke of by Ibn Schacabac in ye ———. And IT said, that ye III Psalme in ye Liber-Damnatus holdes ye Clavicle. With Sunne in V House, Saturne in Trine, drawe ye Pentagram of Fire, and saye ye ninth Verse thrice. This Verse repeate eache Roodemas and Hallow's Eve, and ye thing will brede in ye Outside Spheres.

And of ye Sede of Olde shal One be borne who shal looke Backe, tho' know'g not what he seekes.

Yett will his availe Nothing if there be no Heir, and if the Saltes, or the Way to make the Saltes, bee not Readie for his Hande; and here I will owne, I have not taken needed Stepps nor founde Much. Ye Process is plaguy harde to come neare, and it uses up such a Store of Specimens, I am harde putte to it to get Enough, notwithstand'g the Sailors I have from ye Indies. Ye People aboute are become Curious, but I can stande them off. Ye gentry are worse than ye Populace, be'g more Circumstantiall in their Accts. and more believ'd in what they tell. That Parson and Dr. Merritt have talk'd some, I am fearfull, but no Thing soe far is Dangerous. Ye Chymical substances are easie of get'g, there be'g II. goode Chymists in Towne, Dr. Bowen and Sam. Carew. I am foll'g oute what Borellus saith, and have Helpe in Abdool Al-Hazred his VII. Booke. Whatever I gette, you shal have. And in ye meane While, do not neglect to make use of ye Wordes I have here given. I have them Righte, but if you Desire to see HIM, imploy the Writinge on ye Piece of ———, that I am putt'g in this Packet. Saye ye Verses every Roodmas and Hallow's Eve; and if yr Line runn not out, *one shal bee in yeares to come that shal looke backe and use what Saltes or stuff for Salte you shal leave him.* Job XIV. XIV.

I rejoice you are again at Salem, and hope I may see you not longe hence. I have a goode Stallion, and am think'g of get'g a Coach, there be'g one (Mr. Merritt's) in Providence already, tho' ye Roades are bad. If you are disposed to travel, doe not pass me bye. From Boston take ye Post Road. thro' Dedham, Wrentham, and Attleborough, goode Taverns be'g at all these Townes. Stop at Mr. Bolcom's in Wrentham, where ye Beddes are finer than Mr. Hatch's, but eate at ye other House for their cooke is better. Turne into Prov. by Patucket

falls, and ye Rd. past Mr. Sayles's Tavern. My House opp. Mr. Epenetus Olney's Tavern off ye Towne Street, 1st on ye N. side of Olney's Court. Distance from Boston Stone abt. XLIV miles.

Sir, I am yr olde and true friend and Servt. in Almonsin-Metraton.

Josephus C.

To Mr. Simon Orne,
William's-Lane, in Salem.

This letter, oddly enough, was what first gave Ward the exact location of Curwen's Providence home; for none of the records encountered up to that time had been at all specific. The place was indeed only a few squares from his own home on the great hill's higher ground, and was now the abode of a Negro family much esteemed for occasional washing, housecleaning, and furnace-tending services. To find, in distant Salem, such sudden proof of the significance of this familiar rookery in his own family history, was a highly impressive thing to Ward; and he resolved to explore the place immediately upon his return.

The more mystical phases of the letter, which he took to be some extravagant kind of symbolism, frankly baffled him; though he noted with a thrill of curiosity that the Biblical passage referred to—Job 14, 14—was the familiar verse, "If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come."

YOUNG Ward came home in a state of pleasant excitement, and spent the following Saturday in a long and exhaustive study of the house in Olney Court. The place, now crumbling with age, had never been a mansion; but was a modest two-and-a-half story wooden town house of the familiar Providence Colonial type, with plain peaked roof, large central chimney, and artistically carved doorway with rayed fanlight, triangular pediment, and trim Doric pilasters. It had suffered but little alteration externally, and Ward felt he was gazing on something very close to the sinister matters of his quest.

The present Negro inhabitants were known to him, and he was very courteously shown about the interior by old Asa and his stout wife Hannah. Here there was more change than the outside indicated, and Ward saw with regret that fully half of the fine scroll-and-urn overmantels and shell-carved cupboard linings were gone, whilst much of the fine wainscotting and bolection moulding was marked, hacked, and gouged, or covered up altogether with cheap wall paper. It was exciting to stand within the ancestral walls which had housed such a man of horror as Joseph Curwen; he saw with a thrill that a monogram had been very carefully effaced from the ancient brass knocker.

From then until after the close of school Ward spent his time on the photostatic copy of the Hutchinson cipher and the accumulation of local Curwen data. The former still proved unyielding; but of the latter he obtained so much, and so many clues to similar data elsewhere, that he was ready by July to make a trip to New London and New York to consult old letters whose presence in those places was indicated. This trip was very fruitful, for it brought him the Fenner letters with their terrible description of the Pawtuxet farmhouse raid, and the Nightingale-Talbot letters in which he learned of the portrait painted on a panel of the Curwen library. This matter of the portrait interested him particularly, since he would have given much to know just what Joseph Curwen looked like; and he decided to make a second search of the house in Olney Court to see if there might not be some trace of the ancient features beneath peeling coats of later paint or layers of mouldy wall-paper.

Early in August that search took place, and Ward went carefully over the walls of every room sizeable enough to have been

by any possibility the library of the evil builder. He paid especial attention to the large panels of such overmantels as still remained; and was keenly excited after about an hour, when on a broad area above the fireplace in a spacious ground-floor room he became certain that the surface brought out by the peeling of several coats of paint was sensibly darker than any ordinary interior paint or the wood beneath it was likely to have been. A few more careful tests with a thin knife, and he knew that he had come upon an oil portrait of great extent. With truly scholarly restraint the youth did not risk the damage which an immediate attempt to uncover the hidden picture with the knife might have done, but just retired from the scene of his discovery to enlist expert help. In three days he returned with an artist of long experience, Mr. Walter C. Dwight, whose studio is near the foot of College Hill; and that accomplished restorer of paintings set to work at once with proper methods and chemical substances. Old Asa and his wife were duly excited over their strange visitors, and were properly reimbursed for this invasion of their domestic hearth.

As day by day the work of restoration progressed, Charles Ward looked on with growing interest at the lines and shades gradually unveiled after their long oblivion. Dwight had begun at the bottom; hence since the picture was a three-quarter-length one, the face did not come out for some time. It was meanwhile seen that the subject was a spare, well-shaped man with dark-blue coat, embroidered waistcoat, black satin small-clothes, and white silk stockings, seated in a carved chair against the background of a window with wharves and ships beyond. When the head came out it was observed to bear a neat Albermarle wig, and to possess a thin, calm, undistinguished face which seemed somehow familiar to both Ward and the artist. Only at the very last, though, did the restorer and his client begin to gasp with astonishment at the details of that lean, pallid visage, and to recognize with a touch of awe the dramatic trick which heredity had played. For it took the final bath of oil and the final stroke of the delicate scraper to bring out fully the expression which centuries had hidden; and to confront the bewildered Charles Dexter Ward, dweller in the past, with his own living features in the countenance of his horrible great-great-great grandfather.

WARD brought his parents to see the marvel he had uncovered, and his father at once determined to purchase the picture despite its execution on stationary panelling. The resemblance to the boy, despite an appearance of rather greater age, was marvelous; and it could be seen that through some trick of atavism the physical contours of Joseph Curwen had found precise duplication after a century and a half. Mrs. Ward's resemblance to her ancestor was not at all marked, though she could recall relatives who had some of the facial characteristics shared by her son and by the bygone Curwen. She did not relish the discovery, and told her husband that he had better burn the picture instead of bringing it home. There was, she averred, something unwholesome about it; not only intrinsically, but in its very resemblance to Charles. Mr. Ward, however, was a practical man of power and affairs—a cotton manufacturer with extensive mills at Riverpoint in the Pawtuxet Valley—and not one to listen to feminine scruples. The picture impressed him mightily with its likeness to his son, and he believed the boy deserved it as a present. In this opinion, it is needless to say, Charles most heartily concurred; and a few days later Mr. Ward located the owner of the house—a small rodent-featured person with a guttural accent—and obtained the whole mantel and overmantel bearing the picture

at a curtly fixed price which cut short the impending torrent of unctuous haggling.

It now remained to take off the panelling and remove it to the Ward home, where provisions were made for its thorough restoration and installation with an electric mock-fireplace in Charles' third-floor study or library. To Charles was left the task of superintending this removal, and on the twenty-eighth of August he accompanied two expert workmen from the Crooker decorating firm to the house in Olney Court, where the mantel and portrait-bearing overmantel were detached with great care and precision for transportation in the company's motor truck. There was left a space of exposed brickwork marking the chimney's course, and in this young Ward observed a cubical recess about a foot square, which must have lain directly behind the head of the portrait. He found, beneath the deep coatings of dust and soot some loose yellowed papers, a crude, thick copy-book, and a few moldering textile shreds which may have formed the ribbon binding the rest together. Blowing away the bulk of the dirt and cinders, he took up the book and looked at the bold inscription on its cover. It was in a hand which he had learned to recognize at the Essex Institute, and proclaimed the volume as the *"Journall and Notes of Jos. Curwen, Gent., of Providence-Plantations, Late of Salem."*

Excited beyond measure by his discovery, Ward showed the book to the two curious workmen beside him. Their testimony is absolute as to the nature and genuineness of the finding, and Dr. Willett relies on them to help establish his theory that the youth was not mad when he began his major eccentricities. All the other papers were likewise in Curwen's handwriting, and one of them seemed especially portentous because of its inscription: *"To Him Who Shal Come After, How He May Gett Beyonde Time and Ye Spheres."* Another was in a cipher; the same, Ward hoped, as the Hutchinson cipher which had hitherto baffled him. A third, and here the searcher rejoiced, seemed to be a key to the cipher; whilst the fourth and fifth were addressed respectively to "Edw. Hutchinson, Armiger" and "Jedediah Orne, Esq.", "or Their Heir or Heirs, or Those Represent'g Them." The sixth and last was inscribed: *"Joseph Curwen his Life and Travells Bet'n ye yeares 1678 and 1687: of Whither He Voyag'd, Where He Stay'd, Whom He Sawe, and What He learnt."*

WE HAVE now reached the point from which the more academic school of alienists date Charles Ward's madness. Upon his discovery the youth had looked immediately at a few of the inner pages of the book and manuscripts, and had evidently seen something which impressed him tremendously. Upon returning home he broke the news with an almost embarrassed air, as if he wished to convey an idea of its supreme importance without having to exhibit the evidence itself. He did not even show the titles to his parents, but simply told them that he had found some documents in Joseph Curwen's handwriting, "mostly in cipher," which would have to be studied very carefully before yielding up their true meaning. It is unlikely that he would have shown what he did to the workmen, had it not been for their unconcealed curiosity. As it was he doubtless wished to avoid any display of peculiar reticence which would increase their discussion of the matter.

That night Charles Ward sat up in his room reading the new-found book and papers, and when day came he did not desist. His meals, on his urgent request when his mother called to see what was amiss, were sent up to him; and in the afternoon he appeared only briefly when the men came to install the Curwen picture and mantelpiece in his study. The next night

he slept in snatches in his clothes, meanwhile wrestling feverishly with the unraveling of the cipher manuscript. In the morning his mother saw that he was at work on the photostatic copy of the Hutchinson cipher, which he had frequently showed her before; but in response to her query he said that the Curwen key could not be applied to it. That afternoon he abandoned his work and watched the men fascinatedly as they finished their installation of the picture with its woodwork above a cleverly realistic electric log, setting the mock-fireplace and overmantel a little out from the north wall as if a chimney existed, and boxing in its sides with panelling to match the room's. After the workmen went he moved his work into the study and sat down before it with his eyes half on the cipher and half on the portrait which stared back at him like a year-adding century-recalling mirror. His parents subsequently recalling his conduct at this period, give interesting details anent the policy of concealment which he practiced. Before servants he seldom hid any paper which he might be studying, since he rightly assumed that Curwen's intricate and archaic chirography would be too much for them. With his parents, however, he was more circumspect; and unless the manuscript in question were a cipher, or a mere mass of cryptic symbols and unknown ideographs (as that entitled *"To Him Who Shal Come After* etc." seemed to be) he would cover it with some convenient paper until his caller had departed. At night he kept the papers under lock and key in an antique cabinet of his, where he also placed them whenever he left the room. He soon resumed fairly regular hours and habits, except that his long walks and other outside interests seemed to cease. The opening of school, where he now began his senior year, seemed a great bore to him; and he frequently asserted his determination never to bother with college. He had, he said, important special investigations to make, which would provide him with more avenues toward knowledge and the humanities than any university which the world could boast.

During October Ward began visiting the libraries again, but no longer for the antiquarian matter of his former days. Witchcraft and magic, occultism and daemonology, were what he sought now; and when Providence sources proved unfruitful he would take the train for Boston and tap the wealth of the great library in Copley Square, the Widener Library at Harvard, or the Zion Research Library in Brookline, where certain rare works on Biblical subjects are available. He bought extensively, and fitted up a whole additional set of shelves in his study for newly acquired works on uncanny subjects; while during the Christmas holidays he made a round of out-of-town trips including one to Salem to consult certain records at the Essex Institute.

ABOUT the middle of January, 1920, there entered Ward's bearing an element of triumph which he did not explain, and he was no more found at work upon the Hutchinson cipher. Instead, he inaugurated a dual policy of chemical research and record-scanning; fitting up for the one a laboratory in the unused attic of the house, and for the latter haunting all the sources of vital statistics in Providence. Local dealers in drugs and scientific supplies, later questioned, gave astonishingly queer and meaningless catalogues of the substances and instruments he purchased; but clerks at the State-House, the City Hall, and the various libraries agree as to the definite object of his second interest. He was searching intensely and feverishly for the grave of Joseph Curwen, from whose slate slab an older generation had so wisely blotted the name.

Little by little there grew upon the Ward

family the conviction that something was wrong. His school work was the merest pretence; he had other concernments now; and when not in his new laboratory with a score of obsolete alchemical books, could be found either poring over old burial records downtown or glued to his volumes of occult lore in his study, where the startlingly—one almost fancied increasingly—similar features of Joseph Curwen stared blandly at him from the great overmantel on the north wall.

Late in March Ward added to his archive-searching a ghoulish series of rambles about the various ancient cemeteries of the city. His quest had suddenly shifted from the grave of Joseph Curwen to that of one Naphthali Field; and this shift was explained when, upon going over the files that he had been over, the investigators actually found a fragmentary record of Curwen's burial which had escaped the general obliteration, and which stated that the curious leaden coffin had been interred "10 ft. S. and 5 ft. W. of Naphthali Field's grave in ye——." Hence the rambles—from which St. John's (the former King's) churchyard and the ancient Congregational burying ground in the midst of Swan Point Cemetery were excluded, since other statistics had shewn that the only Naphthali Field (obit. 1729) whose grave could have been meant had been a Baptist.

IT WAS toward May when Dr. Willett at the request of the senior Ward and fortified with all the Curwen data which the family had gleaned from Charles in his non-secretive days, talked with the young man. The interview was of little value or conclusiveness, for Willett felt at every moment that Charles was thoroughly master of himself and in touch with matters of real importance; but it at least forced the secretive youth to offer some rational explanation of his recent demeanor. Of a pallid, impassive type not easily showing embarrassment, Ward seemed quite ready to discuss his pursuits, though not to reveal their object. He stated that the papers of his ancestor had contained some remarkable secrets of early scientific knowledge. To take their vivid place in the history of human thought they must first be correlated by one familiar with the background out of which they evolved, and to this task of correlation Ward was now devoting himself. He was seeking to acquire as fast as possible those neglected arts of old which a true interpreter of the Curwen data must possess, and hoped in time to make a full announcement and presentation of the utmost interest to mankind and to the world of thought.

As to his graveyard search, whose object he freely admitted, but the details of whose progress he did not relate, he said he had reason to think that Joseph Curwen's mutilated headstone bore certain mystic symbols—carved from directions in his will and ignorantly spared by those who had effaced the name—which were absolutely essential to the final solution of his cryptic system. Curwen, he believed, had wished to guard his secret with care; and had consequently distributed the data in an exceedingly curious fashion. When Dr. Willett asked to see the mystic documents, Ward displayed much reluctance and tried to put him off with such things as the photostatic copies of the Hutchinson cipher and Orne formulae and diagrams; but finally showed him the exteriors of some of the real Curwen finds—the *"Journal and Notes,"* the cipher (title in cipher also) and the formula-filled message *"To Him Who Shal Come After"* —and let him glance inside such as were in obscure characters.

He also opened the diary at a page carefully selected for its innocuousness and gave Willett a glimpse of Curwen's connected handwriting in English. The doctor noted very closely the crabbed and complicated letters, and the general aura of

the seventeenth century which clung round both penmanship and style despite the writer's survival into the eighteenth century, and became quickly certain that the document was genuine. The text itself was relatively trivial, and Willett recalled only a fragment. But when Dr. Willett turned the leaf, he was quickly checked by Ward, who almost snatched the book from his grasp. All that the doctor had a chance to see on the newly opened page was a brief pair of sentences; but these, strangely enough, lingered tenaciously in his memory.

They ran: "Ye Verse from Liber-Damnatus be'g spoke V Roodmasses and IV Hallows-Eves, I am Hopeful ye Thing is breed'g Outside ye Spheres. It will drawe One who is to Come if I can make sure he shal bee, and he shall think on Past thinges and looke back thro' all ye yeares, against ye which I must have ready ye Saltes or That to make 'em with."

Willett saw no more, but somehow this small glimpse gave a new and vague terror to the painted features of Joseph Curwen which stared blandly down from the overmantel. Ever after that he entertained the odd fancy—which his medical skill of course assured him was only a fancy—that the eyes of the portrait had a sort of tendency to follow young Charles Ward as he moved about the room. He stopped before leaving to study the picture closely, marveling at its resemblance to Charles and memorizing every minute detail of the cryptical, colorless face, even down to a slight scar or pit in the smooth brow above the right eye.

Assured by the doctor that Charles' mental health was in no danger, but that on the other hand he was engaged in researches which might prove of real importance, the Wards were more lenient than they might otherwise have been when during the following June the youth made positive his refusal to attend college. He had, he declared, studies of much more vital importance to pursue; and intimated a wish to go abroad the following year in order to avail himself of certain sources of data not existing in America. The senior Ward, while denying this latter wish as absurd for a boy of only eighteen, acquiesced regarding the university; so that after a none too brilliant graduation from the Moses Brown School there ensued for Charles a three year period of intensive occult study and graveyard searching.

COMING of age in April, 1923, and having previously inherited a small competence from his maternal grandfather, Ward determined at last to take the European trip hitherto denied him. Of his proposed itinerary he would say nothing save that the needs of his studies would carry him to many places, but he promised to write his parents fully and faithfully. When they saw he could not be dissuaded, they ceased all opposition and helped as best they could; so that in June the young man sailed for Liverpool with the farewell blessings of his father and mother, who accompanied him to Boston and waved him out of sight from the White Star pier in Charlestown. Letters soon told of his safe arrival, and of his securing good quarters in Great Russell Street, London; where he proposed to stay, shunning all family friends, till he had exhausted the resources of the British Museum in a certain direction. Of his daily life he wrote but little, for there was little to write. Study and experiment consumed all his time, and he mentioned a laboratory which he had established in one of his rooms. That he said nothing of antiquarian rambles in the glamorous old city with its luring skyline of ancient domes and steeples and its tangles of roads and alleys whose mystic convolutions and sudden vistas alternately beckon and surprise, was taken by his parents as a good index of the de-

gree to which his new interests had engrossed his mind.

In June, 1924, a brief note told of his departure for Paris, to which he had before made one or two flying trips for material in the Bibliotheque Nationale. For three months thereafter he sent only postal cards, giving an address in the Rue St. Jacques and referring to a special search among rare manuscripts in the library of an unnamed private collector. He avoided acquaintances, and no tourists brought back reports of having seen him. Then came a silence, and in October the Wards received a picture card from Prague, Czecho-Slovakia, stating that Charles was in that ancient town for the purpose of conferring with a certain very aged man supposed to be the last living possessor of some very curious mediaeval information. He gave an address in the Newstadt, and announced no move till the following January; when he dropped several cards from Vienna telling of his passage through that city on the way toward a more easterly region whither one of his correspondents and fellow-delvers into the occult had invited him.

The next card was from Klansenburg in Translyvania, and told of Ward's progress toward his destination. He was going to visit a Baron Ferenczy, whose estate lay in the mountains east of Rakus; and was to be addressed at Rakus in the care of that nobleman. Another card from Rakus a week later, saying that his host's carriage had met him and that he was leaving the village for the mountains, was his last message for a considerable time; indeed, he did not reply to his parents' frequent letters until May, when he wrote to discourage the plan of his mother for a meeting in London, Paris, or Rome during the summer, when the elder Wards were planning to travel in Europe. His researches, he said, were such that he could not leave his present quarters; while the situation of Baron Ferenczy's castle did not favor visits. It was on a crag in the dark wooded mountains, and the region was so shunned by the country folk that normal people could not help feeling ill at ease. Moreover, the Baron was not a person likely to appeal to correct and conservative New England gentlefolk. His aspect and manners had idiosyncrasies, and his age was so great as to be disquieting. It would be better, Charles said, if his parents would wait for his return to Providence; which could scarcely be far distant.

That return did not, however, take place until May, 1925, when after a few heralding cards the young wanderer quietly slipped into New York on the *Homeric* and traversed the long miles to Providence by motor coach eagerly drinking in the green rolling hills, the fragrant, blossoming orchards, and the white steepled towns of Connecticut in spring; his first taste of ancient New England in nearly four years.

Old Providence! It was this place and the mysterious forces of its long, continuous history which had brought him into being, and which had drawn him back toward marvels and secrets whose boundaries no prophet might fix. Here lay the arcana, wondrous or dreadful as the case might be, for which all his years of travel and application had been preparing him. A taxicab whirled him through Post Office Square with its glimpse of the river, and up the steep curved slope of Waterman Street to Prospect. Then eight squares past the fine old estates his childish eyes had known, and the quaint brick sidewalks so often trodden by his youthful feet. And at last the little white overtaken farmhouse on the right, and on the left the classic Adam porch and stately bayed façade of the great brick house where he was born. It was twilight, and Charles Dexter Ward had come home.

Ward was now visibly aged and hardened, but was still normal in his general reactions; and in several talks with

Willett displayed a balance which no madman—even an incipient one—could feign continuously for long. What elicited the notion of insanity at this period were the *sounds* heard at all hours from Ward's attic laboratory, in which he kept himself most of the time. There were chantings and repetitions, and thunderous declamations in uncanny rhythms; and although these sounds were always in Ward's own voice, there was something in the quality of that voice and in the accents of the formulae it pronounced, which could not but chill the blood of every hearer. It was noticed that Nig, the venerable and beloved black cat of the household, bristled and arched his back perceptibly when certain of the tones were heard.

The odors occasionally wafted from the laboratory were likewise exceedingly strange. Sometimes they were very noxious, but more often they were aromatic, with a haunting, elusive quality which seemed to have the power of inducing fantastic images. People who smelled them had a tendency to glimpse momentary mirages of enormous vistas, with strange hills or endless avenues of sphinxes and hippogriffs stretching off into infinite distance. His older aspect increased to a startling degree his resemblance to the Curwen portrait in his library; and Dr. Willett would often pause by the latter after a call, marvelling at the virtual identity, and reflecting that only the small pit above the picture's right eye now remained to differentiate the long dead wizard from the living youth. Frequently he noted peculiar things about; little wax images of grotesque design on the shelves or tables, and the half-erased remnants of circles, triangles, and pentagrams in chalk or charcoal on the cleared central space of the large room. And always in the night those rhythms and incantations thundered, till it became very difficult to keep servants or suppress furtive talk of Charles' madness.

In January, 1927, a peculiar incident occurred. One night about midnight, as Charles was chanting a ritual whose weird cadence echoed unpleasantly through the house below, there came a sudden gust of chill wind from the bay, and a faint, obscure trembling of the earth which everyone in the neighborhood noted. At the same time the cat exhibited phenomenal traces of fright, while dogs bayed for as much as a mile around. This was the prelude to a sharp thunderstorm, anomalous for the season, which brought with it such a crash that Mr. and Mrs. Ward believed the house had been struck. They rushed upstairs to see what damage had been done, but Charles met them at the door to the attic; pale, resolute, and portentous, with an almost fearsome combination of triumph and seriousness on his face. He assured them that the house had not really been struck, and that the storm would soon be over. The thunder sank to a sort of dull mumbling chuckle and finally died away. Stars came out, and the stamp of triumph on Charles Ward's face crystallized into a very singular expression.

FOR two months or more after this incident Ward was less confined than usual to his laboratory. He exhibited a curious interest in the weather, and made odd inquiries about the date of the spring thawing of the ground. One night late in March he left the house after midnight, and did not return till almost morning; when his mother, being wakeful, heard a rumbling motor draw up the carriage entrance. Muffled oaths could be distinguished, and Mrs. Ward, rising and going to the window, saw four dark figures removing a long, heavy box from a truck at Charles' direction and carrying it within by the side door. She heard labored breathing and ponderous footfalls on the stairs, and finally a dull thumping in the attic; after which the footfalls descended again,

and the four men reappeared outside and drove off in their truck.

The next day Charles resumed his strict attic seclusion, drawing down the dark shades of his laboratory windows and appearing to be working on some metal substance. He would open the door to no one, and steadfastly refused all proffered food. About noon a wrenching sound followed by a terrible cry and a fall were heard, but when Mrs. Ward rapped at the door her son at length answered faintly, and told her that nothing had gone amiss. The hideous and indescribable stench now welling out was absolutely harmless and unfortunately necessary. Solitude was the one prime essential, and he would appear later for dinner. That afternoon, after the conclusion of some odd hissing sounds which came from behind the locked portal, he did finally appear; wearing an extremely haggard aspect and forbidding anyone to enter the laboratory upon any pretext. This, indeed, proved the beginning of a new policy of secrecy; for never afterward was any other person permitted to visit either the mysterious garret workroom or the adjacent storeroom which he cleared out, furnished roughly, and added to his inviolably private domain as a sleeping apartment. Here he lived, with books brought up from his library beneath, till the time he purchased the Pawtuxet bungalow and moved to it all his scientific effects.

In the evening Charles secured the paper before the rest of the family and damaged part of it through an apparent accident. Later on Dr. Willett, having fixed the date from statements by various members of the household, looked up an intact copy at the *Journal* office and found that in the destroyed section the following small item had occurred:

Nocturnal Diggers Surprised in North Burial Ground

Robert Hart, night watchman at the North Burial Ground, this morning discovered a party of several men with a motor truck in the oldest part of the cemetery, but apparently frightened them off before they had accomplished whatever their object may have been.

The discovery took place at about four o'clock, when Hart's attention was attracted by the sound of a motor outside his shelter. Investigating, he saw a large truck on the main drive several rods away; but could not reach it before the sound of his feet on the gravel had revealed his approach. The men hastily placed a large box in the truck and drove away toward the street before they could be overtaken; and since no known grave was disturbed, Hart believes that this box was an object which they wished to bury.

The diggers must have been at work for a long while before detection, for Hart found an enormous hole dug at a considerable distance back from the roadway in the lot of Amosa Field, where most of the old stones have long ago disappeared. The hole, a place as large and deep as a grave, was empty; and did not coincide with any interment mentioned in the cemetery records.

Sergeant Riley of the Second Station viewed the spot and gave the opinion that the hole was dug by bootleggers rather gruesomely and ingeniously seeking a safe cache for liquor in a place not likely to be disturbed. In reply to questions Hart said he thought the escaping truck had headed up Rochambeau Avenue, though he could not be sure.

During the next few days Charles Ward was seldom seen by his family. Having added sleeping quarters to his attic realm, he kept closely to himself there, ordering food brought to the door and not taking it in until after the servant had gone away. The droning of monotonous formulae and the chanting of bizarre rhythms recurred at intervals, while at other times occasional listeners could detect the sound of tinkling glass, hissing chemicals, running water, or roaring gas flames. Odors of the most unplaceable quality, wholly unlike any before noted, hung at times around the door; and the air of tension observable in the young recluse whenever he did venture briefly forth was such as to excite the keenest speculation. Once he made a hasty trip to the Athenaeum for a book he required, and again he hired a messenger to fetch him a highly obscure volume from Boston. Suspense was written portentously over the

whole situation, and both the family and Dr. Willett confessed themselves wholly at a loss what to do or think about it.

THEN on the fifteenth of April a strange development occurred. While nothing appeared to grow different in kind, there was certainly a very terrible difference in degree; and Dr. Willett somehow attaches great significance to the change. The day was Good Friday, a circumstance of which the servants made much, but which others quite naturally dismiss as an irrelevant coincidence. Late in the afternoon young Ward began repeating a certain formula in a singularly loud voice, at the same time burning some substance so pungent that its fumes escaped over the entire house. The formula was so plainly audible in the hall outside the locked door that Mrs. Ward could not help memorizing it as she waited and listened anxiously, and later on she was able to write it down at Dr. Willett's request. It ran as follows, and experts have told Dr. Willett that its very close analogue can be found in the mystic writings of "Eliphas Levi," that cryptic soul who crept through a crack in the forbidden door and glimpsed the frightful vistas of the void beyond:

Per Adonai Eloim, Adonai Jehova, Adonai Sabaoth, Metraton Ou Agla Methon, verbum pythonicum, mysterium salamandrae, conventus sylvorum, antra, gnomorum, daemonia Coeli God, Almonsin, Gibor, Jehosua, Evam, Zariatnatmik, veni, veni, veni.

This had been going on for two hours without change or intermission when over all the neighborhood a pandemoniac howling of dogs set in. The extent of this howling can be judged from the space it received in the papers the next day, but to those in the Ward household it was overshadowed by the odor which instantly followed it; a hideous, all-pervasive odour which none of them had ever smelt before or have ever smelt since. In the midst of this mephitic flood there came a very perceptible flash like that of lightning, which would have been blinding and impressive but for the daylight around; and then was heard *the voice* that no listener can ever forget because of its thunderous remoteness, its incredible depth, and its eldritch dissimilarity to Charles Ward's voice. It shook the house, and was clearly heard by at least two neighbors above the howling of the dogs. Mrs. Ward, who had been listening in despair outside her son's locked laboratory, shivered as she recognized its hellish import; for Charles had told her of its evil fame in dark books, and of the manner in which it had thundered, according to the Fenner letters, above the doomed Pawtuxet farmhouse on the night of Joseph Curwen's annihilation. There was no mistaking that nightmare phrase, for Charles had described it too vividly in the old days when he had talked frankly of his Curwen investigations. And yet it was only this fragment of an archaic and forgetten language: "DIES MIES JESCHET BOENE DOESEF DOUVEMA ENITEMAUS."

Close upon this thundering there came a momentary darkening of the daylight, though sunset was still an hour distant, and then a puff of added odor, different from the first but equally unknown and intolerable. Charles was chanting again now and his mother could hear syllables that sounded like "Yi-ngah-Yog-Sothoth-he-lglb-fi-throdag"—ending in a "Yah!" whose maniacal force mounted in an earsplitting crescendo. A second later all previous memories were effaced by the wailing scream which burst out with frantic explosiveness and gradually changed form to a paroxysm of diabolic and hysterical laughter. Mrs. Ward, with the mingled fear and blind courage of maternity, advanced and knocked affrightedly at the concealing panels, but obtained no sign of recognition. She knocked again, but paused nervelessly as a second shriek arose,

this one unmistakably in the familiar voice of her son, *and sounding concurrently with the still bursting cachinnations of that other voice.* Presently she fainted, although she is still unable to recall the precise and immediate cause. Memory sometimes makes merciful deletions.

MR. WARD returned from the business section at about quarter past six; and not finding his wife downstairs, was told by the frightened servants that she was probably watching at Charles' door, from which the sounds had been far stranger than ever before. Mounting the stairs at once, he saw Mrs. Ward stretched at full length on the floor of the corridor outside the laboratory; and realizing that she had fainted, hastened to fetch a glass of water from a set bowl in a neighboring alcove. Dashing the cold fluid in her face, he was heartened to observe an immediate response on her part, and was watching the bewildered opening of her eyes when a chill shot through him and threatened to reduce him to the very state from which she was emerging. For the seemingly silent laboratory was not as silent as it had appeared to be, but held the murmurs of a tense, muffled conversation in tones too low for comprehension, yet of a quality profoundly disturbing to the soul.

It was not, of course, new for Charles to mutter formulae; but this muttering was definitely different. It was so palpably a dialogue, or imitation of a dialogue, with the regular alternation of inflections suggesting question and answer, statement and response. One voice was undisguisedly that of Charles, but the other had a depth and hollowness which the youth's best powers of ceremonial mimicry had scarcely approached before. There was something hideous, blasphemous, and abnormal about it, and but for a cry from his recovering wife which cleared his mind by arousing his protective instincts, it is not likely that Theodore Howland Ward could have maintained for nearly a year more his old boast that he had never fainted. As it was, he seized his wife in his arms and bore her quickly downstairs before she could notice the voices which had so horribly disturbed him. Even so, however, he was not quick enough to escape catching something himself which caused him to stagger dangerously with his burden. For Mrs. Ward's cry had evidently been heard by others than he and there had come in response to it from behind the locked door the first distinguishable words which that hushed and terrible colloquy had yielded. They were merely an excited caution in Charles' own voice, but somehow their implications held a nameless fright for the father who overheard them. The phrase was just this: *"Sshh!—write!"*

Mr. and Mrs. Ward conferred at some length after dinner, and the former resolved to have a firm and serious talk with Charles that very night. No matter how important the object, such conduct could no longer be permitted; for these latest developments transcended every limit of sanity and formed a menace to the order and nervous well-being of the entire household. The youth must indeed have taken complete leave of his senses, since only downright madness could have prompted the wild screams and imaginary conversations in assumed voices which the present day had brought forth. All this must be stopped, or Mrs. Ward would be made ill and the keeping of servants become an impossibility.

MR. WARD rose at the close of the meal and started upstairs for Charles' laboratory. On the third floor, however, he paused at the sounds which he heard proceeding from the now disused library of his son. Books were apparently being flung about and papers wildly rustled, and upon stepping to the door Mr. Ward be-

held the youth within, excitedly assembling a vast armful of literary matter of every size and shape. Charles' aspect was very drawn and haggard, and he dropped his entire load with a start at the sound of his father's voice. At the elder man's command he sat down, and for some time listened to the admonitions he had so long deserved. There was no scene. At the end of the lecture he agreed that his father was right, and that his noises, mutterings, incantations, and chemical odors were indeed inexcusable nuisances. For the fright and fainting of his mother he expressed the keenest contrition, and explained that the conversation later heard was part of an elaborate symbolism designed to create a certain mental atmosphere. His use of abstruse chemical terms somewhat bewildered Mr. Ward, but the parting impression was one of undeniable sanity and poise, despite a mysterious tension of the utmost gravity. Mr. Ward hardly knew what to make of the entire business. It was as mysterious as the death of poor old Nig, whose stiffening form had been found an hour before in the basement, with staring eyes and fear-distorted mouth.

Driven by some vague detective instinct, the bewildered parent now glanced curiously at the vacant shelves to see what his son had taken up to the attic. The youth's library was plainly and rigidly classified, so that one might tell at a glance the books or at least the kind of books which had been withdrawn. On this occasion Mr. Ward was astonished to find that nothing of the occult or the antiquarian, beyond what had been previously removed, was missing. These new withdrawals were all modern items; histories, scientific treatises, geographies, manuals of literature, philosophic works, and certain contemporary newspapers and magazines. It was a very curious shift from Charles Ward's recent run of reading, and the father paused in a growing vortex of perplexity and an engulfing sense of strangeness. The strangeness was a very poignant sensation, and almost clawed at his chest as he strove to see just what was wrong around him. Something was indeed wrong, and tangibly as well as spiritually so.

On the north wall rose still the ancient carved overmantel from the house in Olney Court, but to the cracked and precariously restored oils of the large Curwen portrait disaster had come. Time and unequal heating had done their work at last, and at some time since the room's last cleaning the worst had happened. Peeling clear of the wood, curling tighter and tighter, and finally crumbling into small bits with what must have been malignly silent suddenness, the portrait of Joseph Curwen had resigned for ever its staring surveillance of the youth it so strangely resembled, and now lay scattered on the floor as a thin coating of fine bluish-gray dust.

What Happens "To Him Who Shall Come After..."?

What is the outcome of Charles Ward's frantic delvings into the life and secrets of his terrible ancestor? Read in the next issue of the horrors beyond Hell which a young man brings upon himself by his curiosity—the ghastly, incredible events that come to pass in the second and final installment of Lovecraft's enthralling novel.

"She turned her face to his, and the tears glistened like star dust."

By What Mystic Mooring

By FRANK OWEN

The fog is on Yesterday's edge—for Time ceases when the mists begin.

THE morning had been dull, dreary. In Buitenzorg, all activity ceased. It was a moment of languor, of repose. The usual strident voices of the surrounding forests were suppressed, as though nature had ended her song on a high note of which but a faint echo remained. Over the Javanese city, a fog was slowly descending, a strange fog that shimmered and glowed with a thou-

sand fantastic designs. It brought a cessation of stillness, for now in the weird white-yellow glow there were voices, whispering, murmuring, as though people were speaking in the distance.

Alan Wedmore sat in a corner of a cafe, gazing through the open window on a city slowly changing into a tapestry in which the figures were blurred, grotesque, occasionally formless. The air was intensely oppressive. It was difficult to breathe. Wedmore had had a touch of fever and his head was still heavy. Nevertheless he surveyed the scene curiously as the monstrous fog wove its way like a serpent through the streets and alleys of the city.

Abruptly his thoughts were diverted as he noticed that seated opposite to him at the table was a Chinese whose face suggested great age, for it was bronzed and lined as though it had been left out in the rain all night and become rusted. But then he was in an amiable mood for he had had many brandies. His spirits were bubbling over.

"Welcome," he said cordially, "whoever you are. What do you think of our tapestries?"

As he spoke he pointed toward the fog.

"It is well that you appreciate them," said the stranger. His voice was low, yet each word fell upon the air full-born, an odd voice that showed vast training in the elegant winding paths of conversation.

"Tapestries," chuckled Wedmore, "not by Gobelins but goblins."

"By many words wit is exhausted."

"But I have said very few."

"Words whispered on earth sound like thunder in heaven."

There was something ominous in the stranger's tone, though perhaps it was only because of the sinister glowing fog that had climbed to the window ledge and was drifting into the cafe. It had a sobering effect on Wedmore. A man cannot afford to give himself over to the joys of intoxication when he is in danger. He stifled the thought as soon as it sprang up, but it refused to be vanquished. He gazed intently at the face of his companion which despite the suggestion of great age, mirrored an expression as tranquil and contented as that of a child. Soundlessly he had come as though on the wings of the fog. Wedmore shivered as he gazed into the gaunt face. The eyes were deep sunken but glowing with light, at strange variance to the brownish ivory texture of the skin. Although Wedmore had never met the man before, about him there was a vague familiar something, an intangible essence that suggested they were not entirely strangers.

"My name is Feng Yen," he said. "I was anxious for companionship. I saw you alone at this table; and decided to rest here a moment. I trust I have not disturbed you."

"Not at all," said Wedmore quickly. Momentarily his misgivings were stayed. The voice had a charming quality, an undercurrent of sincerity. "I am glad to have company. This fog is uncanny. It seems to emphasize the fact that a man is always alone even when there are many people surging about him."

And Feng Yen said, "Each man of earth leads a hermit's life in the little world which he builds around himself. No outsider, even though he be an older brother, is able to enter. As for the fog, I find it pleasant."

"It changes the whole city," declared Wedmore. "It repaints the houses and alters the shape of familiar objects. It turns Buitenzorg into a ghost city."

"This fog," Feng Yen said slowly, "is on yesterday's edge. Hidden within it is the city that used to be here, or rather the many cities that have been built through the ages one upon the other. So many billions of people have died since the earth cooled from molten intensity, that there is

scarcely a bit of dust anywhere that was not at one time or other part of human flesh.

"A century ago there was a quaint street called Spice Lane that started only a few hundred feet from where this tavern now stands. Shall we explore it together?"

"But that was a centry ago!" Wedmore ejaculated. He tried to smile but the muscles of his face refused to function.

"Time ceases when the mists begin."

Wedmore rose to his feet. He felt very old.

"I will go with you," he said.

"That is well. Together we will set out on a gentle journey. May no tiger stop our path."

Feng Yen led the way from the cafe into a fog-drenched soundless street, peopled by figures as formless as clay.

"After a typhoon, there are pears to gather. In a fog there are even greater riches."

INTO Spice Lane they walked. Wedmore was puzzled at this strange new street that was nobody knows how old, yet it had not been there at dawn. His flesh felt as though it were creeping along the bones, intent on evading the fear that was but a moment away. Nevertheless at least now the air was not so stifling and he could breathe more easily.

Feng Yen strode along at a great pace, though without effort. His eyes glowed like lanterns in the mist.

"Fogs," he murmured, "are given people to efface reality. Have you a revolver?"

"No," Wedmore replied, surprised at the abruptness of the interrogation.

"Most regrettable."

"Why? Are we in danger?"

"One is always in danger who walks close to life. Have you a knife?"

"Yes."

"Sharp?"

"Quite." Alan Wedmore handed him the knife. "For what purpose do you need it?"

"That I may kill a man."

"I'll have no part in it!"

"Be not disturbed. You have nothing to fear, for the man I am about to kill is Gat Neber who lived in Singapore more than a hundred years ago. In the flush of his youth, there was a day when the fog descended on Singapore as it did today on Buitenzorg. Then, too, I walked back into the mortal world, for fogs bridge reality. At a tavern I stopped for a cup of wine. And there I met Gat Neber. We drank together, and as we drank we grew friendly. In an excess of confidence I told him about my daughter, Kim, she who is as slim and graceful as a young elm and with eyes of such dark lustre the stars weep in envy. Gat Neber listened to my words as though bound by a spell, the spell of the enchanting Kim whom the world knows of only in legend. He begged me to take him back with me through the streets where the mists begin. I had drunk too much wine. My guard was weakened and I grew careless. Yes, I agreed to take him with me, but I should have waited before doing so till the Yellow River runs clear. Long have I regretted that I did not show him only the whites of my eyes. Far better would it have been, had I permitted gentle Kim to dwell in peaceful obscurity. As it was I took destruction back to her. She who had always been guarded so carefully suddenly found herself in a position as unenviable as though she had been into the market place where all men might bid for her services. She gazed at Gat Neber and was captivated. He belonged to a different age, a different world. She was confounded by the mystery that hung about him. In the days that followed awe turned to adoration. To Kim, that day a god arrived. In despair, I turned away and wept and my tears were red with anguish. Nevertheless Kim was happy,

happier than she had ever been since her escape from life. Gat Neber, also, seemed to be enthralled. He bowed down before her as though in worship. Where the mists begin, time ceases to be, an hour, a day, a year, are all one. But as time is measured in Singapore they dwelt together through a thousand moons. Then gradually Gat Neber began to long for his accustomed life in Singapore. He turned away from Kim, plotting to escape from a land that was in itself the most complete escape whereof anyone might dream. At last the opportunity came and he fled back into the world of men, into the world of bleak reality where so little, if any, peace exists. We Chinese through countless centuries on earth practiced the great art of tranquillity, to be at peace with all, and with all at peace.

"It became infused into the blood of my people and so they are able to withstand endless onslaughts of drought, plague, treachery and oppression. Men marvel at their staying qualities. Few realize that in the make-up of the Chinese there is the something more that makes them great among all people. Kim took the news of Gat Neber's desertion stoically but she commenced to droop like a flower. All grandeur had departed from her life. Do you wonder that I, too, grieved? For the fault was mine. I had attempted to permit two worlds to blend in a supreme romance that was worthy of the gods. But Gat Neber was a mortal. He could not vision the wide sweep and glory of an eternal love. And so he went back to Singapore. For he was like a bit of raw, untempered steel, untested, undependable, untrue. But why should I engulf you in torrents of words?"

"Go on," said Alan Wedmore curtly.

"I must," Feng Yen said. "I had no intention of stopping though the ammenities of culture make it necessary for me to appear apologetic for my assumption."

"Go on," Wedmore said once more, though scarcely conscious that he did so.

"That is why we are going to Singapore, to kill Gat Neber, so that he will return to the mists again, this time without vain longings or regret."

Wedmore made no protest to the contemplated slaying but his brain worked nimbly. He must do something to prevent its consummation. Surely the opportunity would come. Mere words of objection seemed pitifully futile.

WHILE Feng Yen had been speaking, they had been walking through the leisurely winding, twisting path of Spice Lane. The air was heavy with a hundred blended fragrances. Here every spice of the Indies was offered for sale but no one seemed intent upon buying nor did the shadowy figures of shopkeepers seem concerned. Over all hung a heavy lassitude as though it were part of the texture of that shimmering, glowing, faintly colorful mist.

And now they stopped before a door that opened into the dark, flavorful hall of a house. They groped their way along until there came a sudden turn, abruptly the hall widened and took on a measure of luxuriousness. The rugs were like moss beneath their feet, and numerous soft-toned lanterns burned to show them the way. Every vestige of the murmuring mists had vanished, a strange hush, as though nature were standing on tiptoe waiting.

And then Kim came to them. At her approach, Alan Wedmore gasped. She was as radiant as the dawn, although her hair was as blue-black as the night sky in which the soft stars sleep. Her figure was beautiful to behold, every soft curve was enchantment. But she seemed ethereal, not a real girl, but a figure of porcelain. Feng Yen had momentarily vanished but Wedmore did not care. All that mattered was

this girl with the warm red lips and eyebrows slanted like the thin moons' edge. He took a step toward her as though to draw her into his arms. But something held him back. Languidly she surveyed him, nor did she seem displeased at his gaze. About the corners of her lips lurked the shadow of a smile. From behind Wedmore, Feng Yen was speaking.

"The chairs are ready to convey us to the quay."

Wedmore offered his arm to Kim. She bowed in acknowledgment and placed her hand upon it. He scarcely breathed so tense was the moment. Of such things are rarest dreams made. Perhaps this, too, was a dream.

And, as though he could read his thoughts, Feng Yen murmured, "All is a dream, earth, sky, the wind in the treetops. Nothing exists with any semblance of permanence. We are all but figures on a fan in the hand of some mighty god. He waves the fan and we vanish or return at his will."

"As long as I am here," said Wedmore, "I am contented."

"I am gratified."

Outside, rumors were waiting with sedan chairs. They carried their burdens without effort. Before long they were at the waterfront where a small boat was waiting. Wedmore lead Kim to a cabin-like structure where there were silks and cushions of every color and hue, and a subdued blue light as though from a hidden lantern.

Kim seated herself comfortably among the cushions and motioned Wedmore to join her. Almost breathlessly, he acquiesced. He could not have moved more softly if he had been in a temple. Gently Kim swayed toward him. He put out his arm and she nestled comfortably against him. Boatmen came and lifted back the draperies so they could see the sky. The boat was slipping away from its anchorage. Wedmore could see the figure of Yeng Fen, as immobile as a statue, leaning against the rail wrapped in the cloak of profound meditation. With a start, Wedmore remembered the knife that he had given him. Were they really en route to Singapore to kill a man? The fragrance in the air intensified. The moon, a cool silver scythe, cut for a moment through the mist. Near its tip there was a bright star that glowed like a jewel on the blue velvet breast of the sky. Then the shimmering golden fog closed in again. It was strange to see that moon by day, yet was it day? How long ago it seemed since the fog had crept down over Buitenzorg. But then perhaps it was not so odd either to see the moon for Feng Yen had said "time ceases when the mists begin."

Wedmore turned to Kim and all his fears slipped from him. Surely, this must be a dream. No girl of earth could be as lovely. What more need he of life if he could merely drift "beyond the hills of dream" with the prayer on his lips that the dream might never end. He held her to him, but she made no effort to break away. A sudden breeze rose bringing with it music, music from the sky or the stars. Kim shuddered or was she quivering with ecstasy at the thought that she was bound for Singapore? If all went well, perhaps soon she would be in his arms again. At that moment a hatred sprang up in Wedmore, hatred for Gat Neber and all that he represented, a blind, reasonless hatred that was beyond all reason. It was more than mere jealousy, like a fire consuming him. If Gat Neber were not destroyed, the fire would destroy him. Wedmore bent so that his cheek brushed Kim's hair. Breath of jasmine and wisteria. No net is stronger than the blue black hair of a beloved woman. He smiled as he thought of the sudden death that Keng Yen was carrying to Gat Neber. He had neither misgivings nor regrets. With Gat Neber

dead there would be no one to stand in the way of his pursuit of Kim. Yes, it might not be such a bad idea for Gat Neber to die. If there were no other way for him to possess Kim it must be done. Fortunate it was that he had given Feng Yen the knife. Not for a moment did he worry about his own future, nor did he pause to wonder if he, too, would be fed to a hungry knife. Kim was with him in that purple mist of solitude. Over and over his thoughts repeated themselves, like scribbled pleas in a prayer-wheel. His desire was at such a high pitch he completely overlooked the fact that Feng Yen had declared that he was resolved to snuff out the life of Gat Neber so that thereafter Kim could be with Gat always. Stepping into the country of the mist was like walking beyond the curtain of mortality. In this strange, lovely land he alone was mortal. But he gave this fact no heed. There was nothing to fear, nothing to dread. For only in life is there danger. Now there was nothing but music and soft lights. A great white bird flew gracefully by, Kim was in his arms. And there was nothing but beauty, fragrance and love, and a knife for Gat Neber that would strike swiftly and deep.

As the boat sped on "beauty hung around them like splendor round the moon."

WITH a start, Wedmore realized that Kim was weeping and there was perfume mingled with her tears. She turned her face to his, and the tears glistened like stardust. Almost without being aware of what he was doing, as though he were a puppet with no control over his motivation he drew her close and kissed her lips and it seemed as though time ceased. Her lips were warm and soft and clinging. It was as though he were standing on tiptoe on a mountaintop reaching for the stars. As she drew away, he murmured, "Are you sad?"

"No," she said, "happy. The air is so tremulous with beauty it stirs my emotions so I cannot help weeping. I love the silence."

"So do I, for in silence one may taste the genuine flavor of things."

Feng Yen approached. "We will soon be in Singapore," he said.

"But I thought the trip was an overnight journey on a fast steamer!" Wedmore exclaimed.

"Have I not told you that here time is without measure, and so we give it no regard?"

"I am sorry."

"Not I, for there is work to be done."

At Singapore, to Wedmore's disappointment, only he and Feng Yen disembarked.

"Kim will wait on the boat," Feng Yen explained. "What happens may not be a pretty sight for women.

Despite the fog, Singapore as ever was a busy place, the crossroads of the world that never sleeps. A conglomerate of races bellowed and chanted a torrent of words that became distilled into a mighty symphony.

But Wedmore paid little attention to the wraithlike kaleidoscope that surged about them as they strode along. He was disturbed by a trivial matter that had happened in a world of wonder. Buitenzorg is an hour by train from Weltevreden. It is up in the hills, a cool elysium where the people of Java go to vacation from the sultry sea coast. Its Botanical Gardens are famed the world over, but it is not a port. Yet he and Feng Yen had strolled into Spice Lane, stopped for Kim, and then runners had carried them to the waterfront where they had taken the boat for Singapore. Had the coolies run all the way to Batavia? It seemed impossible, yet apparently they had done so. He made as though to question Feng Yen but caught himself in time.

After all what matter one more unexplainable thing in a world of magic?

Before long they stopped at a crowded cafe. Feng Yen chose a table away from the throngs. A waiter brought them wine, extra large glasses so that they need not order again too quickly. Wedmore sipped his wine and gazed as the light of the lamp overhead fell upon it. The reflection flickered, and swayed until it almost seemed like a girl dancing. He leaned forward. Perhaps it was Kim dancing in the wine even as she was dancing in his thoughts. He paid no heed as Feng Yen slipped away from the table. All that mattered was his thoughts and his dreams. So intent did his gaze become, that the excitement and revelry about him blurred off into space, forgotten.

THEN somebody bumped the table and the wine was spilled. The spell was broken. He drew his hand across his eyes as though to bring back reality. Stupidly he gazed about him. Then he became conscious of the pandemonium that filled the cafe to bursting point. A hundred men were yelling and gesticulating. Outside a crowd was forming, storming the door and pouring in like a flood. He rose to his feet and grabbed the shoulder of a sailor.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing much," was the laconic reply. "Some bloke carved his friend."

Wedmore fought his way through the mob until he got to a spot where he could see the body of the murdered man. He gazed down in awe. Not for a moment did he doubt that this dead handsome youth was Gat Neber, for on his face there was a serene expression. He seemed almost to be smiling. Somehow Wedmore had no regrets even though it was his knife that was buried in Gat's body. And he knew as he stood there that he had lost Kim forever. Now Gat was with her there was no place for him. He closed his eyes. He must get a grip on himself. And then two arms stole about his body and someone kissed him as gentle and soft as the wind's caress. When he opened his eyes Kim had vanished but the perfume lingered.

Outside, he breathed deeply of the warm air. Now the fog was rising, rolling away in a mystery of light and dancing colors.

He lifted his hand and waved, "Good-by, Kim," he whispered. "I shall be waiting, hoping. Perhaps some day you will come back to me."

With bowed head, he walked slowly back to the harbor front of Singapore. He must begin the long tiresome journey back to Buitenzorg.

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Drifting Atoms

By MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN

Five young men—coming to the brink of a discovery that would have revolutionized the world—find madness and death.

THE whole business began at Ray Chetham's, the night of July 2nd. Just shows you, that, how close we are to the weird and the unbelievable even in the most ordinary of settings. But whenever men get together and start thinking, really *thinking*—well, anything can happen. Anything.

We had met, as usual, for our weekly poker session. Just the five of us, pals since high school days. Chet, Perry Lester, Tom Scofield, and Boyton Greer. And me, Joe Littleton.

There we were, five ordinary American business men. Lounging around the table in Chet's apartment, sleep-eyed, in shirt sleeves, drinking and smoking companionably and arguing about things in general.

Perry was popping off about the next election, Boy griping about the hand Tom had dealt him, when Chet suddenly remarked to me out of a clear sky:

"Joe—suppose someone could change the spots on a card merely by willing them to change. See what I mean? Simply by *thinking* about it. And why not? Look here. Everything we see in this room is nothing but a collection of atoms, held together by—what? Some kind of centrifugal force. If that force were all at once destroyed, everything in the universe would

fly into particles of matter and go spinning off into space."

Perry grinned at him, reaching for a glass. "Here, pal," he drawled. "You need a drink. Put this under your belt, and you'll feel a lot better." He winked at me, describing a rotary gesture at his temple. "Nutty as a fruitcake! Poor old Chet!"

Chetham ignored him. He took the glass of whiskey, held it to the light, regarding it lazily. "Atoms," he murmured. "Nice little glassful of atoms. Pretty soon they'll be part of me. It takes iron, leafy vegetables, fat, and what-not to make a man's hand. . . . You morons know what I think? I think all atoms are exactly alike —and it's only the way they're put together that determines whether they'll be wood or flesh or metal or what-have-you. All matter is composed of the same basic material." He grinned, and struck an attitude.

"Screwball!" Lester snorted pleasantly, fishing for cigarettes in Greer's coat pocket. He lit one, blew smoke rings into the air. "Look at that," he jerked his thumb at one gray spiral. "You mean to say that I and that smoke are composed of the same stuff?"

"Absolutely!" Chetham nodded, jabbing a forefinger through one of the rings. "More atoms went into you, Perry, and they're stuck together in a special way— that's the only difference. If I could get that smoke to stay put in the shape of a red-headed, pug-nosed reporter, your own fiancee couldn't tell it from you except for the density of atoms. And if I could get enough smoke together to supply the same amount of atoms as you have in your homely carcass—why, presto! You'd have a twin! It wouldn't be alive, of course; couldn't move or speak. Just a big blob of matter that looks like you. See?"

"Two Perry Lesters for the price of one!" Greer piped up, laughing. "I've been swindled!"

We all chuckled drowsily—none of us very much concerned or interested except Chet, a science professor, and me, a fiction writer, who enjoyed crazy flights of imagination. Tom Scofield, moody and quiet since his hardware business had failed, looked on with a forced smile. Boyton Greer, a nervous young bank clerk with a hobby of indoor photography, shuffled the cards impatiently. Perry Lester, who covered the courthouse beat for the *Globe*, openly yawned.

WE MIGHT have gone on from there with never a thought beyond our own humdrum lives, had not Chet leaned back in his chair, sipping his highball, and voiced the crazy idea that was to launch us all on this incredible jaunt into the unknown.

"You know something else I think?" he drawled. "I think that, before Creation, some *Force*—call it by any religious name you like—collected a lot of atoms out of space, threw them together, and called them planets or stars or what-have-you. And when men were created, they were given a small portion of that Force, or Power. Call it Will, or Intelligence; call it Soul; call it anything you like. But I believe there is enough electrical power in the human mind to draw and hold atoms together, in any form we choose!"

Scofield laughed uneasily. Greer snorted. Perry Lester and I said nothing, but leaned forward with greater interest.

"Ghosts, now," Chetham expanded. "Materializations of any kind at a séance. They're simply a collection of atoms gathered together by the sheer mind-power of a group of people concentrating on one thing."

Lester's cigarette burnt him; he dropped it with a curse, still blinking at Chet.

"I never heard anything so completely screwy!" he exploded. "You mean a group of people, ordinary people, can create something out of thin air, just by thinking it? Why, you're——"

Chetham waved him to silence. "Now, now, keep your shirt on, Perry. I didn't say exactly that. I said the atoms already exist. The very air around us is full of them—microscopic particles flying around until the gravity pull of some larger solid draws them to it and they become part of that solid. But . . . you've seen a magnet pull a heavy piece of metal to it? If our mind-power was developed enough, we could draw atoms *away* from solids. I could take you apart and reassemble you on my body, except that your mind-power would be pulling against mine. Or we could both concentrate on dissolving that chair, atom by atom, and sticking it onto this chair over here. . . ."

Perry winked at me. "See?" he whispered. "I told you he was nuts! Of all the crazy——"

"But that degree of mind-power," Chet went on, ignoring him, eyes narrowed dreamily, "could probably never be attained by the human brain in its present state. If it could—think of the chaos! Right now, though, I'm convinced we could materialize any familiar object out of detached atoms that are not yet caught by any centrifugal force. Your watch, Perry, for example, could be duplicated. . . ."

Our reporter-pal snorted. With a flourish, he took out the new watch his aunt had given him last Christmas and laid it down on the table, clearing a place among the cards and chips.

"All right!" he waved at it. "That turnip cost Aunt Mag a hundred and ten bucks. I know—I've hocked it. Make me one like it, Chet my friend, and I'll give you this one!"

Scofield, Greer and I were leaning forward now, interested and amused in spite of ourselves. But we laughed openly at Chet, who sat gazing dreamily at the watch, running a hand through his shaggy black mop of hair.

"You think it's so funny?" he said quietly. Those black eyes, sliding over our faces, were serious and unsmiling. "Listen, you knot-heads!" Chet snapped. "Ancient necromancers—the Medes and the Persians, the old Magi—could create anything you'd like to name, simply by the power of thought. They were able even to change the atom formations at will: water into wine, wood into stone, inanimate objects into animate ones—the way Moses turned his rod into a snake—the way Lot's wife, by her own mental turboil, turned her own flesh into salt. They could *do* it, I tell you! And their minds were no better developed—in fact, I'd say they were much less developed—than yours or mine. We have a knowledge of electrical force, chemistry, physics, that those old ducks never had. . . ."

We four were not laughing now. Chet's mood of gravity and growing excitement was contagious. Lester peered at him, one eyebrow cocked at a quizzical angle. Boyton Greer gaped at him, unwinking. Scofield, however, seemed the most affected. He was staring at Chet strangely, wringing his hands in that nervous way of his until the knuckles cracked. A little muscle in his mouth twitched. Tom was always high-strung.

Unexpectedly he blurted: "Chet, I—I've got a book at home——"

All eyes shifted to him, and he reddened like a small boy caught showing off.

"That is," he stammered, "I just thought it might amuse you fellows. Just for a laugh, of course. I mean, what you were saying, Chet; this book tells how——"

Chetham sat up with a jerk, his eyes bright with interest.

"Huh? What kind of book, Tom? You mean, this crackpot theory of mine has been thought of before? Not seriously?"

Scofield nodded shyly. "Y'yeah," he stuttered. "It's all in this book. Uncle of mine willed it to me with the estate. . . ."

We fidgeted uncomfortably. Each of us knew about this uncle—he had died in an insane asylum last year, and any mention of him brought a flare of panic to Tom's eyes. Hereditary insanity is not a pleasant thought for a jittery chap like him. But, with a morbid eagerness:

"Uncle had a lot of crazy books," he was saying now. "Used to collect them. Banned stuff, dealing with witchcraft and so on. This one I mentioned is a compilation of rituals stolen from a Parsi temple. Persian fire-worshippers, you know. Chet, your saying that about the Medes and Persians awhile ago made me remember it. Those Parsi *mobeds*—priests—really had thought-control down to a fine art, even better than the Yogis of India. In this book are all sorts of formulæ for impossible tricks, like setting a bush afire with a glance, or making water spurt out of a dry rock. They could do it, too, in those days. Nothing supernatural about it; just sheer science."

He stopped for breath, glancing from one face to another, then back at Chet for approbation that was certainly forthcoming. The four of us blinked at him, intent and fascinated by such a weird conversation coming out of shy, moody Tom Scofield. As for Chet, he was grinning like a kid with a new toy.

"Say!" he burst out. "I'd like to see that book! Can I borrow it tomorrow?"

"And me next?" Perry Lester chimed in, and mugged at us. "Gentlemen, won't you join us in a padded cell?"

I remember that was the very crack he made. Perhaps if we had realized how prophetic it was, we would have dropped the whole thing like a hot brick. But we didn't realize, of course. Chet was full of fantastic theories which he and Perry were always squabbling about, for nothing more than the sheer pleasure of popping off. Boyton, Tom, and I had always trailed along, putting in our two-cents-worth, until the "debate" ended in a big laugh. Life on Mars, the construction of a stratosphere plane, the physical changes of a psychopathic "werewolf" — these were some of the crackpot matters we had taken apart, for the fun of it. Naturally, then, our fancy was caught by this new idea of Chet's while, as naturally, none of us took it seriously.

WE HAD not forgotten it the next time we met, this time at Boyton Greer's because his wife was out of town. Perry mentioned it almost at once. And Tom, shy but eager for attention, brought out the promised book. There was a clause in his uncle's will, he said, preventing his ever letting it out of his possession; but we could all see it, anyhow, in his presence.

It was an ancient-looking volume, inscribed on vellum and sloppily bound. Pages were missing, and the whole thing was in Sanskrit. But Tom's uncle had translated passages here and there. In fact, he must have been working on this very translation when he lost his mind—from overwork and too intensive study, the doctors said. I doubt that diagnosis, in view of what was in those translations — and what happened later.

We didn't play any poker that night. After Chet had read aloud a few pages of that book, we were too interested for ordinary thoughts.

The wording was obscure. There was a lot of stuff mixed in about *Ahura Mazda*, the Parsi deity of light, and *Narasamsa Agni*—fire—in his various forms.

But between the lines there was a curious sort of scientific theory, hinted at now and then—something about the non-existence of matter except as held together by "the Law of Eternal Mind." It was very vague. There was still more about all phases of earthly matter being akin, and that caught Chet's attention at once.

"There!" he pointed out eagerly. "That agrees with my theory! Look how many plants seem to be almost animal, and how many insects are nothing but animated twigs and leaves. And don't plants eventually turn into mineral form? Petrified trees—that's one marked instance. Then, there's that disease science has no cure for, when flesh hardens slowly into stone and can be chipped off. . . . Yes, there's a link somewhere, and I believe it's in the atom. Hmm! . . . You know, I think we've stumbled on something revolutionary!"

Lester, Greer, Scofield and I were reading over his shoulder, scanning the neat translations appended to each vellum leaf. Suddenly Lester indicated one paragraph, and murmured the words aloud:

". . . *And he shall make, with his own mind and the Power thereof, a likeness unto that which is. And the likeness shall be, it shall exist, until the Power is withdrawn. Yea, what though Life is not given and Growth forbidden, it shall be seen, and touched, it shall have weight and color and substance, according to the Will of him who thinks. For so it was in the Beginning . . .*"

"What do you get out of that, Chet?" Lester muttered. "And look; further down, it tells how to——"

We all read those next few paragraphs, forming the words silently. Simple words—but with a meaning that struck one like a blow between the eyes.

"Why, there's nothing to it!" Greer murmured, frowning. "All you do, according to this, is sit and put everything else from your mind, and concentrate on something."

Chet smiled. "Yes, sure. But that's not so easy as you might think. In fact, it's damned hard to concentrate on any one thing for much longer than ten to twenty minutes. Almost impossible for the average person."

Perry nodded. "Yeah. Little sounds distract you. Other thoughts creep in. But you can train yourself to do it. It was devilish hard for me to turn out copy in the news room, with everybody yelling and the teletype going. But it can be done—and so could this."

I grinned at them, nodding at the card table Gerer had previously set up for poker. "Let's have a séance," I chuckled. "Perry, does that offer about your watch still hold good?"

A murmur of laughter greeted this, but it was uncertain laughter. The phrases of that Sanskrit translation were thrumming in all our heads. Could it be? *Could it be?*

Still laughing, Boyton Greer swept cards and chips from the table and gestured solemnly to the chairs drawn up to it. I sat down. Perry snorted. Tom Scofield ran a nervous glance over our faces, smiling shakily. Then, as Chet sat down opposite me with a clowning gesture of pressing forefinger to forehead, eyes closed as in a trance, the others sat also. With a flourish Perry Lester took out his watch and planked it down in the center of the table.

"There!" Chet laughed. "That's our pattern, gentlemen. Take a good look at it, get the picture of it firmly fixed in your mind. Because—we're going to materialize one exactly like it!"

After a moment we controlled our levity and got fairly serious about the thing; though, of course, each of us thought the idea was absurd. We were merely amusing ourselves, as people do with an ouija

board, not laughing only because that was part of the game.

WE TOOK a good look at the watch, shiny white and gold-rimmed against the black table top. Then, with a swift gesture, Chet removed it. For a few moments we could still see the "light-image" of it against the dark surface; then even that faded. But, by agreement, we still sat motionless, concentrating every thought on the spot where the watch had lain.

No one moved. No one spoke. Five men, from varied walks of life, no different from any five you might see on the street every day. But we sat there around a card table that night, tampering with phsyical laws as a child might toy with a sleeping cobra. . . .

We sat, We stared. We concentrated. Five minutes. Ten. Twenty. . . .

Perry was the first to break. With a snort of laughter, he suddenly sat back in his chair, fishing for cigarettes.

"This is silly as hell," he burst out. "Goes against every known law of science. . . . Aw, come on. Let's play some poker! . . . Smoke, Chet?"

The rest of us, at his words, had relaxed, laughing. Chet, blinking eyes that watered after our concentrated vigil, shrugged and leaned across the table, bracing himself on a bare elbow for support.

Instantly he jerked back his arm, rubbing it and cursing. All the laughter had vanished from his eyes as he put out a hand gingerly and touched the table top where his arm had rested.

"Huh!" Chet exploded. "Feel that—the place where we've all been staring! It's —it's *hot!*"

Wide-eyed, we felt the spot. And there was no mistake—it was warm, that one round spot in the center of the table top; warm, but cooling rapidly. We gaped at each other blankly. Greer shivered. Scofield swallowed noisily. Perry tried to grin, and shook his head like a punch-drunk fighter.

"Say!" he breathed. "Do you suppose——?"

Chet's narrowed eyes stared at the spot, bright with elation. "Do I suppose? Hell yes! Do you know what happened? Our combined mental attraction was collecting atoms at that point of focus—and welding them together! . . . Perry, put out that cigarette," he snapped. "Tom, sit back down—we've got to try this thing again!"

We glanced at Scofield, who had half risen from his chair. Sweat dewed his high forehead, and his pale eyes were frightened.

"Chet, I—I don't like this," he blurted. "They—they say my—uncle was babbling about something like this when—when he —do you suppose he was really mad?" his voice rose pathetically. "I mean—could such a thing——?"

We were all looking at him, which made him flush and stammer as usual. But Chet spoke calmly, very scientific and detached again.

"Yes," he answered quietly. "It could be and is, Tom. Sit down. We're going to prove it."

But Tom Scofield was pushing his chair back, shaking his head. That little muscle in his cheek was twitching more violently than ever, and his face was ashen. His eyes were wide and glassy.

"No!" he jerked out harshly, groping for his hat. "No, no, I won't try it any more! I—don't like to *think* so hard about things, Chet. When I do, I—I feel dizzy. My head aches. . . . Please! I want to go home. I—get the jitters like this sometimes." He broke off so pitifully that Chet frowned at us and slapped him on the back.

"Okay, sure," he laughed. "Don't take this thing so seriously, old son—ye gods!

After all, it's just a screwy experiment. Why should it frighten you?"

I'll never forget Scofield's eyes as he stopped at the door and turned back to us. Those pale eyes stared at the table top for a moment, then veered away like a scared bird.

"Why?" he whispered. "It's the—the uncertainty, Chet, don't you see? That's what got my uncle—the doctor told me, and I—I visited him once at the asylum before he died. You see, he—got to worrying about—what we are and why we're here. *Are* we really here, after all? Where, exactly, is the thin line between imagination and reality? The human mind—it's so tricky, so easily fooled. . . ."

Chet scoffed at him reassuringly. Perry gave another of his down-to-earth snorts, though I saw Boyton Greer staring oddly at Tom as he opened the door.

"Nuts!" said Perry. "Don't try to tell me I spend forty bucks a week trying to clothe and feed a body that doesn't exist! I don't know *why* I'm here, but I know damn well I *am!* I'll slug the guy that says I'm——"

But Tom Scofield had gone.

WE LOOKED at each other for a moment before speaking.

"I didn't like that look in his eyes," Chet murmured. "Tom's such a queer duck. Goes off half-cocked over the slightest thing. Guess we shouldn't have stirred him up with a screwball theory like this."

"Rot!" Perry exploded. "Nothing wrong with Tom; he just took one too many, that's all. And as for your fine little theory, Mr. Chetham, I can explain that 'hot spot' on the table. It wasn't there. But you put on such a good act that we others believed it was, after you said so! Pure suggestion, that's the answer. 'Materializing a watch'!"

Chet grinned at him, eyes narrowing in that stubborn way of his when someone—usually Perry — betters him in an argument.

"Think so?" he snapped. "Well, it so happens, my idiot friend, that I *did* feel heat at that point. Listen; let's meet at my apartment next week sometime, and try this little experiment again. I think I've got a way to disprove this 'suggestion' theory of yours, Perry."

We grinned at his vehemence and agreed to come, debating whether or not to ask Tom, since he had appeared so easily upset by the thing. . . .

But that question was settled for us next morning. Poor old Tom—wandering about the streets all night until the police took him in! They thought he was drunk at first, but later he was transferred to the psychopathic ward. We heard the details via Perry: how he had kept beating his fists against his head, and mumbling about a watch that kept ticking inside his brain. Only we four made any sense out of that, and we kept our mouths shut after a short discussion.

For, as Chet pointed out, everyone knew there was insanity in Tom's family. Anything was likely to set him off, and it had just happened to be our crazy discussion the evening before. Explaining Tom's aberration would not help him and would only bring on a lot of unpleasant publicity.

We had our meeting at Chet's the very next night, full of talk about Tom's commitment to the state mental hospital. Perhaps, had it not been for that, we might have lost interest in our fantastic "experiment with mind-power," as Chet called it. But anything capable of driving a man mad holds a sort of morbid curiosity for the normal man. Like a magnet, the subject drew us once more as we lounged around the apartment, drinking up Chet's company-Scotch and fogging the air with cigarette smoke.

"Of course," Perry drawled, "you've been clowning about the whole thing, Chet. Take off your beard; we know you!" He chuckled. "Come on, now—'fess up! You didn't really feel that hot spot, did you?"

Chet, leaning back in a deep leather chair, squinted at him thoughtfully. Then, with a crooked grin, he solemnly raised his right hand as we used to do in our kid days.

"Honor bright, I felt it," he said flatly. "But the more I think about it, the more I—I wonder if I didn't hypnotize myself into believing I felt it. Try pressing your fingertips together hard, with your eyes closed, and tell yourself there's a pane of glass between them. You know damn well it's not there—but you can feel it! I'm wondering if my 'hot spot' wasn't something of the kind."

I glanced at Boyton, about to make some jeering comment. But his serious, almost frightened eyes stopped me. He leaned forward now, eyeing Chet. Suddenly he blurted:

"I've—got to know. This thing—it gets under your skin, doesn't it? Worries you. . . . Listen, you three. There's a way we can find out for sure. Have someone else, someone who doesn't know a thing about our—our watch-idea, feel the spot after we've concentrated on it."

Chet grinned, and reached for the phone. "I thought of that, too," he nodded approval. "I'll phone the drug store and get them to send some ginger ale. When the delivery boy comes—well, he's our guinea-pig. Okay?"

He phoned the order, then beckoned us to sit in a circle around the table as on that night when Tom showed us that weird book.

SEATED in comfortable chairs a moment later, we prepared to repeat our crazy "séance." Conditions this time were more favorable. A lamp threw our faces in shadow. It did not hurt our eyes so much, illuming only the dark table top. And Chet stuffed our ears with cotton to shut out any noise.

We sat. We stared. We concentrated, as before on that night Scofield had been with us, mentally forming the shape of Perry's watch.

Ten minutes. Fifteen. A half-hour. . . .

If you have tried it, you'll know the strain of concentrating every faculty on one spot for any length of time. It's nerve-racking. After a very short time, my head began to ache. My eyes burned unbearably from the fixed staring. My muscles, tensed to the nth degree, begin to stiffen painfully, and I am sure the other three felt as I did.

But we did not move, did not speak. With every fiber of our beings, we concentrated on the formation of a flat gold watch at the same point on that dark table.

And suddenly . . .

Boyton Greer drew a sharp breath, visible but not audible to our cotton-stuffed ears. All of us tensed. We leaned forward, gaping at the table's center, concertedly tearing the cotton out for audible speech.

"Do you see what I see?" Perry whispered sharply. "Good Lord! I'm losing my mind! Or else——"

"You're not," Chet rapped out. "I see it, too! Boyton? Joe?"

We nodded, dazedly, and continued to gape at it.

It was fading slowly now — a round shiny-looking blob, the size of Perry's watch, white with a yellowish rim. The numerals were blurred, however, and there was no stem.

"Say!" Chet whispered, pointing out this last oddity. "I wasn't thinking about a *stem* for the darned thing! Were you?"

Perry, Greer and I shook our heads,

stunned. That was why the part had not materialized! We had all been concentrating on the *face only.*

Blinking at the shadowy thing, we saw it flatten out, become ovoid, then slowly begin to dissolve. Gingerly Chet poked it with a pencil, and the dent left in the thing's surface was like that one might make by poking a pat of wet sand. Fine sand, almost powdery—that is what the blob appeared to be made of. As we looked, it seemed to melt into the table top. . . .

And once more we all touched the spot where it had been. It was *hot,* as hot as the hearth in front of a blazing fire!

"Well, I'll be a——" Perry sat back, mopping sweat from his forehead.

Boyton Greer huddled in his chair, shivering, shaking his head dazedly.

Chet grinned broadly, spread his hands. The light of scientific triumph glowed in his thoughtful eyes—though there was bewilderment in them, too, and not a little healthy fright.

"It's true!" he breathed. "It—it works! In a minute, I'll realize it, but right now I—I just feel slap-happy! It *was* there, wasn't it, Perry? We *did* see it?"

Perry Lester nodded vaguely, slumped back in his chair. He ran a tongue over dry lips; then he scowled.

"Hypnotism!" he exploded. "You know what we've been doing? Sitting up here like a bunch of dopes, hypnotizing ourselves into seeing a watch! We haven't proved a thing . . . and personally, my head aches! I feel like the devil. Nuts to the whole thing! I'm going home to bed!"

"No, wait!" Chet seized his arm, forcing him back into his chair excitedly. "We've got to bring it back, Perry—and find out whether that delivery boy can see it or not! Then we'll know."

Perry sat down again slowly, running a finger around under his collar. "Well—okay," he growled. "But much of this concentrating business is going to make us all sick. The strain is too great."

"Quiet!" Chet snapped. "Concentrate! The boy will be here in a few minutes. Now, get this. When I get up to let him in, keep concentrating. Replace your ear-cotton, and bring it back!" he whispered. "With the hands pointing to—a quarter to ten. Everybody must agree on that hour."

Fifteen minutes later—minutes that made my head ache sickeningly and my eyes burn with staring — there was that watch-like blob at the table's center again, as solid as before. It shimmered slightly, like an object seen under water. But the numerals were clearer—and this time, it had a stem and slender black hands pointing the hour Chet had planted in our minds before the thing materialized.

There was a knock on the door, and Chet rose quietly to open it.

With tremendous effort of will, Perry, Boy, and I kept our eyes glued to the table as the Negro delivery boy shambled in. The watch quivered as Chet maneuvered him into the dusky room. Cautiously I removed my ear-stops to hear as his light voice murmured:

"That was quick service, boy. So, for a tip, you can have anything you see on that table! Fair enough?"

The Negro grinned at him, then shuffled over to the table, eyeing us curiously because we sat so still and did not glance up at his approach. Sniggering, he peered at the table, then turned to Chet.

"Aw," he grinned. "You's jest funnin' me, ain't you, Cap'n?" I heard, and relaxed—but stiffened again as he added, "You-all wouldn't gimme no gold watch for a tip, now, would you?"

A moment later, when he had slipped the beaming darky a dollar and hustled him out, Chet whirled on us again. We were all leaning back in our chairs, exhausted and stunned . . . all but Perry.

With savage energy he stood up and reached for his hat, scowling. "I've had enough of this," he snapped. "I'm leaving——"

He stopped short, however, blinking quizzically as Boyton rose, eyes wide with a child-like terror of the dark.

"Chet," he whispered. "He *did* see it! It's—true! Then, you and I—all of us—are nothing but a collection of tiny particles, held together by—what? And we could dissolve, like that watch! Fly into atoms and go drifting off into space! I wonder," he muttered. "Is that what death is? When our bodies disintegrate into dust——"

Perry stared at him, then flashed a warning look at Chet and me. He laughed lightly, reassuringly.

"Oh, come on, Chet—this has gone far enough. Boy, don't take him seriously. Why, that nig seeing it doesn't prove a thing! It's nothing in the world but thought-transmission, coupled with mass hypnotism.

We were thinking that watch so hard, we made the nig see it. A darky is very sensitive, like dogs. That's the answer: telepathy and hypnosis. Eh, Chet?"

Chet glanced at Boyton's white face, and shrugged. "Sure," he drawled. "That's all there is to it. The watch didn't really exist at all."

Greer stared at him fixedly, then forced a grin. "You're—quite sure? Wow!" he laughed shakily. "This thing—had me going for a minute! The idea of——" He shook himself like a terrier, and faced us, more like the old Boyton. "Well, good night, atoms!" he drawled. "I'm going home and get some shut-eye. If I disappear in the night—*pouf!* like that—you'll know what happened to me! See you tomorrow."

But we didn't see Boyton, not ever again, alive.

I WAS sitting in the office next morning, nursing a blind headache caused by our mental strain the night before, when Chet phoned. Perry had just called him with the news, via the city room, about a young clerk, one Boyton C. Greer, who had been walking along the street on his way to lunch. Suddenly, without a word, he had leaped in front of an oncoming truck, to be killed instantly. Greer's wife was prostrated with grief, at a loss to explain the suicide except that Boyton had seemed very nervous and depressed the night before.

That afternoon we met — only Perry, Chet and I now—in a downtown restaurant. A deep gravity hung over us like a cloud as we sat discussing Boy's suicide, following so closely upon Tom's mental collapse.

"Chet," Perry blurted, "it *was* this watch-thing that got them both. Boy was such an impressionable kid, and poor old Tom was a psychopathic case. We should never have stirred them up with a crazy idea like this, and left them to worry over it, when there's absolutely nothing to it."

Chetham met his eye queerly. Sweat beaded his high forehead, and his hand shook nervously, holding his coffee cup.

"No?" he drawled. "Perry—Joe, I've been thinking about this damn business all night . . . and I'm not so sure! We started this as a gag, yes. Half the time I was pretending, of course—like the time we found that formula for witch-ointment, and rubbed the stuff into cuts on our arms. The aconite and belladonna in it did give a sensation of flying and high excitement, and we did have hallucinations; so I pretended we had really flown through the night to a witch's Sabbat. I actually had the rest of you believing it for awhile, but of course there was nothing to it. . . ."

Perry nodded, grinning faintly at the memory of five excited small boys camping out together under the stars.

His grin faded as Chet's quiet voice went on:

"But this thing—I'm not so sure. Franklin was playing a game with a kite and a key, when he stumbled on the truth about electricity. And we five nitwits, clowning around, may have actually been performing a valuable scientific experiment—with mental electricity. It—it scares me, the way it scared Tom and Boyton. But—I decided last night that we must go on with it. We owe it to those two to find out if there's anything to it besides telepathy and hypnotism. Don't you see? If they've given their lives for something of real value to science, Boy's and Tom's names will go down in history. And so will ours—if we can prove that watch was real!"

Perry and I stared at him. The noise and clatter of the small café faded into non-existence at his words.

"It can't be!" Perry burst out, almost desperately. "Chet—it's a scientific impossibility. Besides, there's no way to prove it. Why, good Lord, if a man can't believe his own senses, what can he believe?"

Ray Chetham pushed back his chair, and rose from the table, his dessert untouched.

"A camera," he replied flatly. "I'm going to Boy's now, to try and cheer up his wife—and borrow that pet camera of his and some stuff for developing. You know that old vacant house of my uncle's on Beecher Street? There's an old table and some chairs in the attic. I'll meet you there in an hour, and we'll test this crazy thing once and for all!"

He strode out of the restaurant. Perry and I sat for a minute, staring at each other. He grinned at me shakily, and ran a finger around under his collar.

"I have a feeling," he said, "that we've gone quite far enough with this screwy business, Joe. Tampering with the Law of Creation, that's what we're doing—in case there's anything to it, which I doubt. But—suppose there is? What effect will such knowledge have on the world of tomorrow? Cripes!"

He jerked to his feet, glancing at his pocket watch, and I saw him wince slightly as he did so.

"Be seeing you in an hour," he muttered. "I've got to go hock this thing to pay my rent." He laughed oddly. "Sordid down-to-earth thought, isn't it? Maybe if I waited, I could hock—*the other one.* And tomorrow, the pawn-shop owner would look for it, and ——" He strode out, laughing queerly.

I sat for a long time, almost the whole hour, thinking about what he had said. Thinking and thinking about it, imagining the possibilities. . . .

I felt funny and light-headed, and a little sick at the stomach, when I got up finally and headed for that old house on Beecher, to join Chet and Perry—and a camera.

THEY were already there when I arrived. Sunlight streamed through a curtainless window, full on the table around which Chet had placed two rickety chairs and a packing-box. On another chair he had rigged up Boy's camera for a time-exposure.

The half-open door of a spacious closet across the room revealed a second smaller table, with pans of acid ready for developing the picture of—whatever was to be on that table.

My head was spinning now. My heart pounded, and I felt a crazy excitement, similar to the effect of a marihuana cigarette, I once sampled. The room appeared all out of focus, and Chet's and Perry's faces looked distorted and unfamiliar. If they had looked at me, perhaps they would have noticed something in my expression. But they were too intent on the experiment; merely waved me to my chair, and sat down at the table.

It took a long time, this meeting, to make that blob of matter appear on the

table top—evidence of my mental state, and perhaps of theirs, too.

We sat, stared, concentrating for almost a full hour. And then——

There it was, quivering as from an electric current but clear in every detail. I wondered if the thing was solid, a hollow shell, or whether the vague rudiments of a mechanism were hidden there inside—distorted, perhaps, by minds unfamiliar with watch-works. I wondered. . . .

Then—*click!* Chet had pressed the camera release, and registered on the sensitive film whatever really lay on that bare table top.

The sound was loud in the silent room, so loud that it startled me, and made the watch-image quiver and lose its shape. Slowly it dissolved as Perry leaned back, rubbing his smarting eyes and stretching tense muscles.

Chet stood up dizzily, taking up the camera with great care. I felt rather than saw him make a bee-line for the closet; heard the door shut behind him. . . .

It was then that the roaring began in my head, deafening me, blinding me. I could see that door across the room, looming large and forbidding as the door to the death-chamber of a prison. Behind it a man was moving swiftly, dipping a section of film into a pan of acid—and thereby, perhaps, solving the eternal mystery of Creation.

And men would be gods, pitting their brain-power one against another—creating images that did not exist in the normal scheme of things, creating even women that did not exist—until no one could tell the true from the false, and madness would sweep the world. . . .

Terror shook me like an ague—a blind sick terror of space and mystery and things beyond our ken. In that moment it seemed that Boyton and Tom stood beside me. I thought I could see them, waving frantic arms and screaming something at me, shoving me toward that monstrous door. . . .

I heard someone—Perry—cry out:

"Joe—what's the matter, Joe? You look so—wait, Joe! Take it easy, old boy; you're—*Chet! Chet! He's gone mad! Look out!*"

Vaguely I remembered picking up a chair, feather-light, and raising it above my head, and smashing with it—smashing at a monster wearing a white mask made up to resemble Perry Lester's face.

Then the huge door burst open, and I was smashing again, wielding the chair with no effort, until a second fiend, masquerading as my old friend, Ray Chetham, went down like a felled ox.

Something was in his hand—a piece of film, ready for developing, but ruined now by exposure to the light. . . .

That's about all, Sergeant. You'll find the bodies in that second-floor room, in the old vacant house on Beecher. I came straight here, the minute I realized there was nothing I could do for poor old Perry and Chet—after I came to myself, you understand, I saw what I had done.

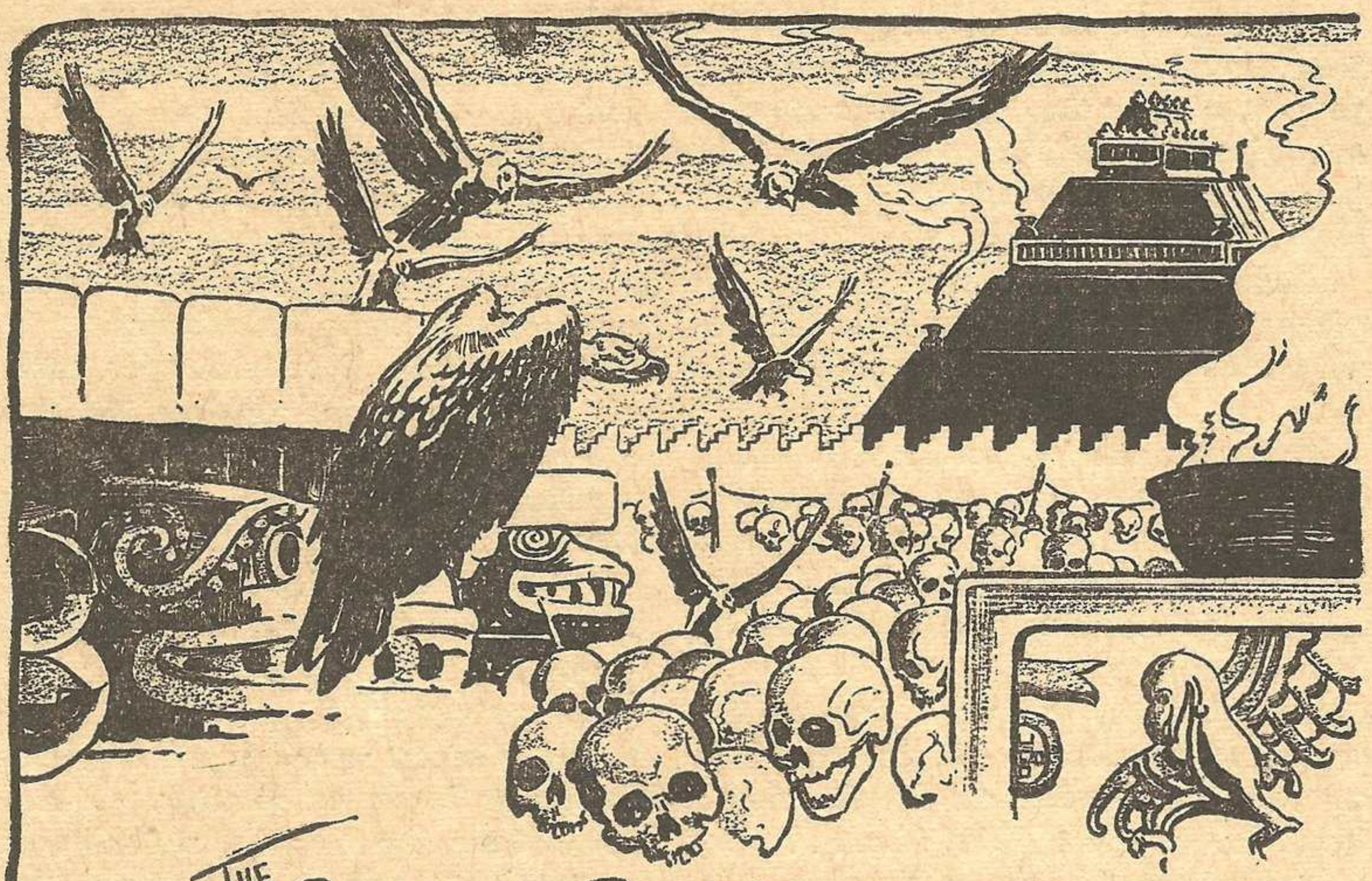
I thought of suicide at first, longed for it, bending over them and crying like a baby. Old Chet and Perry were more like my brothers than friends. . . . I couldn't stand the thought of what I'd done. . . .

Then I knew that suicide was the easy way. What I had to do was give myself up, so that I could tell someone about our experiments before they do—whatever the state is going to do to me.

Someone else may want to try what we tried—a scientific mind, not a bunch of untrained helpless laymen like the five of us. Someone not afraid to find out what was on that undeveloped film.

I don't want to know, myself. I hope to God nobody ever finds out!

SUPERSTITIONS

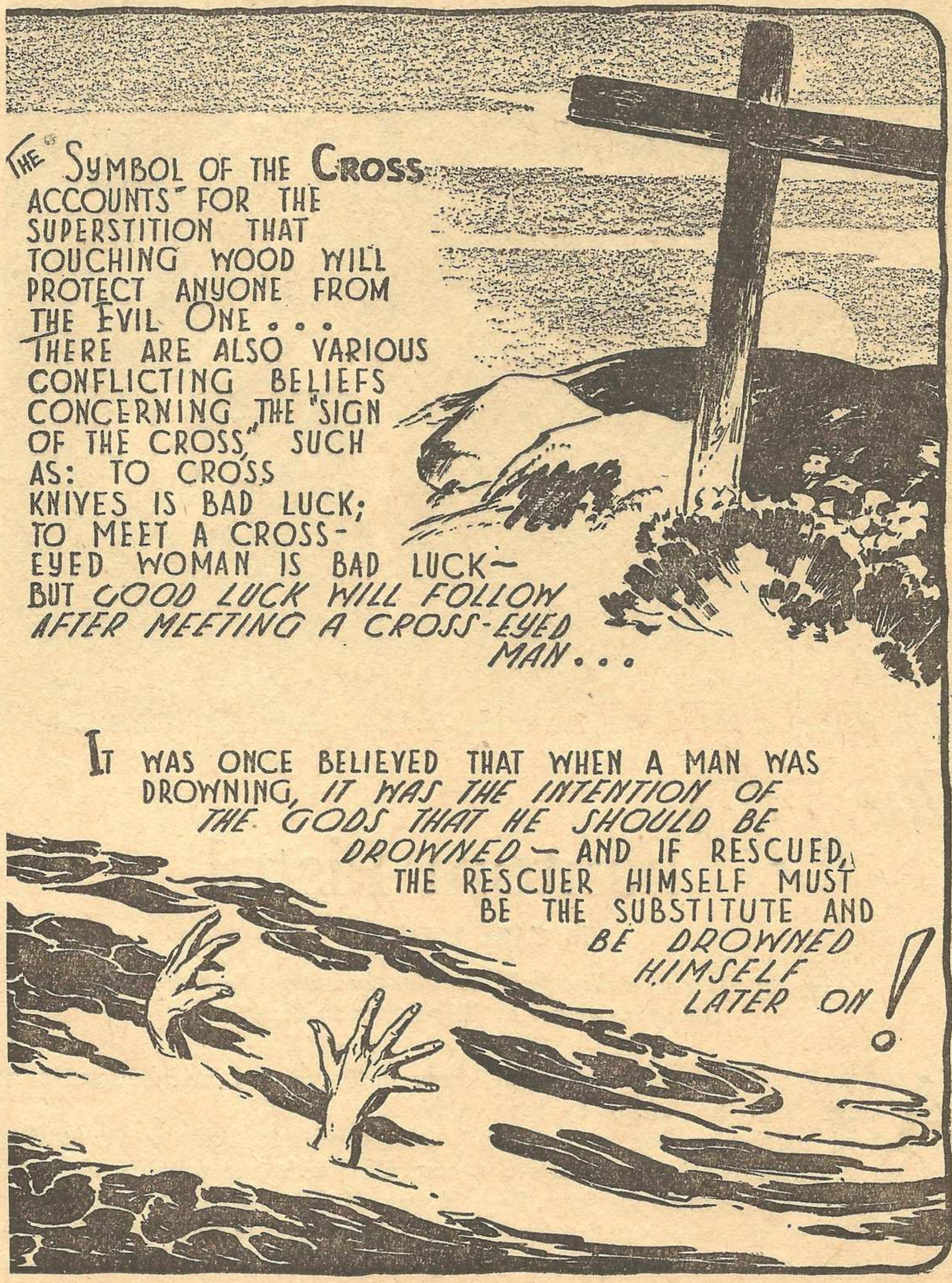


THE **CULT OF DEATH**, DEVELOPED BY THE **AZTECS** TO APPEASE THEIR PANTHEON OF BLOODTHIRSTY GODS, REACHED ITS HIGH POINT IN *THE SACRIFICE OF* ***20,000 MILITARY CAPTIVES*** WHO WERE SLAUGHTERED AT THE DEDICATION OF THE GREAT TEMPLE IN MEXICO! AFTER A SEVERAL YEARS CAMPAIGN OF CONQUEST, THE CAPTIVES WERE AMASSED FOR THE DEDICATION TO THE RAIN AND WAR GODS... TWO GREAT CHIEFS LED THE EXECUTION AND WHEN THEY WERE EXHAUSTED, LESSER DIGNITARIES SUCCEEDED EACH OTHER ACCORDING TO RANK, UNTIL THE LAST VICTIM HAD BEEN SLAIN... THE SKULLS WERE THEN STRUNG ON POLES AND SET UP IN THE GREAT RACK CALLED THE "PLACE OF SKULLS" WHERE THE NUMBER OF SUCH GRISLY TROPHIES *WERE AT ONE TIME ESTIMATED AT* ***60,000!***

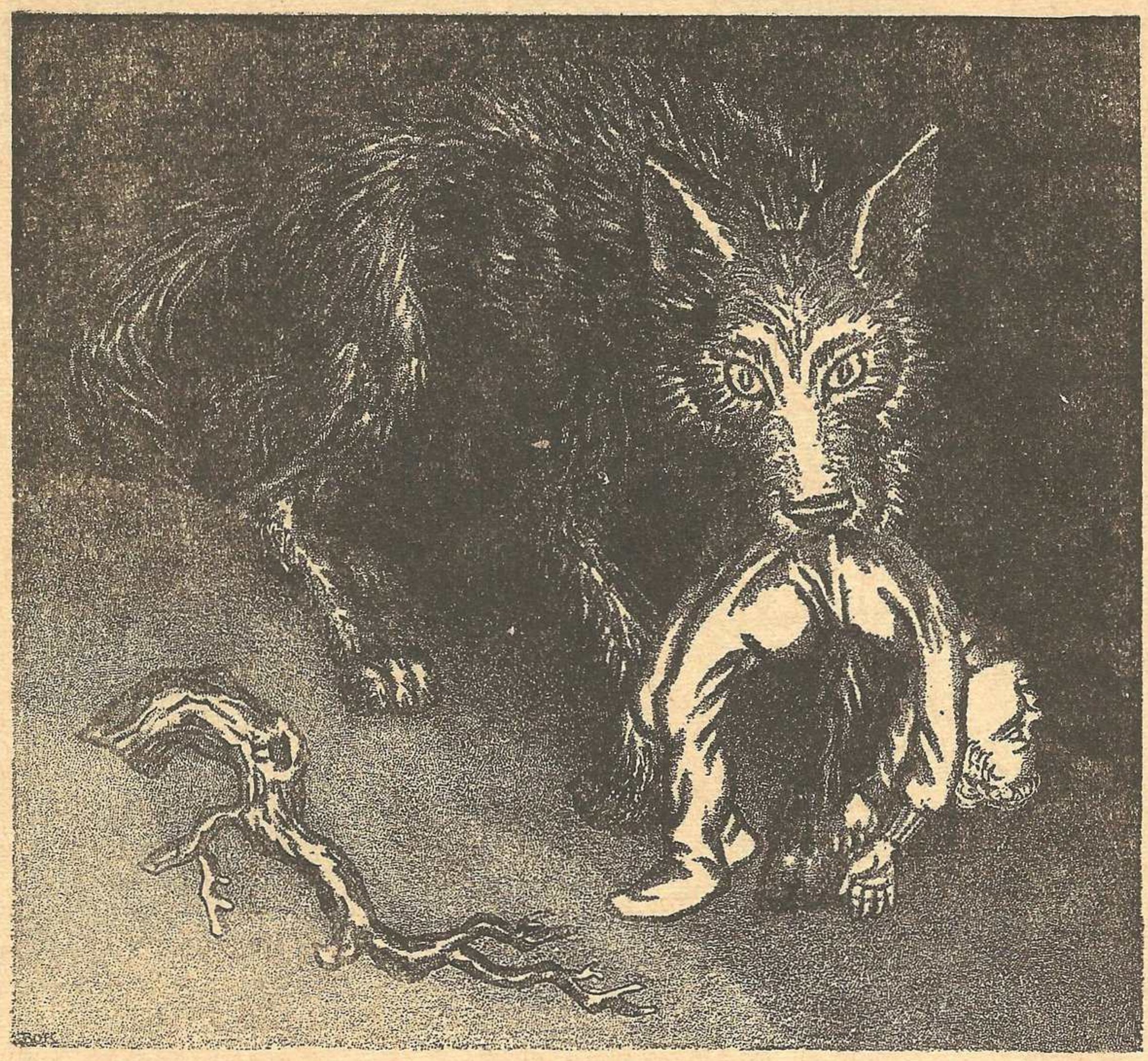
o

AND TABOOS

by Hill



"It comes alone at night, a big gray brute with fiery eyes."



The Phantom Pistol

By CARL JACOBI

They say that only a silver bullet can slay the werewolf—a strange tale by the author of "Revelations in Black"

AS I look back, my friendship with Hugh Trevellan seems to have been inevitable. Our ages were near, we were both bachelors, and our avocational interests were much the same. Instilled deeply in both of us was that fascination for art and craftsmanship that has been mellowed and made attractive by time.

I had gone in for books, and my shelves were filled with rare volumes, the result of years of collecting and considerable expense. But Trevellan had done his browsing along a different line. I remember the

night Major Lodge brought us together.

"Idiot, meet idiot," he had introduced jokingly. "You two must know each other.

"The antique bug has got you both. McKay here knows all there is to know about books, and Trevellan's case of pistols would make a gunsmith turn green with envy."

"Pistols?" I had repeated, shaking the thin hand and scrutinizing the gaunt form before me.

And Hugh Trevellan had smiled. His pale blue eyes twinkled pleasantly. "Yes," he replied, "revolvers of all kinds: wheel-locks, flint-locks, muzzle-loaders, and even those absurd modern automatics. Would you care to see them?"

IT IS strange how inborn in every man is the collecting instinct. I have heard that even a savage will hoard colored pebbles, and I know that as a boy my greatest disappointment came when I lost my book of foreign stamps. Trevellan's pistols were his life. He stood before their heavy mahogany case and admired them at least once every day. He dusted them. He polished their scrollwork. And he searched constantly for more.

They were, in truth, a masterly assortment. Ranging from the earliest mid-Fourteenth Century hand-cannon on the top shelf to a modern long-barreled Luger automatic on the bottom, the case displayed all the gradual developments conceived by man in the making of light firearms.

"This one I picked up only yesterday at the Meldrow sales," said Trevellan, taking out one of the weapons. "It's an Italian Snaphaunce pistol, and I'm not sure yet whether it's a forgery, though I paid a price for it. Here are a pair of flint-locks by Lazarino Comminazzo. Note the double-necked hammers. This is an old arquebus, and this a French wheel-lock with the royal shield in gilt and damascened with gold."

Even my books on which I had prided myself for so long seemed to fade and lose some of their glamor as I stared down upon these beautiful relics. I said as much to Trevellan, and he smiled graciously.

"I should like to see your books," he replied. "I have a few volumes on munitions that are rather old, but from a standpoint of binding or edition I'm afraid they are of little importance. Unfortunately I'm leaving for the country tomorrow, so I'll have to postpone the visit."

"How long are you going to stay?"

He shrugged. "Rented a secluded place down Arronshire way, and I may stay all summer. Doctor's orders, you know. Says I'm all on edge and need solitude. It'll be a miserable nuisance, but still I don't mind. I can finish a paper on Scotch pistols I started a month ago. But say . . . why not motor down and stay a fortnight or so? We could have a royal time."

Early in July, when my business permitted, I had "motored down," but I had cut my stay short and actually breathed a sigh of relief when I was back in Bloomsbury. Why? The reason is hardly a tangible one. And yet now, seen retrospectively, it seems a psychic warning of what was to follow.

I FOUND Arronshire a district quite distinct and separate from its neighbors, both from a philologist's and a cartographer's point of view. The people were a rough, burly type, and the characteristic voice inflection was harsh and unpleasant. The country was extremely wild and rugged. And a general air of neglect seemed to pervade everywhere. The hedges had grown rank and untrimmed. Road markings had fallen to decay, bridges rattled ominously as my car rolled over them, and the villages seemed to shrink back despondently as I passed.

For a solid two miles the lane which led to the manor was lined with gnarled old apple trees. But it was the sign on the post-box that drew me up short. "Blueker House," it read. "Ludwig Blueker, Undertaker."

The house was one of those monstrosities of the Victorian age, ornate and sadly in want of paint. The lawn before it was overrun with weeds, and a general air of neglect was over all.

"How do you like it?" Trevellan hailed from the veranda.

"Why on earth don't you take away that undertaker's sign?" I replied in question. "This place is about as cheerful as a graveyard."

He had moved into the house furnished, bringing with him a single trunk and, of course, his beloved pistols. The weapon case he had placed by the big bay window, opening on the front lawn. The huge mahogany cabinet seemed strangely out of place there, and so did Trevellan himself. As I sat across from him, his delicate face glowed in the lamplight like tinted wax, and I could not help thinking of an old painting, a portrait of a French courtier that hung in my rooms.

But while I could not point my finger at any one feature of the house that was in itself distasteful, there was something utterly somber and depressing about the architecture that crushed all buoyancy of feeling and left me in a state of deep melancholia. I stayed only two days, then headed back for London.

The rest of the summer passed with only an occasional letter from Trevellan. He had grown accustomed to the solitude, he said, and was really enjoying his convalescence. August dragged into September, and his letters grew fewer, and finally stopped altogether.

Then one day in Charing Cross I stumbled upon a book that brought Trevellan back to mind. It was an old volume, once finely bound, with the title, *Historie of Certayne Small Fire Arms*, stenciled deeply in a brass plate on the cover. It contained some exquisite colored drawings of old pistols. I knew how eagerly my friend would welcome the sight of such a work.

Accordingly, the next day I headed toward Arronshire and Hugh Trevellan. A week before, the countryside had been a maelstrom of autumn color, but now, as I drove along, I found only a graveyard of naked trees and drab bracken. The strong winds which had whipped in from the south during the past few days had removed every leaf, the advance warning of an early winter.

BY NIGHTFALL I was nearing the manor. Again, as in early summer, I felt an increasing heaviness of spirit as I entered the district. Black storm clouds were pouring into the sky when I reached the village of Darset. Dust and old leaves swirled into the car, and a drop of rain spattered on the windshield. But my attention was drawn to the state of general excitement which had seized the townfolk.

Knots of them stood in the light of shop windows, talking earnestly. Several rickety cars tore by, loaded with men armed with hunting-rifles. And in the doorway of one house several persons were trying to console a woman who was crying bitterly.

"What's wrong?" I asked the garage man, as he began filling my car with petrol.

"Wolves," he replied, and looked frightened as he said it.

"Wolves," I told him rather coldly, "have been extinct in England since the Fifteenth Century."

He looked at me queerly and spilled a quart of petrol on the mudguards. "Have they, sir?" he said. "Then it's a wild dog it must be, or something worse."

"Did it attack somebody?"

The man's hand shook as he took the money. "That's what it did, sir. Carried

off the widow Chase's youngest, the sweetest girl you've ever seen."

I stared. "You mean a wild dog actually killed a child?"

"And she's not the first, sir. Only a fortnight ago, Johnny, the cobbler's son, was taken from almost under his mother's eyes. It comes at night, alone, a big, gray brute, with fiery eyes, they say. Jeff Twillger took a shot at him from his bedroom window. Jeff can hit a shilling every time from here to that tree, but he missed. A reward be posted too: fifty pounds for the man who brings in his pelt. I'll be bringin' down my gun, I think. It's nice earnin's."

I took note of the threatening heavens now, and with the garage man's help, put up the tonneau top of the car. The distant rolling of thunder was in my ears as I headed down the winding road, and the headlights showed the rain coming down in earnest. In a quarter of an hour the road was in bad condition, and I was forced to reduce speed.

I came to Blueker House lane at last and the next moment was shaking hands with Hugh Trevellan.

The house looked even gloomier than before, but when my friend offered me a glass of Liebfraumilch, I was almost glad I had come.

"It *is* good wine," agreed Trevellan. "It was left here by the old Austrian who formerly owned the place. He died, you know, and the house was offered completely furnished. I saw the ad and leased it before even seeing it. Not so bad, eh?"

I smiled and set down my glass. "I've got something to show you," I said, reaching for my grip-sack.

He was up and out of his chair at that with the exuberance of a child suddenly reminded of a toy. "And I've got something to show you."

He stepped quickly to his pistol case and returned with an oblong box of tarnished silver. Placing it on the table before me, he opened it and stood back proudly. "The masterpiece of them all," he said. "And where do you think I found it? In Darset, of all places."

Resting on its cushion of dark velvet, gleaming in the lamplight, was a beautiful long-barreled pistol. The butt was made of ivory, yellowed now like an ancient cameo, and adorned with an intricate network of silver filigree. Mosaic inlays formed queer designs above the trigger, and the barrel, which was trim and graceful as a poised lance, glittered with engraved gold spirals. A small gold cross was upraised at one end. But it was the hammer that attracted my attention. Of blackened steel, it had been fashioned into a perfect death's-head.

"Isn't it a beauty?" Trevellan said, leaning over my shoulder.

"And you bought it in Darset?" I said, unbelievingly.

He smiled in delight. "By a sheer piece of luck. It belonged to one of the villagers, and when he found I was interested in old weapons, he offered to sell it to me. I gave him twice what he asked."

I took the pistol from its case and fondled it. "Italian?"

TREVELLAN frowned. "You've got me there. I really don't know what it is. I don't believe it's Italian, and nothing about it suggests the Germanic. The man said it had been in his family for years."

We lit our pipes after that, and Trevellan went into a lengthy dissertation on the artistry of ancient weapons in general. At length I brought out the book which had really been the incentive for my visit. Trevellan thumbed through its pages carefully and looked a long time at the illustrations.

"It's an excellent work," he said. "I——"

His voice trailed off; his eyes suddenly riveted themselves on the book. With a

low exclamation he pushed the table lamp nearer the printed page.

"Look here, McKay," he cried hoarsely. "Read this."

The volume was turned to the chapter, *Early Eighteenth Century,* and in the center of the page I read the following paragraph.

"The moste skillfull worke of the master craftsmanne, Johann Stiffter of Prague, was a holstre pistol made for a subject of England, Sir William Kingston, in the yeare of our Lord, 1712. This weapon was fashioned in certayne unusual ways, being made to fire a silver bullet, being blessed by seven priests with holy water, and having the crucifix carved upon the barrel. Sir William, it was said, was wont to travel often in the southerne countrys, and while on one of his journeys was attacked by werewolves and other dæmons. The witch-wolves, who were really human creatures in league with Satan, carried off his little daughter, Julie, and left Sir William sore hurte. Whereupon the Englishmanne swore vengeance upon all like fiends of hell and ordered the pistol made, combining all knowne methods by which they could be killed."

And following these startling words came an illustration and a detailed description of none other than the ivory pistol Trevellan had shown me only a short while before.

THERE was no mistaking the fact. No pistol of similar craftsmanship could have been created. But there was one way to prove absolutely its authenticity. The description mentioned five words carved upon the weapon by the gunsmith: *Tod dem Wahrwolf schwöre Ich* [Death to the Werewolf I swear].

"Have you a magnifying glass?" I asked Trevellan. And then I stared as I saw my friend's consternation. The man was almost beside himself. His hands were opening and closing convulsively; his face had grown white, and a strange frightened look had stolen into his eyes. He got up, swaying.

"There's one here some place. I'll—I'll see if I can find it."

A moment later we were scrutinizing the pistol through the glass. Tiny lettering appeared on the barrel.

"There it is!" I cried. "It's the same pistol."

There was no answer. I turned and stared at Trevellan. He was leaning heavily against the table, lips twitching. Abruptly he seized the pistol from my hands, thrust it back in its box and replaced it in the mahogany case.

"Are you ill?" I said .

"Yes," he replied jerkily. "I—I feel a bit faint. That long walk I took today must have done me up. If you don't mind. I think I'll go off to bed."

I nodded and regarded him curiously as he left the room. What on earth had come over the man? He had been perfectly normal until reading that paragraph about the pistol. I lit my pipe and sat there, musing over his strange actions. And as the tobacco smoke drifted ceilingward, I suddenly became aware of the storm again.

The rain was swishing against the big bay window now. Thunder boomed steadily overhead as if some giant rolling-pin were being moved back and forth across the roof.

For a time I was content to sit there, listening to the wild night so near, yet so far. But as my mind began a train of thought suggested by that queer paragraph, a decided sense of unease came over me.

Werewolves! What strange horrors man will mentally create for himself. It was a queer belief, this idea that a man will adopt a taste for human blood and will change into a lower animal, a wolf, to obtain it. Stranger still the legend that holy water, the sight of the crucifix, or a silver bullet will kill such a demon. And yet I knew such superstitions were still current in south Europe.

Suddenly my pipe slipped from my teeth, and I sat bolt upright. The words of the garage man in Darset suddenly flashed back to me. He had spoken of a

wolf or wild dog that had entered the town and made off with a child on two separate occasions.

I tried vainly to ward off the absurd question that was stealing into my brain. Might not this big gray brute be a were-wolf? I forced a laugh. But the thought persisted, and more details arose to defeat my better judgment.

Was it not true that wolves had been extinct in England since the Fifteenth Century? Yes, of course; but the beast might have been a wild dog. But if it were a wild dog, would there not be some record of its once being tame? I frowned. Not necessarily. The animal might have come from a distance, left there by its owner when he had vacated. But still a wild dog would make for the poultry coops. No matter how long it had been wild, human flesh would be repugnant to it, would it not? I stared into the bowl of my pipe. To this question I could offer no answer at all.

A shelf of books on the other side of the room caught my eyes, and thinking perhaps to steer my mind into more pleasant channels I crossed over and let my gaze pass along the titles. I saw with astonishment that all of the two dozen volumes dealt with lycanthropy, sorcery, black art, and the occult. Richard Verstegan's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence,* strange names of long-dead authors, rare works whose publication had been banned by God-fearing people lay there on the shelf before me. There was LeLoyer's *Book of Spectres,* the sixth edition of DePræstigies *Daemonun et Incantationibus,* printed at Basle, and that hellish writing of Milo Calument, *I Am a Werewolf,* all copies of which I remembered were supposed to have been cast in Hoxton marsh.

IT WAS odd that Trevellan had not mentioned these books to me when he knew nothing could have delighted me more. And it was odd, I suddenly thought, that Trevellan should be reading them himself. One would find nothing in the line of pistols in these pages.

But when I looked at one of the volumes I found the reason. They were not Trevellan's property. They belonged to Ludwig Blueker, the former resident of the house, as attested by the name scrawled on the flyleaf. Yet the books had not passed Trevellan's notice. Throughout the pages I found queer notations in his writing. There was no mistaking his peculiar scrawl.

One particular group of sentences caught my eye. It read:

"July 31. I followed all the rituals tonight and found that I have the power. I can hardly realize it, but it's true. Something seemed to draw me toward the village, but I dared not venture from the grounds. One must grow accustomed to such a terrific change."

Far back in my brain a lurking suspicion was beginning to grow, and I thumbed through the pages for more notations. But beyond a few meaningless jumbles of words, the rest was in Latin, which I did not understand.

Puzzled, I made my way up the stairs to my bedroom, undressed and went to bed.

Sleep has always come readily in my life, yet now with the rain surging at the windows, and the lightning flares drawing drunken shadows along the wall, I lay awake, listening to the slow ticking of the hall clock.

Midnight came with the slow striking of the clock chimes. And then I heard the door of Trevellan's bedroom creak open and footsteps pass softly down the hall. I sat up. I slipped to the door, opened it a crevice and peered out.

A dim nightlight burned at the far end of the hall. In its feeble glow I saw Trevellan, fully dressed, moving toward the staircase. But his actions were not those of

a man in his own home. He was skulking forward, stopping every few steps to listen carefully. As he reached the first stair I caught a glimpse of his face.

A wild, insane look contorted his features. The eyes bulged in their sockets; the mouth sagged downward in an empty grin. For an instant he stared unseeingly toward my door; then he began to descend.

For a moment I knelt there, staring into empty darkness, my mind whirling madly. Had the man been sleep walking? But there was nothing of the somnambulist in Trevellan's actions. Where then was he going, stealing out of his house like a hunted criminal?

On impulse I darted down the stairs, ripped open the door. A sheet of rain slapped my face. The grounds loomed dark before me. Then a fork of lightning streaked down from the heavens, and I saw it. Bounding along the path, heading toward the road was a great gray dog-shaped wolf! It turned in that instant of electrical flash, and the sight of those fiendish, fiery eyes was something I would never forget.

Then darkness returned, and for many moments I stood there, motionless. Chilled, I slowly returned to my room, sank into a chair by the window and watched the rain trickle down the glass. Questions unanswerable pounded at my brain.

Hours dragged by, and gradually I lapsed into a fitful slumber.

When I awoke the gray dawn was stealing into my room. The wind had gone, and outside the water puddles lay motionless, like strips of iron under the leaden sky. All was strangely still. Through the open casement came the smell of wet earth and moldering leaves.

I listened. From far off in the direction of the village came a long mournful howl. Again it sounded, louder, more distinct. Years before I had heard such a cry when I had ridden through Royal-woods in pursuit of the fox. But it was not the baying of hounds I heard now. It was the cry of a wolf, and it was approaching the manor at lightning speed.

Fists clenched, I waited. And then a moment later it bounded into sight directly beneath my window. A feeling of loathing swept over me as my gaze fell on that gray shaggy body. The wolf looked around with a snarl, then moved out of my sight toward the other side of the house.

An interval of silence, and then I heard the door unlatch softly. Footsteps sounded on the carpeted stairs. I strode across the room, opened the door.

Hugh Trevellan was entering the hall. No longer was he skulking as though afraid of being seen. He was erect now, and he turned and cast a last look over his shoulder before entering his room.

Suddenly a giddy sensation rose within me. A scream gurgled unsounded to my lips. I had seen the mouth, the lips of Trevellan in that instant before he entered his room, and God help me, they were slobbered with thick red blood!

THOSE intervening hours until I stumbled down to breakfast were a living hell. When I sat down at the table my hands were trembling perceptibly.

"Good morning, McKay," Trevellan said. "Hope you had a good night's sleep in spite of the storm."

The silky satisfaction of the man sent a wave of nausea through me. But he did not seem to notice the fact that I made no reply. Keeping up a steady conversation, he laughed and joked, and I could not help thinking his actions were those of a man living the after effect of a powerful drug.

I studied him closely as he sipped his tea. His cheeks glowed with a brightness of almost super-health. And yet he seemed to have changed. Not greatly. The features were the same and the pale, blue eyes still gave him that look of doll-like fragility.

But about his head there were certain alterations that destroyed the classic moulding I had always admired. The ears were more prominent, longer and pointed in shape. The nose, I'm sure, was larger, with dilated nostrils.

"Trevellan," I said when breakfast was over, "who was Ludwig Blueker?"

He frowned. "The former owner of the manor," he replied. "Shall we go for a walk down the road a bit?"

"I know he was the former owner," I said as we went out the door, "but was he a farmer or an undertaker?"

"Both, I believe," Trevellan answered. "He eked out a mean existence from the soil, and he made a few pounds now and then by doing the occasional funeral work for the people of Darset."

It was plain that Trevellan did not care to discuss the matter with me further.

"I was looking at some of his books last night," I said, "and what a collection! Blueker must have been a superstitious fool!"

Trevellan turned on me almost with a snarl.

"He was a great man," he cried. "Those villagers laughed at him because he preferred to stay in solitude and study things which they could not understand. Blueker took years to gather those books."

We were nearing the end of the lane now, weaving our way in and out among the pools of water. Emerging on the post road, we drew up as two men on horseback clattered up beside us.

"Good mornin'," said the nearest, a tall fellow I remembered seeing in the village.

"But a wet, chilly one."

He nodded. "You haven't been seeing a wolf or wild dog about, have ye?" The voice was stern and filled with determination.

I could feel myself swaying slightly. "It didn't attack someone in Darset again?"

He shifted in his saddle. "It did. Broke into a house last night. It's getting more courage every time. The mothers be watching their children like hawks today, and there's ten parties out hunting the brute."

"How many last night?" I waited his reply with an inner terror.

"Two. The Jepson twins. It's 'orrible, sir."

"If he comes around here," I said, "he'll leave his pelt."

The man smiled grimly. "There'll be a hundred pounds in it if ye do, sir. And the personal thanks of every mother in Darset."

He dug his knees into the horse's flank, and the two of them rode off at a fast trot.

Trevellan stared at me dumbly. The jovial mood had left him, and in its place was a look of unmistakable fear.

"I—I think we'd better be getting back," he said. "I've got some writing to do."

IN Blueker House once again Trevellan excused himself and went to his room. Left alone, I wandered into the library.

The moment I entered that chamber I felt the presence of some unseen power! Like a great lodestone I felt myself drawn toward Trevellan's pistol case. As I stood there, gazing through the glass doors, a single object centered into my vision: the silver box that contained Trevellan's latest ivory pistol.

Impulsively I opened the case and took out the weapon. The sight of that relic there affected me like old wine. I turned it over and over, but I offer no explanation for what I did a moment later. In slots on the velvet-lined box lay the weapon's charge, three silver bullets, and loading equipment. Hesitating a moment I picked up one of the silver balls, inserted it in the gun and poured in powder from the little horn. I rammed the charge home. Then with an effort I replaced the weapon in the magohany case.

Not until it was quite dark outside did Trevellan come downstairs.

"I'm sorry, McKay," he said, "but I've got to go to the village. You'll find some cold food in the kitchen. I may be back late, so don't wait up for me."

The door slammed, and his footsteps died away on the gravel.

And then a slow feeling of dread rose up within me. I fell to pacing the room madly. Outside a flotilla of velvet clouds was creeping across the sky, but off to the east a darker blot glowed with a soft radiance where the moon was trying to break through.

More hours snailed past; the ticking of the pendulum cloud pounded through the rooms like the blows of a mallet. Stranger than before came that strange psychic urge to open again Trevellan's gun case and take into my hands that ivory pistol.

Then suddenly there floated to my ears a far-off ringing sound. I listened. It came from the direction of the village, swept forward by a wind, a deep bong, bong that penetrated every corner of the manor like a tocsin. The blood rushed to my head. It was a tocsin! They were ringing the steeple bell in Darset, ringing it to awaken the village. The horror had begun!

And as I listened, another sound rose over the bell—the long wailing cry of a wolf.

I stood by the big bay window, staring out into the grounds. The moon rode in and out through thick clouds. Giant disproportionate shadows staggered across the lawn.

Abruptly the clouds parted, and I saw the beast in the full light of the moon. It was the wolf, and its mouth was smeared crimson.

A scream rose to my lips. I felt myself turn like a puppet on a wire. My gaze centered on the weapon case, and its magnetic lure increased a hundredfold. An inner power, a psychic will drew me toward it.

My hand moved forward. I opened the glass door.

"Trevellan!" I cried. "Trevellan! Go back!"

The wolf stopped short and peered upward. Like lightning my hand leaped to the case. My fingers closed over the ivory pistol, snatched it from its velvet mounting.

My thumb reached for the death's-head hammer, pulled it to full cock. My forefinger tightened on the trigger.

"Trevellan!" I cried. "Good God, I can't help myself!"

There was a crashing report. Glass shattered and fell to the floor. From out on the lawn below me came a hoarse cry of pain.

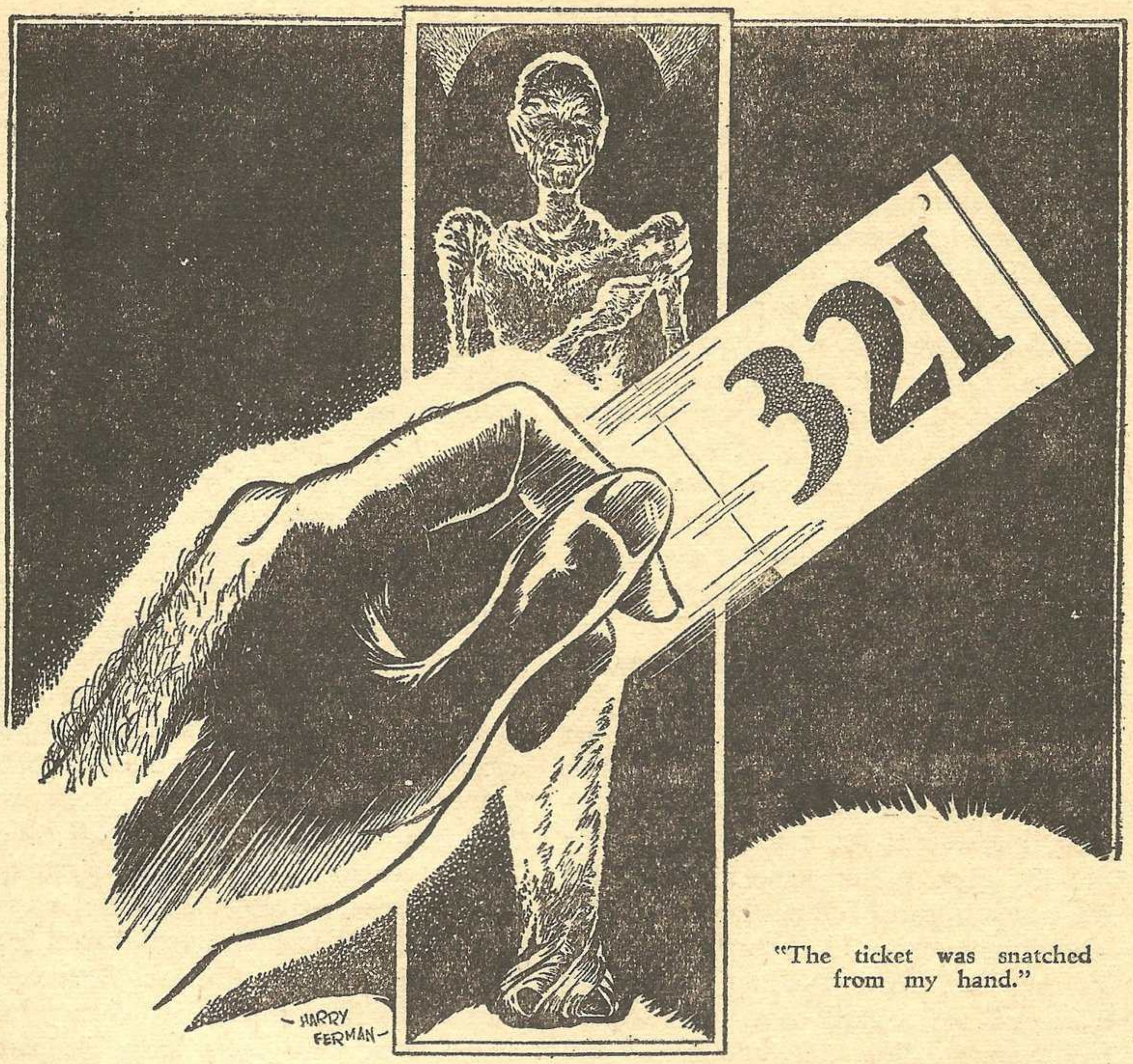
Then I was released. Turning, I flung the pistol to a far corner, raced out into the grounds. I found him there, sprawled on the grass, his shirt marked with a growing circle of red. He rose up as I lifted his head in my arms.

"Thanks, McKay," he said, his voice a whisper. "It was—it was the only way."

He fell back with a sigh, and I was alone with the corpse of Hugh Trevellan.

ON OCTOBER second, the evening edition of the *London Chronicle* published the following item:

"Reports of an unfortunate tragedy in north Arronshire, near the village of Darset, were made known today by police of the district. The body of Mr. Hugh Trevellan, noted antiquarian and authority on ancient firearms, was found in his summer home by a close friend, Mr. Martin McKay of Russel Square, Bloomsbury, who had come from London to visit him. After examining the body, the district doctor expressed the opinion that death had come accidentally when a weapon Mr. Trevellan was cleaning was discharged. The bullet, curiously, was found to be made of silver."



"The ticket was snatched from my hand."

The Ghost of a Chance

By A. B. ALMY

"A skeleton in the closet?" That's nothing to a mummy in the breast pocket!

DON'T ask me why I went to the Charity Bazaar that evening. By rights, I should have gone to bed early. I had used all my energy and ingenuity that day in my effort to break down sales-resistance to the purchase of the Acrecom, the niftiest, most up-to-date, comfort-bringing, accident-reducing, auto-gadget in existence.

I was standing on the street corner, top-coat on arm, gladstone at side, waiting for a taxi to show up. In spite of the tooting of auto-horns and the roar of electric-cars, oddly, at times, I could hear the

horse-chestnuts dropping to the ground from the trees in the center-parking. The fact is, I was becoming gradually relaxed. In this pleasurable state of mind and body, I must have let several taxis pass unnoticed.

Suddenly I became aware that someone had jostled against me. It must have been one of the two girls who were just then passing. They were talking at the top of their voices. I couldn't help hearing them:

"I bet there'll be a lot of folks at the Bazaar tonight. Won't we have a swell time!"

"You said it. It's the last night, too. They're going to raffle off that horrible thing, you know."

"Mercy! You give me the shivers! I wouldn't want to get it. Just feature—"

That's all I heard plainly. A taxi was at hand. I half raised my hand to hail it, yet, when it was on the point of stopping, I motioned for it to go on. Why did I? Because, for some reason, I felt the compulsion to follow those two girls whose conversation I had partly overheard. As they had been dawdling along, they were now only a block or so from where I had been standing. I could easily pick them out from the crowd by their red, ruffled, knee-short dresses and their black cocked-hats. Twins, very likely. Even if I had lost sight of them, I'm quite certain, knowing what I now know, that I would have gone their way and arrived at their destination. They had said that they were going to the Charity Bazaar. I knew that I was bound for the same place. Don't ask me how I knew.

Presently the two girls disappeared. I went on, not hurrying particularly. My alligator-bag was becoming heavy.

And now, I had arrived at the place. The building was large, brilliantly lighted. I pushed my way up the steps and into the main hall.

It was a regular old-fashioned lodge bazaar, or fair, you might call it. There were booths of every kind, swathed in colored bunting and paper. There were balsam pillows, crazy-quilts, aprons galore, woven baskets—in fact, doodads of every description. There was the clatter of cups and plates. An orchestra that no one was listening to was adding to the hubbub. Indeed, there was the usual confusion and, everywhere, the usual bevy of marcelled young women begging you to buy something. And, what was still more old-fashioned, there was the selling of chances, or tickets, for articles more or less useless, especially, to the male sex.

In the midst of this hubbub, I was calm. I disposed of my coat and baggage at the decorated check-stand. I took time to eat a sizeable chicken-pie and to down the strongest cup of coffee within my experience. After that, I went directly to the farther end of the long hall. Here, was the bazaar of curiosities, as it was called. There were all sorts of things—grotesque tea-pots, tobacco—pipes of every imaginable shape and country, queer-shaped brass and pottery vessels, Chinese, Peruvian—who knows from where they all came? Of course, there were tigers' teeth, elephants' tusks, stuffed birds, petrified fish. Why name them all? They meant nothing to me at the time, nor do they now.

I LEARNED, from the large poster above the booth, that this miscellany of objects had been donated, to be sold for charity, by a distinguished gentleman, Mr. Frederick Rawlins, world-renowned traveler and philanthropist. After a cursory glance at this hodge-podge of stuff, I gave my attention to one object alone. The thing was an Egyptian mummy. It was propped up in a wooden box painted white inside, the better to display its lineaments. One of the mummy's arms was merged with its shriveled breast. The other hung somewhat apart from the body, like a rope of brown, twisted hemp, with a knot at

the end. That knot, I perceived, was a hand. I was fascinated by that hand.

I leaned over the wooden hand-rail, only a few inches from that brown, shrunken thing. More than once, I have been told that, by nature, I am rather cold and unsympathetic. However that may be, I was immediately overwhelmed with sympathy for this mummy. Poor fellow! It's bad enough to be buried in the ground, but how much worse it is to have one's body salted and dried and packed away in some stifling vault, only to be dragged out again, some thousands of years later, and treated like so much merchandise. How humiliating to be displayed before the curious eyes of a callous mob, who see nothing in you but a lump of cinnamon-colored leather with features like no human being.

As I continued to stare at the mummy, I became convinced that, in life, he had been an exceptionally intelligent man. In that shrunken head, I pictured a philosopher's brow. What an insult to raffle off his body as if it were a mere patch-work quilt. Yet, that is exactly what they were doing.

I was besieged by ticket-sellers. "Buy a chance! Buy a chance for the Egyptian mummy!"

"No, thank you. No."

"A ticket for the mummy, sir? A mummy ticket, before they're all gone!"

"No! No, I say!"

As I was turning away from the rail to dismiss the importunate ticket sellers, someone touched me on the arm. Who was it? I didn't see the person. However, that touch impelled me to call out, "Here, I'll take one of those mummy tickets!"

Three girls rushed up to me. I deliberately waited until another one came up. "I'll take my ticket from you," I indicated. I reached my hand into her tin coffee-can and extracted a ticket. It was number 321. I placed it in my bill-fold.

I was ready to go now.

All the while that I was in the taxi on my way to the hotel, I cursed myself for being so foolish as to take in that lodge affair. Twice, I took out the ticket to tear it to pieces, but, instead of doing so, I replaced it, unmutilated. I know, now, that I could as readily have torn an iron bar to shreds as that ticket.

As I said before, I had had an exceptionally difficult day. Once in bed, I fell asleep immediately. Soon, however, I became restless. I dreamed fitfully of sarcophagi and mummies and ticket-girls and huge chicken-pies.

I AWOKE, suddenly. Someone was getting into bed with me. The nerve of it! I had engaged a single room and paid plenty for it. It was inky dark in the room, so I didn't see the person. Why didn't the fellow finish getting in if that was what he was bent on doing? Queer, this getting in and yet, not getting in—exactly.

I had a sickish feeling. I reached over. Nothing was there. Yet, the bed was creaking. There was a depression, too, as if—as if what? I could scarcely breathe. But someone else was breathing. It was the breath of mummy pits.

I thought that my heart had stopped beating. Yet, after a moment or so, I felt it still functioning. "I must be calm. Calm," my mind registered. "No matter what happens. I must keep a clear head."

That steady breathing at my side. That cavernous breathing. "Don't get excited," I admonished myself. So, by sheer will-power, I worked myself up to the point where I saw the situation. The ticket! I had drawn the lucky ticket! The joke was on me. Up to now, I had always been able to take a joke. That's why I had become such a successful salesman.

I didn't know a word of Egyptian. I could try English.

"Who are you?" I asked in a kind of

gasping way. I really didn't expect a reply.

"Shafra Tatkera Ptah-hotep," came in a fungus-like voice. "If that's too long for you, you may call me Shafra Tatkera, when you're in a hurry. Ptah-hotep is my family name."

I just lay there, too weak to move. The breathing became louder. "I said you may call me Shafra Tatkera for short. Didn't you hear me?"

"Y-yes. I was only—I was only wondering where you learned to speak English."

"To be sure, that's only natural. Well, I don't intend to tell you everything. Even my favorite wife, most precious lotus blossom of all lotus blossoms, Hespa Nekata, never did know more than a hint of all my goings on. You're shivering. Here, I don't need any blankets. The fact is, I've picked up English ever since I left the tombs. We'll skip telling how long a time that is. To tell the truth, I've been attached, more or less intimately, with thirteen individuals, since then. Two of them were women."

The bed was shaking, though I didn't hear any laughing. After a moment, he burst out, "Ha! Ha! Ha! Those tombs! That painted sarcophagus! There's nothing in the world like it. Quite jolly! Speak English, do I? A little French, too. The Russian language was the hardest. But, really, I owe my excellent English to Frederick Rawlins. I spent more time with him than with anyone else. You are acquainted with him, I suppose?"

I said "No," but so faintly that he failed to hear. He leaned over and repeated the question. I didn't want him to do that again.

"No!" I shouted, and, with that, almost passed out.

"Don't be childish. I hardly expected you'd know him. He's an exceptional person. Likes to delve into out-of-the-way places and collect valuable curiosities. He's lousy rich but it hasn't spoiled him. Very kind-hearted, too, or he wouldn't be donating me and all those other choice bits to charity." Again, that dreadful silent laughter. "You do realize, don't you, that it was merely his philanthropic sense that made him part with me? We were together thirty-four congenial months. And now, I'm with you."

I groaned inwardly.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" This time, aloud.

I couldn't keep my teeth from clicking.

"There's no reason to be stand-offish, Mister— What *is* your name? And your business?"

"My name's Anthony Charleston. I travel for the Bickwell-Crowder Company, producers of the Acrecom, the niftiest, most up-to-date, comfort-bringing, accident-reducing, auto gadget in existence. In fact, the Acrecom has reduced auto accidents—"

"Hold on, Charleston, I'm not interested in that line of talk."

If I could have choked him, I would have. Instead, I asked boldly, "Aren't you sleepy, Mr. Shafra Hottep?"

"Shafra Tatkera, I told you. No, I'm not sleepy. Three thousand-seven-hundred-and-eleven years in a carved sarcophagus is some rest, believe me. The truth is, I'm never sleepy."

I drew a breath of despair.

"See here, if you're tired, go ahead and sleep."

"Thanks." I turned over on my side. Sleep. How could I sleep? I was afraid to breathe for fear he'd think I wasn't asleep, and afraid not to breathe for the same reason. If I only could sleep!

The clock on the stand near the bed had a phosphorescent dial. One o'clock. Two o'clock. That thing at my side was restless, too. My eyes kept staring at the clock. By three o'clock, I had become stiff as a board. Four o'clock. I hadn't sup-

posed that there were any roosters in the heart of a metropolis, but there seemed to be. A breath escaped me.

"Hear that?" came a chuckle at my side. "Would you believe it?"

I didn't reply. Heavens, was he telepathic? Was I to have no peace, sleeping or awake? I was so tense, I felt as if, at any moment, I might crack into pieces.

Presently, there was such utter silence and lack of stir, that I believed that Shafra Tatkera himself had fallen asleep, if such a thing were possible.

Four-thirty o'clock. I had a wild idea. I was going to escape. I got up softly.

"Heigh-o, friend Anthony! I hope nothing I've done has disturbed you."

"Oh, no," I said nonchalantly, through dry lips. "I've always liked the morning air. Besides, I like to get an early start—the early bird, you know." I was trying to be jaunty, but I was merely vapid. The bed shook with insulting laughter.

AFTER I was dressed, I opened up my sample-case and arranged papers. The sight of my Acrecoms, usually so inspiring, produced only a dull heaviness in me. What was going to happen to me and to them? I had a premonition that I was facing ruin, both business, and domestic. What of Harriet, my devoted wife, and Jimmy and little Prudy? I drew a deep sigh.

"Excuse me, will you, if I talk to you from the bed? No need for me to get up yet. However, we've got to attend to something. I suppose, naturally, that you're wondering what you're going to do with me. At the start, we don't seem to be particularly attracted to each other. That will change, in time, we hope. Cheer up, Anthony. I'll not talk to you much through the day. I'll just accompany you silently."

I had a touch of nausea, for the moment.

"Do you have your mummy ticket at hand?" As I didn't answer, he repeated, sharply, "Let's see your ticket. It's number 321."

As if I had no will of my own, I took the accursed ticket from my billfold.

"All right," I said. I held it out over the bed. My hand was shaking.

The ticket was snatched from my hand. "It's O. K." Ticket 321 was again in my hand. Now, in spite of all that had occurred up to this moment, I had still been trying to believe that I was under some inexplicable spell of hallucination. Now, after this ticket business, I knew that the mummy's ghost was actually with me.

I made a sickly attempt to be facetious: "Well, where do we go from here? So what?"

"Very well, the first thing for you to do is to go and get my mummy. They won't mind getting rid of it, I fancy. You'll get my mummy and then—"

"And then what?" I interrupted, hoping for deliverance.

"Why then, you and I will be able to settle down to normal life, the routine of business."

"Oh—" I checked a groan. I was praying silently, "O Lord, Lord, how long!" I had a right to pray. And, I might as well say now, that, in the days and weeks that followed, I exercised that privilege to the utmost, but always silently. "Lord, O Lord, help me get rid of this horrible pest." But, I don't wish to anticipate. However, this I will say, Shafra Tatkera was telepathic.

Not to go into detail, in some way or other, I got Shafra Tatkera's visible substance up into my room. Notwithstanding strenuous objections on his part, I managed to pack him into my medium-size sample-case, which I then pushed into the dark end of the closet. Excepting for an ancient, undefinable odor that some people might not even have detected, but which to me, smelt down to the most noxious pit, I and my Acrecoms might, to the ordi-

nary observer, have been occupying the room alone.

Speak of a skeleton in the closet. What is that to a mummy!

I was due to leave the city the next day. I mean, the day after the establishment of Shafra Tatkera into my privacy. Only by the most dogged determination, did I succeed in getting off my monthly report. I had the hardihood, too, to keep several engagements early in the day, to clear up orders that had been hanging fire. Shafra Tatkera went with me everywhere. I smelt him, I heard him, I breathed him. I was convinced that my clients were unaware of his presence. I, however, being all too aware of him, found myself replying to his insinuations, aloud. How could I explain to some client that my sudden imprecations, my hitting out into apparently thin air, were caused by a creature, invisible to him, but disagreeably actual to myself?

That night, when I reached my room —*he* called it *our* room—I was utterly shot to pieces.

I SLEPT without dreaming. I awoke, however, when the city rooster crowed. For a few blissful moments I lay there, not feeling, not thinking. Then, it all came back to me with a shock. The ticket. The mummy in my sample-case. Shafra Tatkera in bed with me. My business, my unmatchable Acrecoms, the niftiest, most up-to-date, comfort-bringing—but I could not think of them now. My darling Harriet, Jimmy and Little Prudy. "O God, get rid of this horrible Shafra Tatkera. Rid me of—"

"Good morning, Anthony!"

I couldn't even pray with, you might say, privacy.

Again, I got up at four-thirty.

"Bright day, isn't it, friend Anthony, to be up and about so early? You're bound to sell your gadgets today."

I wondered. Could this early rising really offset my terrible handicap?

I tried business again that day. This time, I—we—set off at noon. Somehow or other, I couldn't summon courage to go earlier. It might have been all right if I had been able to ignore absolutely Shafra Tatkera's presence. But how could I? He talked to me almost incessantly. When I couldn't restrain myself longer, I answered him. People were beginning to think that I was demented. I saw their expressions. I heard their remarks. I became afraid. I sweated. A little more of this thing and I might find myself in an insane asylum.

The night of this day was like that first one when Shafra Tatkera had intruded himself into my companionship. I couldn't sleep. Would I ever be able to sleep again? Would life ever be sweet and normal again?

"When you become used to me, you'll sleep like a child," came the unasked-for consolation in answer to my thoughts. I noticed that it was only two o'clock.

I couldn't move. I couldn't think. "O—" I couldn't even pray.

"Yes, friend, you'll get as used to me as to an old shoe." He gave a rasping laugh. "Frederick Rawlins became used to me. I believe he found me rather interesting from a scientific point of view. Fine old fellow, he was. You, too, have possibilities of companionship, if you'll only buck up."

Not to become tiresome with detail, I can readily sum up the facts.

I became a hermit in my room at the Palace Hotel. Exercising all kinds of subterfuge, I arranged with the Bickwell-Crowder Acrecom Company for a leave of absence. With even more subterfuge, I sadly laid the stage for an indefinite absence from Harriet and the children. I who had always abhorred deceit, lied consummately. Shafra Tatkera admired my skill in this respect, he said.

And so the days passed. Night, morning, noon, afternoon, night again, morning. I—we went out only for meals and the most insistent errands. If there could be any comfort in such a situation, it was that Shafra Tatkera was really a ghost, invisible, requiring neither food nor clothing. Each time I left my room, I returned to it as to a refuge.

A week passed. Two weeks went by. Three. A month passed by the calendar. I was becoming accustomed to the situation, as a prisoner grows used to his bars. And yet, thank heaven, I remained rebellious.

I kept trying to throw off that insiduous something that was drying me up, and yet that was giving me the feeling of being choked with a stale mustiness. As for the Acrecoms, however, I lost all interest in what I used to think were the niftiest, most up-to-date— Oh, what was the use of bothering with them?

Two months passed. I realized that only by remaining conscious of my intolerable situation, could I hope to save myself. "Lord, Lord, help me get rid of this creature—" Every time that I cried out in my heart, Shafra Tatkera became sulky. He argued with me. He became insulting. I could be thankful for one thing: while he was able to hurl newspapers about the room, he never so much as lifted a heavy object to cudgel me. I am convinced that he was unable to lift anything excepting the lightest weight. Parenthetically, Shafra Tatkera had a passion for newspapers. He read them from the first to the last page.

The days went by, well into the third month. Shafra Tatkera was becoming increasingly annoying. He now kept insisting that I go out on the road again. He kept talking Acrecoms to me. He extolled their virtues, even telling me that they were the niftiest, most up-to-date, comfort-bringing, accident-reducing auto gadgets in existence. I never wanted to hear those words again. "Get out and around, you rabbit. We can swell the sales of Acrecoms for the company so they'll make us president in just a short time. Buck up."

I remained deaf to his arguments and appeals. I would never, as long as I was cursed with him, go out on the road. I wasn't going to risk getting stuck into an asylum.

The fact is, Shafra Tatkera was actually becoming bored with me. It was a refreshing idea. It encouraged me. "I'll get rid of him some way or other," I vowed secretly. "The other thirteen persons found some way of doing it, and so shall I. But, not by way of the road, of that, I'm certain."

Every day, now, and off and on, in the night, Shafra Tatkera took to harping on that one subject: "Get out on the road. Sell your Acrecoms. They're the niftiest, most up-to-date—"

I would clap my hands over my ears. "No! No! I'll not go on the road. Nothing can make me sell Acrecoms."

Such was the situation when we had been together three months, lacking only two and a half days.

IT WAS nearly lunch time. In a few minutes we would be going out to the Elite Café, just around the corner. Shafra Tatkera was quiet, deeply absorbed in the funnies.

Suddenly the fire-siren sounded. Louder it came. Louder, and, with it, came the noise of the engines and trucks. I ran to the window. A crowd was gathering below us. The Palace Hotel was on fire. Already the alarm was sounding through our halls. For all its class, the Palace was an old building. It would burn like tinder. I must escape! But not with the mummy! There wasn't time to grab up anything.

I ran into the corridor.

"My mummy! Save my mummy!" came shrieking into my ear.

I paid no attention. Smoke was seeping up and through the narrow halls. I ran to the elevator. Others sought the same way of escape, but as instantly as we arrived at the shaft we recognized the futility of that means of escape. In a few minutes the elevators would be wells of flame.

Frantically, I started down the stairway, and, all this time, Shafra Tatkera was with me, screaming, "Get my mummy! Save my mummy!" In a frenzy of terror, he waved his funny paper in front of my face. I hurried on, unheeding.

"I say, get it! Get it before it's too late!"

"No! No!" I shouted. We had reached the lobby. It was a thickening mass of smoke. Red tips were showing about the elevator openings.

I was in the street now, amidst the confusion.

Then, from across the street, I stood watching the flames lick up the walls of our wing of The Palace.

"My mummy! My mummy!" I still heard his wailing shriek. Still, the funny paper, now almost in tatters, was beating the air.

"Save it! Oh—"

All at once I felt a deep relief. Our wing of The Palace went down with a roaring crash.

I was free!

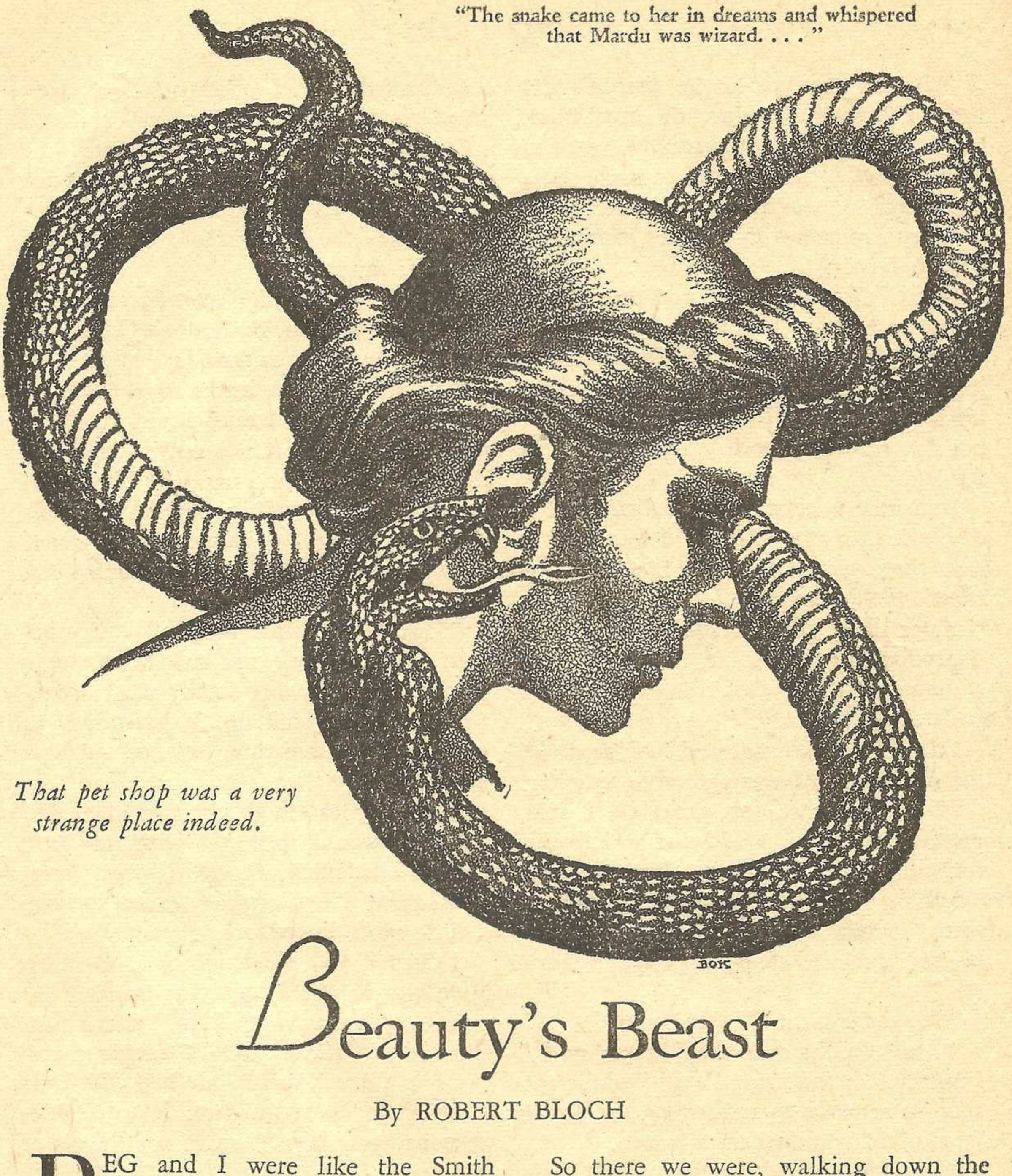
To this day there is no sound that thrills me more than that of a fire-siren. Again, I feel that sudden sense of relief. Believe it or not, just as you will.

Futility

By MARVIN MILLER

Though man aspires to immortality
With stone and mortar, structures that he lifts
Above reclaiming earth and slashing sea,
Will sink to nothingness: the hieroglyphs
On Toltec temples tell perhaps of all
Their builders knew of architecture, and
In lost Lemuria the starfish crawl
Through colonnaded altars in the sand.

Like drunken giants, jealous of their power,
Sluggish waves of oceans toss and roll;
Sublunar thunder teaches man to cower;
Volcanic caverns praise a primal plan
Of That which fashioned carefully the soul,
But moulded mountains mightier than man.



"The snake came to her in dreams and whispered that Mardu was wizard. . . ."

That pet shop was a very strange place indeed.

Beauty's Beast

By ROBERT BLOCH

PEG and I were like the Smith Brothers — only better, because neither of us had beards. We disagreed so perfectly that we made an irresistible combination. Of course, Peg always permitted me to be boss, provided I did what she told me. And when she invited me to dinner at Leonard Merril's, whom I detest, I naturally argued and agreed.

So there we were, walking down the street because Peg was athletic and I preferred a taxi. I was walking fast and Peg was dawdling, so she spotted the place first.

"Look at the cute puppy!" she exclaimed. My eyes wandered quickly to surrounding lamp-posts.

"No—over there, in the window."

Peg dragged me before the glass pane

of what I perceived to be Mardu's Pet Shop. Of course there was the usual black and white pup crouching wobbly-legged in the sawdust, and Peg began to make those disgusting noises women always make when confronted with puppies, babies, or Tyrone Power.

Now I don't like dogs, and that is putting it mildly. If I were perishing in the snow of the Alps and a St. Bernard came running up with a bottle of brandy under his neck I might fall on him in gratitude—but I'm sure the pooch would bite me in the leg.

Somehow I never could believe that a dog was man's best friend; I know of at least three people who are higher in my affections than a canine.

After Peg stopped squealing at this dopey-looking little mutt, I told her this, adding that if we didn't step on it we'd be late for the party.

"Ooh, let's go inside and look around," she countered. Always agreeable, was Peg.

"I do not care for animals," I said, gently. "In fact I would not go into this foul-smelling joint to see King Kong in a bathing suit. I despise anteaters, dingos, emus, pandas, yaks, aardvaarks, hartebeestes, ocelots, steinbok, dúgongs, and elk."

"My uncle is an Elk," said Peg.

"And you, my dear, are a horses' neck," I murmured; following Peggy into the pet-shop in response to a charming tug on the lapel which knocked off a button.

"I simply must have that puppy," she prattled. "He's so cute, and I could buy him a little red blanket with his name on it, and you could walk him around the block every night—"

Yes, and I could drop dead too, sister, only it's bad for my health. So was the pet-shop. To be brutally frank, it smelled in there.

"Come on, Peg, we haven't got much time," I said, glancing around the dingy, cage-lined walls in a sudden attack of combined *claustro*—and *zoophobia.*

"Can I do anything for you, sir?"

"Yes, you can open a window and air out this joint. Only you look as though you came from the Black Hole of Calcutta yourself, mister."

He did. The tall, thin man who rounded the counter was obviously not a Caucasian. He had the dark, pointed face of an East Indian, and his voice held a nasal twang.

In all frankness, I must admit he didn't impress me then. It was only afterwards, thinking of it, that I realized his movements were those of a panther; that in his pet shop he was a jungle beast. Quiet, quick, supple, ember-eyed, he confronted me.

"That puppy in the window—" Peg began. The tall, dark man shot her a single glance. I don't know exactly what it conveyed, but Peg shut up. I determined to get him alone sometime and find out how he did it.

Then the lean-faced one turned to me.

"You would perhaps wish to look around a little first. I have many pets here, and I think the young lady could find one a little more interesting. Perhaps?"

I can tell you what kind of a glance he gave *me.* It was a look that made it impossible for me to say "No." I can't explain that. Maybe Dale Carnegie could, but I've a hunch this Hindu had a lot Dale Carnegie never dreamed of. It wasn't sales personality he turned on, it was the air of command.

"Would you show us?" I heard myself saying.

"But that puppy—" Peg wailed.

"This way." I nudged Peg to follow the dark shop-owner. I was doing a little rationalization on my part. I didn't want Peggy to get that puppy; I didn't want to put on its ittsy-bittsy red blanket and take ums out for a nice walk around the block every night. Blazes no! If she could be

steered into getting a parrot, or goldfish, or even a pet gorilla it was okay by me. But I had no intention of spending my evenings gazing at the trees. So what if this fellow was domineering?

We walked between the long lines of cages. I stared curiously. There were dogs, lots and lots of dogs. Chinese Chows, Toys, Pekes; exotic little creatures with curiously bright eyes. That was funny. No common western breeds.

"Imported?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. All imported. I bring them from the East. Fine blood. Some of the best, sir."

CAGES of birds; gilded, ornamental cages with curiously-designed bars, teakwood perches of oriental patterns. They held canaries with bodies like golden, living notes; finches and nightingales, scarlet humming-birds with peacock purple crowns. And in larger grilled prisons were blood-beaked macaws, white cockatoos, heavy-crested parrots with blinking eyes.

"Quite a collection," I said.

"From all over the world," answered the Hindu, softly. "From all over the world they come." But he didn't stop to expound further, didn't offer to show us anything. We passed a crystalline counter of fishbowls, passed the insane eyes of a million wriggling exotics. And then Peg grabbed me in the gloom and I felt her body trembling against mine.

"Snakes!" she shuddered, in a voice hard with loathing.

From their pits the vipers swayed, the cobras crawled, undulating in the evil glory of their poisonous beauty. Eyes bright as Lucifer blazed upwards in the darkness, and the air was filled with a sluggish rustling that sounded against my spine in little cold notes of horripilation.

"Beautiful, are they not?" murmured our guide. "In my country they worship them. I had great trouble procuring these."

"Get them yourself?" I asked, merely to hear the sound of my own voice.

"I have secured everything in the shop —personally," answered the tall man.

"You mean you captured all these things? Sort of a Frank Buck, aren't you?"

"I bring them back alive."

Peg giggled feebly as I squeezed her arm and we resumed our inspection. A moment later she grabbed me in the shadows with a low scream.

"Here, now, don't get so affectionate," I cautioned. "This is no place for—"

"Ooooh! Rats, take them away!"

"Merely white mice," came the soft voice at my side. "From Burma.

"Sacred in the temples, you understand," continued our mentor. "Like that peacock over there." He gestured in the darkness. "In fact, I might mention that all the animals in this shop are sacred to Eastern mythology. The snakes, of course, and the Chows in China; the fish are worshipped in Java and the Celebes, and the various birds in Borneo and the Malay States. But I was going to show you the monkeys."

"Why?"

"I am sure the young lady here will be more satisfied with a monkey. Such as—this one."

And he stopped before a row of cages at the back of the shop. Stooping, he prodded the bars of a shadow-shielded crate. "Hanuman," he whispered. "Hanuman."

"What?"

"I call him Hanuman. After the sacred monkey-god of India," came the voice. "A temple monkey; tame, intelligent, and very hard to procure."

I began to wonder whether this Mardu, as his sign proclaimed him, was some kind of nut. Sacred animals! I spotted a tortoise, and a Siamese cat. Half-expected a crocodile and a white elephant.

"Hanuman," called the Hindu. "Show thyself."

I stood there in the shadows, Peg at my side, and suddenly something clicked. I knew there was a screwy feeling in the air, and now I placed my finger on it.

It was too quiet. Utterly still. When you go into a pet shop the dogs bark, the parrots squawk, the birds screech, the monkeys chatter. And here it was still. The animals watched us as we passed, but did not move. We had walked down a row of glittering eyes in the darkness, and there wasn't a sound. Something wrong.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Is it bedtime in this menagerie?"

"No." The Hindu smiled. "But my pets are all very well-trained.

"Let me assure you, sir, of that. They are well-trained animals. Temple beasts are intelligent; they are bred with human backgrounds almost in their blood. And I have personally instructed every one. I know you will be satisfied with—ah, Hanuman. Show thyself to the lady, here. She might want to buy thee, little friend."

THE monkey appeared suddenly, head pressed against the bars. And Peg stooped down, looked into the monkey's eyes. Very quiet was the monkey, and its bright little orbs were timid, but they rested on Peg's face in mute appeal. Animal magnetism, or something—but silly as it sounds, the little creature had that trusting, ingratiating sort of gaze that nauseated me and went over with a bang where Peg was concerned.

"That is the way," the Hindu whispered. "Show that you like the lady, that you trust the lady. She wants to buy you. She wants you. Don't you, lady?"

The drone of his voice in darkness was almost hypnotic, and Peg stared into the beady little eyes. Auto-suggestion.

"I want him!" Peg stood up. It wasn't "Isn't he cute?" or "What an adorable little fellow!" It was "I want him!"

"I thought he would be suited to you when I saw you," said the Hindu. "Yes, perfectly suited. You are in complete accord."

"How much?" I barked.

"To the lady? Ten dollars. A small sum, but they are so perfectly attuned, so beautifully matched that—"

"She isn't going to marry the monkey," I interrupted. "Here's your ten. Give us the monk and let's get going."

"It is done." He stooped, opened the door of the cage. The monkey just crouched there. And then Mardu stooped and picked him up in slim, almond hands, and held him for a moment against his face. His long fingers stroked the beast's fur in a hypnotically soothing caress. And the Hindu whispered softly, unintelligibly, in a strange tongue. The monkey seemed to nod, and it struck me so funny I let out a guffaw; whereupon Peg kicked me in the shins.

Ah. Here you are. Treat Hanuman well; I have told him much of you. And do not forget Mardu.

Peg took the monkey on her shoulder and we walked down the aisle of the shop, the smiling Hindu behind us.

Do not forget—"

Peg smiled and the monkey made that ridiculous nodding gesture. I stood on the sidewalk and laughed.

"All right, Peggy. Where do we buy the organ?"

"He's wonderful. I'm going to take him to the party."

"To Leonard Merril's?"

"Why not?"

"Well, I admit he's an improvement over the average run of Leonard's guests, but don't you think that—"

We walked down the street. The monkey clung to Peg silently and its eyes never left her face.

"Wasn't that the queerest place?'

"That's what I'm thinking,' I answered. A mighty queer place."

"And that Mardu—he has such an air about him."

"So has the place. Whew!"

"Oh, don't talk that way. Honestly, I'll bet he's a wonderful man. The way he handled those animals. Like some old Brahmin priest or something. Don't the Hindus believe that animals have human souls? Reincarnation, isn't it?"

"I don't know, I don't like flowers. Hurry up and drag that soulful baboon of yours to dinner."

What Peg had said started me thinking. It was a queer place, and the Hindu was a strange man. I determined to go back there and ask a few questions. Sometimes there's a story behind such things; wouldn't hurt to find out. If Mardu were a renegade holy man, now, who collected sacred animals and sold them to those he thought were psychically attuned to the spirit of the beast— Oh, the devil with it. But he had steered Peg off the puppy, and almost hypnotized her into buying the monkey. I wondered what he would have picked out for me. I hoped it would be a chicken, fried. I was hungry.

"Here we are, Peg. Upstairs quickly or I'll shove Hanuman here between two slices of rye bread and eat out on the steps."

"Nasty!" Peg faced me. "Thanks for buying me the monkey, you swine." She put her arms around me and her face very close so that I stood on the brink of eternity as we kissed. Sometimes Peg could be very nice that way; so sweet and cuddly that I'd forget she used red nail polish. Right now she turned my heart into a creampuff, and then I drew away and I saw the monkey watching me with glittering little eyes and it clawed at Peg, pulling her face around.

"Well look who's jealous," Peg giggled. "You've got a new rival."

"He needs a shave," I grumbled.

But I noticed that Peg didn't look at me any more, just stared at the monkey as we went up the stairs and knocked on Leonard Merril's door.

Inside, everybody stared at the monkey, too.

All during dinner they stared, and Peg told her story, and I just ate. The monkey rested very quietly on Peg's lap, and looked up at her whenever she gave too much attention to one of the other guests. It tugged at her shoulder in the irresistibly human gesture of a small child, and it wasn't long before everyone noticed it and began making cracks about jealousy, and a few off-color comments that might have made me burn if they weren't so damnably funny and appropriate.

"What you going to call it?" asked Leonard Merril, as we went into the living room.

"I don't know," Peg mused.

"Just plain Mr. X will do," I growled. "That's the best way of referring to the third member of a romantic triangle."

"Mr. X it is, then."

"Beauty and the Beast," said Merril. "Where'd you say you got it, Peg?"

"A place called *Mardu's* down on Flynn Street. I told you about this funny Hindu that runs it—"

"Mardu's?" It was Mrs. Merril who interrupted. "Why, that's where Lillian got Toby."

"What Toby?"

"That—that snake." Mrs. Merril shuddered. "A fine sister I've got. I can't understand it; she's always hated reptiles, and yet only about a week ago she came home with a nasty little cobra she keeps in a wire cage and feeds live mice to—ugh!"

"Really?"

"It's the truth. And now that you mention it, she got it at *Mardu's*. She told me she passed there and happened to notice a puppy in the window, but this fellow that runs the shop started talking to her and she—"

I STOPPED listening. I knew the rest. So she went in to buy a puppy and came out with a snake. Like Lou Holtz's story about Lapidus going to the race-track, taking bad advice and betting on the wrong horse; listening to the same fellow again and betting on the wrong horse again until he loses all his money; deciding to spend his last dime for a bag of peanuts only to buy popcorn instead on the advice of this same stranger. So the puppy in the window was a decoy, and Mardu sold his customers what he felt was best. All right —but why?

"You know Lillian is absolutely devoted to the horrid thing?" Mrs. Merril was in full conversational cry. "Why, the kiddies are beginning to complain that she neglects them to spend all her time with that nasty monster. And she goes to *Mardu's* every day; he's supposed to be teaching her Hindu philosophy. One would think that the man had hypnotized her. I declare, if I didn't know my own sister better than that I'd be scandalized!"

Looking suddenly at Peg, I caught her staring at the monkey. And right then and there I had the hunch—the hunch that was cold along my neck.

"Let's go," I whispered. "Let's pick up Mr. X and get out of here."

Peg shrugged and rose as I made my excuses. We departed. I didn't want Peg to hear any more about Lillian and her pet. It would be too easy—first thing I knew Peggy would be dropping in at the Hindu's place, and hearing some "philosophy" and I had just one strong notion that I didn't want this to happen.

We walked home very quietly. I was silent, worried by something I couldn't quite shape into thought. As for Peg, she was crooning at the monkey. It clung to her, clung to her; I wondered if it would leave her when she went to bed. Its paws sunk into her shoulder and it clung like a little black leech, like an incubus. Its eyes glittered in the moonlight. What had the Hindu whispered to it when he took it from its cage?

Oh, that was nonsense! But it wasn't nonsense when Peg ignored me in favor of the dizzy orang-utang, and it wasn't nonsense as I kissed her good-night to feel those tiny paws clawing at my hair, pulling my head away from hers. No, that wasn't nonsense.

I went to bed with the grim determination of seeing *Mardu* again the next day. There were some things I had to find out. No need of letting my imagination run riot, but still I intended to interview my Hindu friend and get matters straight.

I awoke next morning as the phone rang. It wasn't Peg. It was Sullivan, my agent, and he bawled out his orders in a peremptory voice. An hour later I was on the train, and for a week I was much too deep in work to think much about Hindus, animal trainers, or pet monkeys with a mother fixation.

But I came back, and I hadn't changed my shoes before the phone tinkled, and Peg's voice did a ditto. No, it didn't tinkle this time. She sounded grave.

"Hello, just get in?"

"No, darling. No, how are you. No, when can I see you." And she sounded upset.

"What's happened, Peg?"

"Lillian's dead."

"Who?"

"Lillian. Mrs. Merrils' sister. You remember, the one that bought the snake from Mardu. Oh, it's just awful—"

"Be right over." I hung up, broke the lace in excitement as I changed shoes, and dashed.

I don't know what I expected to find at Peg's place, or what I expected to hear. Probably Peg sprawled out, strangled by the monkey; with a wild note revealing that Lillian had been bitten by her snake, and that Mardu was a Hindu murder mas-

ter who sold killer beasts to his victims. Something like that made my heart thunder as I ran upstairs and knocked on Peg's door.

But there stood Peg, cool and slim. She was all right, then. But the monkey was perched on her shoulder—

Its beady little eyes were stabbing at me, but I could only see the figure of the girl.

"Let's have it," I said. "Let's have it straight."

"Nothing's the matter with me," Peg answered. "It's Lillian. And even that isn't so bad. I guess I was a little hysterical when I called you; it came so suddenly. I just heard today."

WE SANK side by side on the sofa, and that damned monkey was grinning on her shoulder, like some eavesdropper. She didn't seem to mind, or even to notice its presence; but every once in a while her hand rose unconsciously to caress the simian. She caressed it the way Mardu had caressed it and its eyes shone.

"It sounded so funny, darling. Merril called me. It happened last night; heart attack or something. She was in the studio, playing to Toby."

"Toby?"

"That snake she bought. Mardu had given her a little silver flageolet like snake-charmers use. She was playing it when she keeled over." Peg paused. "That's all there was to it. Leonard saw it happen; the doctor came and certified it."

"Go on."

"Why, that's all."

"Oh no it isn't. Don't try and fool me, Peg. Out with it."

Peggy bit her lip, then plunged ahead hurriedly. "Oh, nothing else matters much, except for the funny thing that happened today. Mardu showed up at Merril's house and took the snake."

"What?"

"This morning. He came to the door and asked for his snake. Said that if the lady was dead she wouldn't need it any more and he would like to buy it back."

"Did he get it?"

"Merril almost threw it at him. He went away then." Peg sat staring, one hand caressing the monkey on her shoulder. "But that's what upset me so at first. You see, Mardu didn't ask if Mrs. Merril had died. he *knew* she was dead before he came."

"Peg."

"Yes."

"Have you been to Mardu's since that night? Look at me—have you?"

"I—"

"Thought so! Now what's all this? Why did you go?"

"I had to."

"Had to?"

"To find out about the dreams. I haven't told you that, have I? That I've been dreaming of Hanuman?"

"I thought the monkey's name was Mr. X?"

"No. His name is Hanuman. That's what Mardu tells me. I must call him Hanuman."

The look in her eyes, the *vacant* look that was not Peg, unnerved me. I shook her shoulders, none too gently. "Come on, now; those dreams!"

"All right. They started that first night. I put Hanuman in the kitchen and went to bed. I wasn't conscious of falling asleep, and the first thing I knew Hanuman was in the room, next to my bed. He hopped up to my pillow and snuggled next to me, and began to talk. Not chatter, but talk. At first it was all a drone, then I could make out words, and then I recognized the voice. It was like Mardu's—soft, whispery. He was telling me things; things I could *feel* rather than understand. He talked for a long time, but I wasn't frightened. Then I seemed to wake up. It had all been so real I half expected to find the monkey

lying next to me, but of course it wasn't there. I knew then that I'd been dreaming. Funny though, I couldn't remember those important things Hanuman had said to me. I went out to the kitchen and there he was. It may sound kind of foolish, but I was all worked up and in a daze, and I began to speak to the brute. Of course he just blinked at me. So I went back to bed. The next day you left and I went to Mardu's."

"Go on."

"I told him. He just smiled, and asked me if I remember what Hanuman had said, and when I answered no, he laughed and asked me to sit down. I did, and he explained that I must have been unconsciously hypnotized. That was the funniest thing, because you know I'd been thinking so myself. Yes, the night we bought Hanuman in the dark, Mardu's voice had influenced me. By association — Mardu and the monkey—it had carried over into my subconscious in sleep. Peculiar, wasn't it?"

"Very," I said, curtly.

"Well, this Mardu is really quite a person. He found out I was interested in psychology, and he began to tell me what the Hindus have learned of the subject; how the Brahmin holy men can control the mind, and influence others. He studied in some temple or other himself at one time; I believe it was a temple of Yama, he said, and what he found out about animals in particular was of great help to him in his work. He told me how trappers can hypnotize animals, and how snakes are charmed, and how sometimes in the temples the priests teach certain animals to actually hypnotize human beings!"

"What's that?"

"Oh, it's only a sort of legend in the East; they think that snakes hypnotize birds, and that sometimes the animals can learn that power. It's all mixed up with a lot of other things he taught me, about the theory of reincarnation. You know I said something like that when we first met him; that he might be inteersted in reincarnation. Funny that he is. He believes absolutely that men go through all kinds of incarnations on earth; starting out as the lowest insects and gradually, life after life, evolving into human form. If a life is good, the soul is rewarded by ascending to a higher form in the next existence; if a life is bad, the soul sinks to a lower animal state. That's one of the fundamental principles of their religion, you know.

"Mardu talked about how all religions believe that gods once walked the earth in the shape of beasts; the Egyptians and the Greeks and the Hindus, of course. He told me about lycanthropy as a universal superstition—oh, thousands of things! He's quite an educated man. Well, in the end he had me quite calmed down; warned me not to worry about any more dreams, and gave me this."

Peg pulled it from her blouse—the tiny silver pipe with the worn scroll design in the metal. "He said I should play the pipes to Hanuman every night before I went to sleep; that it would show my mastery of the beast and thus reassure my own subconscious and keep me from dreaming. So I have. And then—I heard about Lillian."

I gave her a long look. What I saw didn't satisfy me yet.

"All of it," I whispered. "Come on, all of it. You went back to Mardu's again, didn't you? And your dreams didn't stop, did they? And before Lillian died you saw her and she told you—"

"That Mardu was a wizard and that the little silver pipe was a token of his power, and that the snake came to her in dreams and whispered, and she was afraid of—"

PEG blurted it out as though she couldn't stop. But *it* stopped her. Crawling up to her mouth its tiny paws raked her lips. And Peg fainted.

I grabbed at the furry little monstrosity, but it chittered and leapt to the floor. Then I was chafing Peg's wrists and whispering her name, kissing away the bright trickle of blood from her lips. She sat up and clung to me for a long, shuddering moment, and then she got control of herself.

"See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil," she said, in a voice with a ghost of amusement. "The three monkeys. Well, indeed."

"Where's that damned pipe?" I demanded. "I'm going to smash it. And then I'm going down and smash Mardu. Fakir, holy man, medicine man, magician—whatever he is!"

"It's raining," said Peg. She was staring out the window. The drops thundered down. "The pipe? Why—Hanuman has it." Indeed, the monkey, now perching on the mantel, clutched the silver pipe to its bosom.

I went for that monkey. I went for him for half an hour, in the midst of the most torrential rainstorm I've ever seen. The lights went out, and I stumbled after the elusive beast in the dark. Then Peg got frightened and began to cry, and I comforted her. Chasing an inhuman intelligence in pitch-blackness isn't a pleasant thing, and I'd rather not talk about it. But the way that diabolical little simian eluded me was uncanny. At the end of the half hour I was nearly as hysterical as Peggy, and quite willing to believe her story. Mardu hadn't hypnotized me, but I knew.

I knew as I took Peg in my arms, there in the rainswept darkness, and I understood her murmurings.

"You know what Lillian was afraid of, don't you? And why Mardu knew she died, and wanted that snake back— You know why he keeps those pets now, and why they are so quiet, and why he only gives certain ones to certain people? You know what he means by reincarnation, and animals that can hypnotize, just as music can. Little silver pipes. You know what the dreams mean, and why every night they get stronger and stronger and Mardu calls me and pulls me out of myself into—"

"Don't be silly," I said, but I didn't believe she was silly. And somewhere in the dark room was the monkey. I could almost feel it grin.

"But why?" I said aloud. "You see, dear, it isn't reasonable. If it's all a trap to do—what you're hinting—Mardu must have some purpose behind it all. He hasn't, so your notion is absurd."

Only inside my head it wasn't absurd. I'd figured it out. Peggy had said he was a priest of Yama. Yama is the god of Death and Hell. Mardu was the Hindu equivalent of a devil worshipper. Now a devil worshipper has one aim; to degrade God and His works, to pull men's souls to Satan. A Hindu devoted to Yama and working for the devil, would degrade others. If he believed in reincarnation, used hypnotic powers, he would try to degrade others by dragging them back, lowering them on the reincarnative past by putting their human souls into—

But no. This was the Twentieth Century. Snakes and monkeys, even temple snakes and monkeys, cannot hypnotize human beings, cannot whisper in dreams, cannot pull a human soul out of its body and —oh, this was the Twentieth Century—

Or it was a mad world of thunder and lightning and skirling rain. I went to the window. The streets swirled in water. It was rising from the river. Flood-level or over.

Peg whispered behind me very softly.

"I went there today. I took a look at the snake Mardu had given Lillian. He tried to hide it, but it was lying there in a box. When it saw me it opened its eyes and I knew, and then I screamed and ran out before he could stop me. But I knew."

"Nonsense," I said, but the thunder drowned it out.

"He must be stopped before he does what I know he'll do. That monkey—the next time I fall asleep it will whisper again and pull me out and I can't fight any longer, I can't!"

"I'm going to Mardu's now," I said.

"In this storm? The river might—"

"Take a chance. Got to. You stay here. Get hold of that monkey—he's hiding somewhere here. And beat its brains out. Yes, kill it! Then wait for me. I'll be back."

She clung to me in the darkness, and I could hear the rain, and her heartbeat, and above that a faint, evil rustling as the unseen simian scampered grinning round the room.

"Be careful," Peg whispered.

I SLAMMED the door and raced through water-swept streets. The pools rose above my ankles, but I made my apartment. I ran in, opened my desk-drawer, and pulled out the revolver lying there.

Then the phone rang. I knew right away who it was. Peg. She'd dissuade me. Well, let her—

"Hello."

The phone just buzzed. I held the receiver close. Brrrrrrr. And then, a chattering. A chattering. Monkey-chattering.

I never stopped to hang up. In a moment I was out on the swirling streets, running madly with the revolver in my hand. I banged on Peg's door, then forced it with my shoulder.

Blackness within, but I had matches. Peg lay there on the floor, the little silver flageolet in her hand. She hadn't fainted.

It must have come to her suddenly in the darkness; dozing off, then the drone of monkey-voice, Mardu's voice, compelling her to play. And in that playing, a hypnotic linkage took place.

But that was insane. She'd had a shock, heart attack. That devilish little beast had done it. Where was it?

Tugging at my ankle. I looked down, striking a second match. The monkey was at my side. The monkey that always hated me. It was tugging at my leg, whining, and it looked upwards with a gaze so startlingly familiar that my own heart skipped a beat.

"Devil," I muttered, and struck out. It avoided the blow, but made no move to scurry away. It just looked up, patiently, and then it whined, whimpered and pointed. First at the body, then at its own chest. And it tugged my leg. It led me over to the phone, indicated the mouthpiece.

Sure. Peg had suffered a heart attack, and then she had phoned me and chattered like a monkey.

But it had to be that way. This other was too much.

And still the monkey whined, and when I picked it up it tugged at my shoulders and pointed at the door.

All right. I was crazy. I was going to be guided by a monkey. I was going out on the dark, flooded streets, down to the river-front where the water was rising; all at the instigation of a pet monkey.

Then I looked at the white body of Peg on the floor and I looked at the monkey and I made my decision.

"Come on," I said.

I stopped thinking right there. The streets were knee-deep in water. Through thunder and storm-streaked flashes of fury I waded, a wet-furred monkey chattering on my shoulder. Crashing through flooded darkness, down towards the river, down to the dark shop on Flynn Street to avenge something my sanity wouldn't let me believe.

The shop was a blur of darkness in a sea of ink. The monkey chattered shrilly, urging me forward through the circling waters. I rattled the door as thunder boomed, then drew my revolver.

The monkey screeched and left my

shoulders. It climbed the lintel. And then the wet brown form wriggled upwards through the transom, dropped inside the shop. A moment later the door opened, and a flood of water drenched the floor as I swept inside.

It was silent. Even in the storm the animals did not cry out, but a thousand eyes burned through the darkness. The monkey scampered before me, leading me.

A thousand eyes watched our progress. A thousand— How many of them *were* animals? Mardu had travelled all over the world, he said. In how many cities had he opened a pet-shop, sold his beasts, and had them *returned?* How many of these strangely silent animals had come back? I must avenge Lillian, and Peg, and how many others?

We were almost at the end of the shop when the simian paused before me. It crouched next to a low, box-like cage with a netting front. It chattered. And answering through the blackness came a hiss.

Monkeys hate snakes. But Lillian had a snake—

The beast fumbled at the netting. And then something moved, something wriggled across the floor ahead of me. There was hissing and chattering. I tiptoed forward and we came to the door. Then the monkey tugged at my leg, looked up with those bright eyes I knew too well. I pushed open the door, just a crack.

A single candle burned in the room within. Mardu was lying on a cot in the small back room. Whether he slept or whether his attitude was one of Yogi-like repose I cannot say. He was motionless as though in a trance. I raised my revolver, but the monkey squealed softly.

I stood there in the doorway as surging waters rocked the timbers of the shop; stood there as the monkey and serpent crept through the small opening, scurried across the floor. I could not move, I could only stare. The waters groaned against the house, and I felt a swaying. I knew it was time to be getting out, the river was loose. But I couldn't move. I could only watch the grotesque brown figure moving across the floor to Mardu's cot.

The sleeping face, the brown, impassive face of Mardu, suddenly quickened with animation. The Hindu opened his eyes, and it was as though all hell yawned within their lambent depths.

"You here?" he whispered, staring at the creeping monkey before him. "But this must not be. Tonight was the night —yes—I directed that. But I meant to call tomorrow for you. You would not come of your own free will—or would you?"

The monkey stared. And then I understood. It was stalling for time. For, unobserved, up the side of the cot, the snake was crawling.

Thunder sounded, the waters crashed against the timbers, and still I watched through the crack of the doorway as the Hindu gazed down at the monkey, his face a mask of perplexity. Suddenly his tone, his word-choice altered.

"Ah! Can it be that I have failed? Hast thou failed, Hanuman? Did I not direct thee, animate thy purpose in dreams? Didst thou not take the woman's psyche and incarnate—"

I watched the snake, wriggling unnoticed at the Hindu's side. It lashed upwards. Again the thunder blared, but Mardu's scream of terror drowned out the very voice of Nature. The Hindu sat bolt upright as a green band of horror tightened against his throat. His hands tore at the surging coils, his eyes bulged.

And then the monkey raced forward, chattering in triumph. Its tiny claws raked Mardu's chest, its teeth sank again and again near the heart. The snake tightened its embrace, encircling Mardu's brown throat with a jade necklace of death.

A crash, the tinkle of glass, and the sudden scream of animal terror sounded from

the shop without. The place was flooding. And yet I could only stare at the strangling Hindu, stare at vengeance.

The monkey leaped from the brown body to my waist, chattering wildly.

Its paw pointed toward the door. It tugged my shoulder. I nodded. I gestured toward it, but it shook its head. For an awful instant our eyes met again, and then I plunged away. From behind me I heard a gurgling moan, but I did not look back.

I FOUGHT my way through the shop as water rose. Dying animals in cages yelped beneath the oncoming torrent soon to rise; floating crates blocked my path and the water surged ponderously in menacing waves, but I fought through. The street was waist-deep, and as I cleared the doorway the shaking shop began to sag in the blackness. Cursing and gasping, I staggered through grinning chaos.

Wet to the skin, thunder-deafened and lightning-blinded, I went on. There were no thoughts left to think, no emotions left to feel. There was only an urge that drove me forward. The shop was gone, Mardu was gone, and Peg—

Why, I was back at the apartment, walking the steps to her flat. How long had I struggled? What unreasoning instinct had brought me here? The forced door swung open on darkness. I lurched in.

"Peg!"

She was lying limply on the sofa, but a single candle gleamed, and as I rushed forward she sat up, smiling weakly.

"Darling, I must have fainted when you left, but the monkey's gone and I feel—all right. What happened?"

"Don't you *know?*"

"Of course not. How could I? I had a spell, or something."

"But I thought—"

"Tell me."

I told her, whispering within the circle of her arms. She smiled and nodded, and it was good to see her smile and nod. But I kept wondering. Hadn't it happened, then? Was the monkey just a monkey after all? Had a beast led me to that shop and exacted vengeance? It must have been so, because Peg was here. Or else—when Mardu died Peg had been released. Perhaps she hadn't *changed* long enough for the astral connection to become permanent. Perhaps there was a secondary spell which Mardu performed when the animal was returned. Or I might have imagined the whole thing. Yet the revolver in my hand disproved that. And the absence of the monkey backed it up.

I told Peg the story straight, though, and then added my doubts. "Are you sure?" I said. "You didn't know, didn't feel?"

Peg smiled.

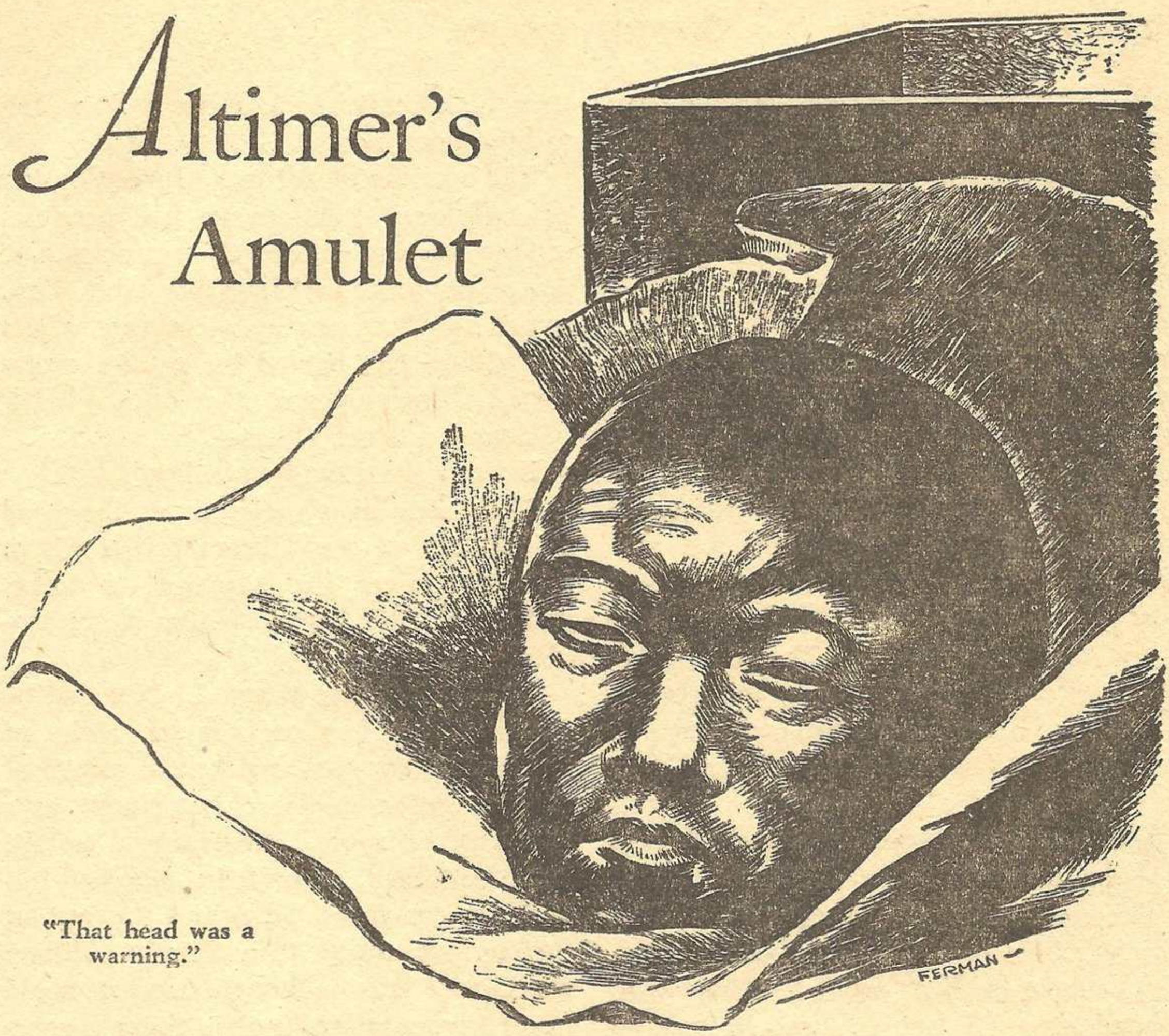
"You must have been imagining things," she said. "That's the trouble with you, darling, you have such a perfectly silly imagination. Of course, your idea that I was a monkey and led you to Mardu's is cockeyed."

"Peg," I said. "Either you're a very brave girl in trying to spare me those memories, or you're just a stubborn, sweet damn fool. Now which is it?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" said Peg. And she gave me a look. It was quite a knowing look—she grinned like a monkey, and I remembered *another* look that a monkey had given me, and I had terrible doubts. Then Peg kissed me and I didn't bother about doubts any more.

There would be plenty of time for arguing later. Peg and I always argued anyway. But from now on, I determined, there would be only one argument I'd stand for with Peggy—whether it would be a boy or a girl. And even then, I hoped we might reach a compromise in time.

Altimer's Amulet



"That head was a warning."

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

Tibet isn't particularly gentle when it comes to affairs of vengeance.

THE blinds in the house on Park Lane went down, a servant appeared to sweep before the imposing dwelling secure in its little grove of trees in London's heart, and the bobby observed that Brooks Altimer would be coming home again. Indeed he was, with all the customary fanfare attending an explorer of his prominence. Respectful notices appeared in the press, hints were gravely made about his latest discoveries, and humor had it that this time, without fail, Brooks Altimer would be knighted by his king.

"This time," said Brooks Altimer to a small group around his table that evening, "I have really brought back something worth while." He paused to appreciate to the full the awed silence and respectful waiting that greeted his words, his big blue eyes shining with pride, his thick-lipped mouth curved in a slight, almost disdainful smile. "Yes, I've done it; I've brought back an amulet from one of the forbidden shrines of Tibet. I believe you said I wouldn't be able to accomplish it, didn't you, Norcross?"

Norcross leaned his tall body across the table and looked at the thing held carelessly in Altimer's hand. "I believe I did," he said. "My apology. I was wrong." He fixed his sharp eyes on Altimer. "But

how did you accomplish it? It must have been difficult—very difficult."

Altimer brushed aside the suggestion of difficulty with the nonchalance of a prima donna waving away her fiftieth bouquet for the evening. "I suppose difficulty is a relative term," he said casually. "I had a little, yes. But I wouldn't have thought of it, if you hadn't mentioned it. Unpleasantness, rather. I managed to bribe one of the priests and everything was made easy for me, but unfortunately some old fanatic came rushing out at me just as I took the amulet from the shrine. I was forced to deal harshly with him lest he make an outcry, and had the misfortune to cut off both his hands with the weapon I carried. I was in disguise, of course."

"He wasn't another priest, then?"

ALTIMER shrugged. "I doubt it, though he did come from behind the shrine."

Norcross grimaced. "Both hands! Ugh! Blighter bled to death, I suppose."

"I supose he did," replied Altimer with equanimity. "I lost no time in making my escape."

"With many maledictions upon you, no doubt," said another member of the party.

Altimer laughed. "Oh, yes—there are always curses and such; one expects them." He clapped his hands. "Now, then—to port, gentlemen."

Altimer's amulet was duly photographed, pictures appeared in the press, Altimer's exploit was lauded and Altimer was praised so fulsomely that he would have been inflated to the limit had he not already been in that state for several years prior to his accession of the amulet. His cup was almost full; one of the London society columnists linked his name with that of a very prominent young woman and stated that "a Certain Person had spoken highly of Altimer's amulet during tea in Buckingham Palace Gardens."

For ten days Altimer rode very high; then he came back to earth with a disturbing jar.

The occasion of Altimer's forgetting the pride-making attentions he had been receiving was the delivery of a package. It was a very small package from Tibet. Consumed by that impetuous curiosity which had always lain behind his great explorations, Altimer opened it at once. What he found was not pleasant.

It was a shrunken human head.

Close scrutiny revealed it as the head of that one of the Tibetan priests whom Brooks Altimer had managed to bribe, making possible his acquisition of the amulet.

He was properly alarmed. Not that he put any faith in those strange stories of ancient powers possessed by the priests of the old shrine in Tibet, but simply as a matter of principle. He arranged to take lunch with Sir Linden Fledra, who had forgotten more about Tibet and the rest of the ancient world than Brooks Altimer would ever know—though Altimer would never have admitted such a thing even to himself. Even now, he sought advice only, and over the table casually told Sir Linden about his amulet.

"FILCHED it, eh?" said Fledra indelicately, his sharp old eyes fixed unwaveringly upon him.

"You put it rather directly," protested Altimer mildly.

"Only way to put it," retorted Fledra shortly. "And I'll put it to you that you'd better get it back just as soon as possible. That head was as distinct a warning as you could have been given. What do you expect them to do? Serve you with formal notice?"

"I have no intention of restoring the amulet," said Altimer.

Sir Linden Fledra snorted. "Then make your will, Altimer. Pity you don't have a few more years in which to function. You

might conceivably make a name for yourself."

Altimer ignored this patent thrust. "Do I understand you to mean that you put any stock in the so-called ancient powers of the Tibetan priests, Sir Linden?"

Fledra clucked. "Dear me, you seem to me remarkably obtuse, Mr. Altimer. Certainly I put stock in them; I've seen them at work. Remarkable! No, sir, you'll be well advised to take my advice, and henceforth devote your time to something worthwhile, and not dubious peccadillos!"

Altimer held himself in only briefly. When he got ready to go he delivered a fifty-line address to the effect that Sir Linden Fledra had grown into a pathetic old dodderer. The old man cackled mirthfully and rang for his servant to show Altimer out.

"A posthumous knighthood won't do yuh much good, will it?" observed the old man at parting.

Despite his visible aplomb, Altimer was disconcerted, and it was only by the most exacting discipline that he was able to put away all thought of his disagreeable experiences with the package from Tibet and old Sir Linden Fledra. He managed to invest his activities for the day with a certain sense of security, strong enough to enable him to speak of old Fledra as "ailing, poor fellow!"

This sense of security lasted him less than twenty-four hours.

In the night he awoke with the feeling that an intruder was in the house. He got up quietly; he was not entirely fearless, but he could deal with an ordinary burglar. He listened. The sounds were unmistakable: drawers opening and shutting, doors pulled away and quietly closed again, a scuttering sound which must have been of someone walking. He went out into the blackness of the upper hall and determined that the sound came from his studio.

Down he went, well armed, and sidled up to the studio door which he opened noiselessly—only enough so that he might turn on the light. There was no one in the room; the windows were locked, everything was in order. He searched carefully, but there was not a cranny in which anyone could hide, and presently he withdrew.

Nevertheless, he was not quite satisfied, and stood uncertainly in the lower hall now. Within a minute, the scuttering began again, the opening of drawers and cabinet doors. Clearly it emanated from the studio. He pondered a quick invasion of the studio, but reflected sensibly enough that he had just completed such an entry. Despite a gathering of perspiration cold on his forehead, he pushed open the door without turning on the light.

For a long minute he saw nothing, but his eyes held to the patch of light visible on the floor, dim light cast by the corner lamp, and presently his patience was rewarded. Something scuttered across it, not one, but two. *Rats!* he thought. But rats could hardly open drawers, and this was going on again! He leaned weakly up against the door jamb and pondered a strategic withdrawal.

At that moment the invaders scuttered across one edge of the parallelogram of light again. He saw them quite clearly.

THEY were a pair of hands, chopped short at the wrists, running along on fingertips! The long, thin fingers with their yellow color made stronger by the light from outside were too suggestive to lend themselves to any other explanation than that which occurred to Altimer.

It took him every available ounce of self-control to draw out of the studio, shut the door, and get back to his own room. Carefully, if a little fatuously, he locked the door and sat in the darkness pondering what to do next. Three possible explanations occurred to him at once: he had

been having an optical illusion, his imagination overwrought; he had been pre-disposed to expect something like this by Sir Linden Fledra; or there was after all something to those stories of ancient powers possessed by the guardians of the Tibetan shrine. Naturally, he was less disposed to accept the third explanation than either of the other two.

Still, Sir Linden had said nothing about the priest's hands, and there was certainly nothing in his own mind about the unfortunate beggar who had striven at the loss of his life to protect the sacred amulet. This thought was not comforting. He dressed quietly in the dark, and went out of the house to spend the rest of the night at his club.

Despite his antipathy for the old man, Altimer went to see Sir Linden Fledra once again in the morning. The old man greeted him with that surprised air of someone seeing alive an old acquaintance long thought dead; it was not a reassuring greeting. He seemed, in any event, to have completely forgotten Altimer's insolence on the occasion of his previous visit, and sat to listen gravely to what he had to say.

Altimer told him all, not forgetting to mention his suspicion of hallucination, indigestion, and possibly suggestion. He looked hard at Fledra when he said this, but the old man seemed entirely preoccupied.

"Well, I suppose they've begun to look for the amulet," he said presently. "I dare-say the old priest you killed was the shrine's real guardian; so it would be his job."

"But, of course, he's dead," said Altimer with a little smile.

"Yes, yes," nodded Fledra. "You see, it would be much easier for him then." His grin was gargoylesque.

Altimer tried again. "You're suggesting, of course, that they have power to transcend space and time — and even death?"

"What is death, after all, my dear fellow? There's an avenue to be explored. You might try to get through to me after you cross over."

"Or you to me," said Altimer.

"Oh, I think I'll hang on a bit yet," observed Fledra. "You might, too, if you got that amulet back to Tibet." He shook his head a little fretfully. "Though I'm afraid, very much afraid, that it's too late. Where is the amulet, by the way?"

"I have it well hidden at home. This afternoon I'll give it to the British Museum, where it belongs."

Sir Linden Fledra shook his head and muttered under his breath. He showed Altimer out with an almost tender solicitude, and it was clear in the way he gazed at him that he did not think he would ever see Altimer again.

Altimer made almost indecent haste to bestow the amulet upon the British Museum, not, of course, being so impractical as to forget notifying the press, so that credit might go where it was due, and a Certain Person might have additional evidence of Altimer's worth to the Crown. The press was wonderful: pictures of Altimer, the amulet, the case where it would repose—His Majesty could hardly refuse knighthood to a man like Altimer!

Naturally, Altimer was well satisfied with himself. He had foiled whatever it was searching for the amulet in his Park Lane home on the previous night, and had gained added prestige in so doing.

Altimer's amulet, however, was destined to remain in the press for at least another twenty-four hours. So was Altimer, though not in a way he would have appreciated.

As a matter of record, Altimer saw none of the columns, though in time no doubt he might have been as proud of the mystery of Altimer's amulet as he had been of his acquisition of it. Nevertheless, he knew of it.

He was awakened from sleep that night

by a call from the Metropolitan police. A divisional inspector was on his way out; would Mr. Altimer be prepared to receive him? The amulet given to the British Museum had that night, less than a quarter of an hour ago, been removed from the case where it had been placed.

"Good God!" exclaimed Altimer. "Who could have taken it? It has no great commercial value!"

"That's the mystery, sir. It vanished almost before the watchman's eyes. He's hardly coherent, since he saw no one—only something he described as rats. Of course, he's upset. Inspector Warborn will be right out."

Altimer got up, put on his dressing gown, and went downstairs to the studio. The night was warm; he put on a dim light, ascertained that whiskey and soda were on the sideboard, and opened the window a little, so that the gentle east wind might invade the room. The hum of the city's heart rose from outside and made itself manifest in the room. He could not get the police call out of his mind.

"Something he described as rats!" He shuddered and contemplated the visit of Inspector Warborn almost with relief.

The inspector, however, was too long in coming. At this moment, while he was hurrying along in a police car, Altimer stood at the window looking out into the street.

A bobby passed under the yellow pool of lamplight and strode off into the darkness. An instant later, two dark things scurried across the lamplight's glow on the street, and vanished into his own grounds.

SOMETHING like rats!

Altimer backed away from the window. Good God! this thing is driving me out of my mind! he thought.

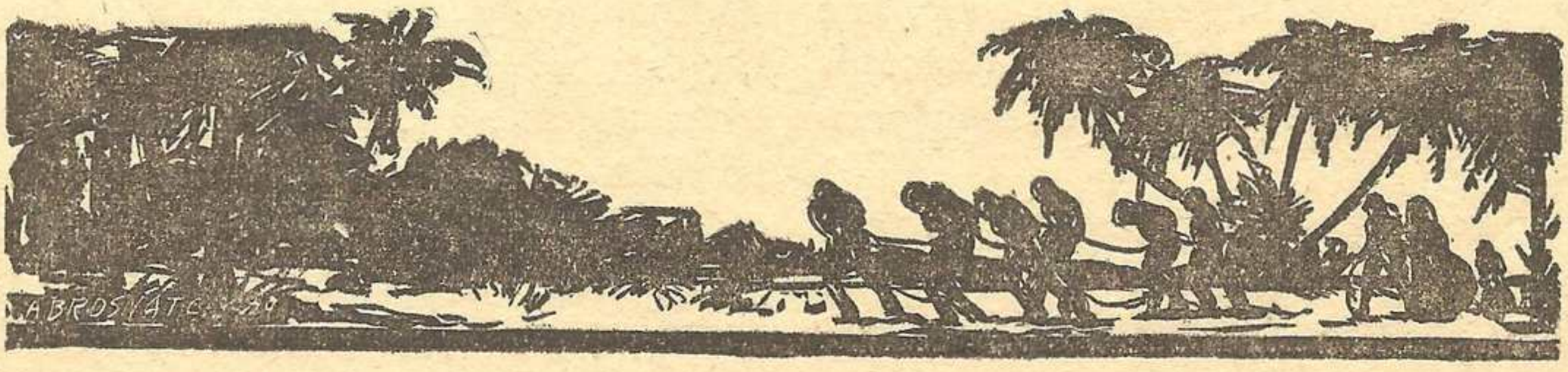
In a moment more he was beyond even this. There was a rustling sound along the side of his house, and on the window-sill appeared two long-fingered yellow hands, one of which carefully deposited Altimer's amulet on the sill before it joined the other.

They scuttered off the sill, across the floor, directly to where Altimer stood, fearstruck, watching them. When he felt them on his legs, Altimer screamed once, hoarsely, but, of course, his servants slept too soundly to hear it, and before he could scream again, the hands had found his throat.

Inspector Warborn discovered Altimer. He had been strangled. "Someone with long nails," said the coroner soberly. "Possibly an Oriental after that amulet!"

The press was superb. Altimer would have reveled in it. And he got a word from his king. The same busy columnist who had before reported Altimer's prominence wrote that "A Certain Person had mentioned the late Brooks Altimer and asked who he was and why he had taken the amulet."

Sir Linden Fledra wrote Altimer's obituary in ten lines and sent a wreath.



"Scarce daring to draw breath, she looked at them with wide-set, staring eyes."

"A single scarlet word burned in her brain . . . witchcraft!"—a mediaeval novelette of passion and sorcery.

There Are

SOME of this I saw myself, some of it was told me, some of it I reconstructed, adding scrap to scrap, as a paleontologist reconstructs a brontosaur from fossil fragments salvaged from Jurassic silt.

I was serving with the Army of Occupation, attached to the M. P., since I was one of those whose orders read "to Coblenz" instead of "to Camp Dix" when the A. E. F. was broken up. Jerry had taken his defeat philosophically and our principal duty at the time was to prevent fraternization between our men and our late enemies of the feminine gender. Periodically a brasshat came down from Ehrenbreitstein to lecture us on this. "G-I and all the folks back home are greatly concerned," he'd tell us

"These were the votaries of Lucifer the accursed—a ghastly crew of thirteen."

Such Things

By SEABURY QUINN

with the smock-faced smugness of a staff man laying down the law to the line. "Think what it would mean to patriotic American mothers if their boys came home with enemy wives—"

"Listen at the big lug!" muttered Fontenoy apKern, the battalion adjutant. "As if all wives ain't enemies!" apKern should have known. He was paying alimony to two wives at home and ardent court to a blonde little English girl with buck teeth and a silly simper who drove a car for British headquarters up at Cologne.

Accordingly, duty rested lightly on us. On our own initiative we interpreted the order against fraternizing to mean we were to keep the boys from too great intimacy with Coblenz maidens noted more for care-

free spirits than attention to decorum, and let 'em go as far as they liked with legitimate love-making. Even the brigadier admitted we were wise in this, since keeping billeted soldiers from philandering is about as feasible as King Canute's attempt to order back the rising tide.

It was the twenty-third of June—Midsummer's Eve—though the date meant nothing to me then, and I was off duty. With nothing to do for a blessed twenty-four hours I'd rummaged through the old part of the city, looked in at the thirteenth century basilica of Saint Castor, crossed the famous Bridge of Boats and found myself in open country, my head pleasantly empty of intention, my throat exceedingly receptive to a draught of *liebfrauenmilch,* or beer, if nothing better offered.

I must have walked four or five miles, for the slate-gray roofs of Coblenz shimmered with an almost silvery luster in the brilliant summer sunlight as I looked down on them, when I came upon the Calvary. Time-mattered and overlaid with moss until the original drab of its granite was hardly perceptible, it stood beside the highway where the remnant of a Roman road, now scarcely more than a cart-track, cut across it, a mute reminder of the old faith in the very heart of Rhenish Prussia. The sculptor, probably some pious friar, had cut life, or, more precisely, death—into the cold stone. The corpus fairly writhed upon the road; tense, straining muscles stood out on the arms and legs and torso, the corded throat seemed overfilled with groans of torment, the brow beneath the plaited crown of thorns was knotted and bedewed with the cold sweat of the death-agony. Curiously, whether because of minute particles of mica in the stone or for some other reason, the slanting sunrays struck a sort of half-dulled brightness from the upright of the cross behind the up-thrown, tortured head, giving the effect of an illusive halo.

Across the plinth supporting the almost life-sized crucifix ran what remained of an inscription, "—ORATE PRO EJS."

That puzzled me. I knew the Latin of the Medieval Schoolmen was not like that I had grappled with at Erasmus Hall High School, but . . . Understanding dawned on me at last. J and I were interchangeable in the Middle Ages, Germanic peoples favoring the J, and Latins using I. Whoever chiseled that inscription must have been a German, and chose J. That would make the last word read *"eis"*—them—so the remnant of the legend begged the passer-by to "pray for them."

This too was unusual. Such petitions usually appeared on family monuments, not on wayside Calvaries. Who, I wondered, were "they"? But even as I puzzled over the inscription I was vaguely conscious of another anomoly. These Medieval roadside shrines were placed along the highway, not at crossroads, for at the junction of two roads the witches gathered to mount broomsticks and fly screaming to the sabbat, suicides were buried at such places with stakes driven through their hearts; evil spirits made crossroads their rendezvous. Yet it was certainly a crossroads, and certainly a shrine stood there.

Beyond the hedge of hornbeam, once neatly clipped but now almost as ruinous as the old road sprawling past it, I saw the ivy-mantled relic of a gray-stone tower with what looked like a cottage roof beside it. And with the sight I realized I had walked a long way, that I'd eaten nothing since my early breakfast at the Monopole, and that I was hungry as a pike and thirsty as a sandbank. Perhaps the caretaker would sell me luncheon. Poverty was pressing hard on Fritz those days and a little American money would seem like a fortune to the average peasant.

"AND now, if the *Herr Leutnant* has completed his repast, he would like to see the ruins, *nicht wahr?*"

The "Herr Leutnant" had finished his repast, and very good he'd found it. Boiled fowl with dumpling, potatoes fried with just sufficient onion to make them perfect, great slabs of rich black bread with fresh sweet butter, and an *apfelstrudel* worthy of a king. *Apfelstrudel* you must know is cake made from dough that has been stretched and beaten to a paper-thinness, then rolled around a core of spiced sliced apple, and is the only thing in the world that outranks a New England apple pie. There had been no wine—worse luck—but the *bier* was all that could have been desired.

The ruins weren't very interesting. The outer walls had fallen long ago, taking five of the six watchtowers with them, and the keep was just a square stone building with small windows and no roof. The moat was overgrown with water-hyacinth, and the terraced flower beds were choked with weeds. Still, the old fellow had seemed so anxious to show me the place—his *dankerschöns* were almost overwhelming when I handed him a dollar—that I thought I might as well humor him. We'd made the round, and were back where we started when, "What's that little building over there?" I asked, pointing to an unroofed structure just outside the rim of the old ruined wall.

Something furtive came into my guide's china-blue eyes. He licked his lips and looked away, his mouth moved once or twice, but no words came from it. Finally: "*Na, na,* it's nothing, *Herr Leutnant,* just the chapel of the Hohenneitschütz. There is nothing there to interest you—"

"No?" I broke in. "Let's have a look at it." The man, for all his affability, was after all an enemy and I was an alien soldier in conquered territory, and a military policeman in the bargain. If there was something he particularly did not want me to see—and quite obviously he did not want me to inspect the chapel—it was my duty to investigate. For the first time since I'd left Coblenz I was thankful that I'd worn my belt and gun.

"Take me to that chapel and no monkey business," I commanded sharply, snapping back the flap of my holster. "Go on, get going; shake it up!"

"*Jawohl!*" he answered scarcely audible, shrugging his stooped shoulders as he led the way across the weed-grown flower gardens. There was no need to draw my pistol. For generations he and his kind had taken orders unquestioningly from men in uniform. "The *Herr Leutnant* need not vex himself. I will show the chapel to him, but"—I could see a shiver ripple through his fat form as he spoke—"it holds no interest for the visitor."

THE chapel of the Hohenneitschütz family lay unroofed and open to its God. Grass had grown between the flagstones of the floor, the painted glass had long since disappeared from the stone mullions of the slim high Gothic windows. Carven in the walls were epitaphs in monkish Latin which I didn't bother trying to translate, each with its wreath of coats of arms about it, for the Hohenneitschütz were related to almost every noble family in the empire.

The sun was slanting toward the horizon and shadows filled the roofless chapel as cool wine might fill a cup. The altar, white stone, much discolored by the elements, took up most of the east wall. Above it was a basalt, lustrous black crucifix, almost man's-size, at each end were the bronze standards where in ancient days the eucharistic candles burned. I wondered as I looked at those discolored green-bronze candlesticks carved with saints and birds and stiff, unearthly-looking flowers, how long it had been since the scarlet-orange flame had bloomed above them at the tips of white, long, scented tapers, how long since the pungent tang of incense rose before the altar where the tabernacle stood

and a tonsured priest had ended service with his *"Ite, missa est."*

A quick reconnaissance almost convinced me there was no place where a mouse could find an ambush in the chapel or a cache of arms be hidden, yet the man's apparent frightened, furtive manner and his anxiety to be rid of me struck a warning tocsin in my mind. "Who's this?" I asked as with elaborate unconcern I walked across the chapel pavement, testing each stone for a hollow ring, and paused beside the tomb that filled the space between the altar and the north wall on the Gospel side. "Careful, feller, watch it—keep your eye on him," that inward voice was warning as I circled round the tomb. The peasant's florid round face had gone visibly paler, the fat hand winding in the watch-chain of plaited human hair cabled across his bulging waistcoat had stopped still, he drew his breath in so sharply that it seemed like a sob.

"Na, na, Herr Leutnant," he responded, almost sobbing with anxiety, "he was no one—nothing—nobody. Come, let us go if the *Herr Leutnant* has seen all he wishes—"

"Shut up!" I cut him off. "I'll tell you when I'm ready; meantime, keep your distance, or—" The gun half-drawn from my holster put pungency in the unspoken threat, and while the little fat man fairly writhed with what seemed like acknowledgment to me, I bent closer to inspect the monument.

Unlike the Calvary which had stopped me on the highway this piece of sculpture was entirely ordinary. The figure lying supine on the stone sarcophagus was a young man dressed in light plate armor, of the middle fifteenth century I judged by the graceful flutings and ridges on the cuirass and epaulières. He was unhelmeted, and long hair curled about his ears and underneath his neck. According to the custom of the time his hands were joined above his breast as if in prayer. I glanced down at his steel-shod feet. They should have rested on a dog or lion or some heraldic animal, or possibly upon a cushion, but to my utter surprise I saw that a goose was nestled close against them, squatting complacently, feet tucked up beneath her, neck bent in a graceful curve to let her head rest on one shoulder, quite as if she'd waddled in and found the time and place propitious for depositing an egg. Had this been some young scapegrace fool? I wondered. And had the Medieval sculptor taken this sly way of telling future generations of the young knight's follies? "Who was he?" I demanded of the caretaker.

"Herr Leutnant, I cannot read the inscription," he lied shamelessly. "My eyes are bad, the light is poor, the Latin letters—"

I was bending forward while he spoke, deciphering the legend on the stone coffin. He might have told the truth, at that, I thought a moment later, for the letters had filled up with lichen till they were barely visible, and round them the stone had discolored till they scarcely showed against it. Still, I could descry a few dark lines of lettering, "—Junker Gustavus von Hohenneitschütz und—orate pro ejs—" There it was again, that "Pray ye for them." First it had appeared upon a wayside Calvary, where it had no business being, now it was on an individual tomb. Not pray for *him,* but pray for *them.*

"Is there more than one body interred here?" I asked the peasant.

His reaction to the question was astounding. He was a Prussian of the Prussians, round-faced, blue-eyed, fair-skinned. And doubtless a good Lutheran, too. But as I shot the harmless question at him he raised his right hand and crossed himself.

"Nein, nein, mein Leutnant, he alone is buried there—*Gott sei dank!*—but he was very wicked, very foolish, very head-

strong, and now he bears a dreadful penalty!" He looked across his shoulder at the shadows which were reaching out along the chapel pavement with the coming of sunset, and I saw the sweat break out upon his forehead. "Come, let us go, if you will be so gracious, *Herr Leutnant,* for the sun is setting quickly, and it is the eve of Saint John—"

There was no mistaking the genuineness of his terror. His face was fairly quivering, his jaws hung like the dewlaps of a hound, his eyes were round and dilated, and his mouth began to twist convulsively while spittle drooled from its corners. "Come, for gracious heaven's sake, *Herr Leutnant,"* he besought me. "It is the eve of Saint John's Day, and with the coming of the darkness *they* have sway upon the earth!"

So that was it. The superstitious fool was scared of ghosts and witches and wanted to be safely away from the Hohenneitschütz' family mausoleum before sundown. "All right," I relented, shoving my gun back into its holster, "run along, but mind the curfew. If you're caught out after eight o'clock something worse than ghosts will get you, Fritz."

"Worse than ghosts, *Herr Leutnant?"* he repeated blankly.

"You said it, old scout. American M. P.'s."

HALF a mile down the road I paused irresolute. Saint John's Eve was a famous gathering-time for witches, I knew, a night when all the powers of evil held high carnival and the unquiet spirits of the earthbound dead came forth to wreak their spite on anyone unfortunate enough to cross their path. A superstitious peasant might well have dreaded being found away from home at sunset, but—

I'd given young Gustav von Hohenneitschütz' coffin a light kick, and it had sounded hollow as a kettle-drum. Six feet long and more it was, by three feet wide and three feet high. What was to prevent arms being stored there? Rifles for a full platoon could be hidden in it, or three or four dismounted machine guns. Tildenson of the Intelligence had told me of a plot the M. P.'s nipped in half-bud down at Treves. They'd found guns and ammunition and about a half ton of "potato masher" hand grenades hidden in a cemetery there—why not in the Hohenneitschütz family tombs up there? Perhaps it had been fear of ghosts that made that little Heinie so jumpy—and perhaps it had been fear I'd run across their arms-cache. He'd certainly tried his best to keep me from the chapel when I wanted to look at it, and it had been broad daylight then.

What to do? Go down to Coblenz, pick up a squad and come back to make a search—and find they'd taken fright and moved the stuff while I was seeking reinforcements? No, that plan was out.

I took my gun out and looked at it. There were five shots in the cylinder. That would be enough to stop 'em unless they were too strong. If they were—"What are you waiting for?" I asked myself. "D'ye want to live forever? Get back there and take cover in the chapel. If it's all right you'll have done no harm; if Jerry's planning something it's up to you to put a stop to it before it starts. 'Bout face, forward march!"

Kicking my way through the hedge of hornbeam I made a circle of the castle keep, and did the last twenty yards to the chapel in approved skirmish order, wriggling quietly between the weeds that waved waist-high from the flower beds, finally dashing through the door and sprinting up the aisle to find a point of vantage in the angle of the wall beside the altar. Here I was in dense shadow and protected by the stone walls on each side. No one could sneak up on me, I could see anything bigger than a rat that crossed the threshold, and, which pleased me most of all, had an

unobstructed view of the Junker Gustav's tomb.

The sunset light had vanished now, and blue-purple shadows slipped across the chapel floor. Looking through a trefoil window in the farther wall I saw a star come out, a mere pin-prick of golden glow against the lilac of the evening sky. Presently, I knew, the moon would be up, and the bars of light that pierced the glassless windows would make it bright enough for me to shoot with some accuracy. Till then I'd have to watch myself. Five bullets weren't a lot, even if I could make every one count, and I'd no idea how many there would be in the party.

I didn't feel heroic crouching there against the wall. I felt uncomfortable and foolish. If I'd only had the sense to go to Coblenz for a detail—we could have commandeered a car and gotten back in half an hour—but no, I had to be a blasted hero, taking on a whole uprising single-handed. Had I fallen from my high chair and lit upon my head in infancy? I wondered while my muscles cramped and stiffened in the evening chill and every breath of breeze set branches swaying to throw shadows in the doorway, shadows that looked suspiciously like men with rifles in their hands—and I had only a revolver with five bullets in it.

My vigil wavered from the chapel door a moment, for as one may not quite see, yet dimly perceive, an object from the corner of his eye while looking elsewhere, I was aware of something moving by the tomb of Gustav Hohenneitschütz. My eyes and gun swung simultaneously toward the sepulchre. "That's it, eh?" the thought flamed through my mind. I'd heard of secret passages with tombs for outlets, now, it seemed, I was about to see—

"What?" the question fairly jumped from my lips, forced out by sudden pressure of surprise. Something like a vapor, tenuous and half-seen as a puff of breath upon a frosty night, was rising from the statue's graven lips, fanning out in a slim cone, then hanging lazily in midair.

I felt a sudden chill go rippling down my spine, one of those causeless fits of nervous cold which, occurring independently of outside stimuli, make us say, "someone's walking on my grave." It wasn't easy to breathe, and there was a curiously unpleasant feeling in the region of my stomach. It was Midsummer Eve—the caretaker had warned me about ghosts—"Steady on!" I brought myself out of the mental nose-dive. "You know there aren't such things. Jerry's trying to pull a fast one—"

The humid summer heat seemed giving way to a chill which affected the soul as well as the body, a dull, hard, biting cold suggestive of the limitless eternities of frozen interstellar space. The little halitous white cloud swung motionless above the carved stone face, then gently, as though wafted by a breeze, it eddied slowly toward the altar, hung still a moment, then gradually spread out like a smoke-screen laid down by an airplane, a drifting, gently-billowing curtain which obscured the sanctuary from my gaze.

A HORRIFYING thought took hold of me. Gas! In some way they had set a cylinder of phosgene in the tomb, released it through a hidden vent in the statue, and were filling the place with it. Crawling like a snake over the flagstone floor I wriggled from the corner by the altar, making for the doorless portal of the chapel. There would be air-currents there; their pressure would drive back the gas—

I looked across my shoulder as I neared the doorway. They might be coming out now; I didn't want to take any chance of being shot at as my silhouette showed in the archway's faint light.

The gas-cloud still hung like a curtain before the altar, but in it I could see faint

points of bluish light, mere tiny specks of phosphorescence scintillating in the gently-wavering vapor. I flattened to the pavement and lay watching, gun in readiness. They had tried to gas me, and lost the first trick. Now—

Gradually, but with quickening tempo, the little points of light were multiplying till they floated like a maze of dancing midges, spinning luminantly till they seemed to merge and coalesce and form small nebulae as large as glowing cigarette ends, but burning all the while with an intense, blue eerie light. It was as if, in place of the gas-screen, the chapel had been cut in half by a curtain of solid, opaque moonlight.

The little light-points changed from spinning to a slowly weaving motion. The luminous curtain seemed breaking up, falling into a pattern of highlights and shadows.

A picture, as when the acid etches deeply in the copper of a half-tone plate, was taking form before my eyes.

Candles once more glowed in the bronze standards on the altar, their pointed, orange flames made small breeze-raveled stains against the darkness. The altar itself had been bleached from dirty, time-stained gray to spotless whiteness. I could read the legend, *"Sanctvs, Sanctvs, Sanctvs"* cut across the chamfered slab that formed its top. In the honey-pale glow of the candles I descried a priest, a barefoot, tonsured monk in alb and stole who faced a man and woman standing at the lowest of the three steps leading to the altar.

These were no shades, no pale, anemic ghosts. Each of them was plain and clear-cut and distinct. I could see the gleam of light reflected from the gilt fringe of the priest's stole, make out every detail of the man's and woman's costumes, and—which settled it—descry the shadows which they etched against the little pool of brightness spilled down by the flickering candles. Ghosts cast no shadows; I'd heard that since my infancy.

The man stood nearest me, and I could see the narrow corded edge of gold that trimmed his wine-red velvet doublet and the collar of scrolled gold about his neck. A sword with a jeweled pommel hung belted in a velvet scabbard at his left side. His hair was long and fair, curled under at the ends where it swept his shoulders. His face was turned away from me, but in the way he stood, in the way he held his head and shoulders, I seemed to see something vaguely familiar.

The woman standing at his left was partly turned toward me. She was dark and vibrant, with small, sharp, clear-cut features, her hair was very black and shone with almost blue lights in the candle-rays. She wore it plaited in two long, full braids that swept across her shoulders and hung almost to her knees in front. Upon her head was a small cap of silver netting thickly set with seed-pearls, her gown was shimmering white silk and clung as closely as a sheath to her slim figure, a belt of silver plates was clasped about her waist.

ODDLY, though the priest's lips moved, I heard no words. It was like looking at a scene through a sound-proof glass screen, or watching the swift action of a silent motion picture.

But I could fit the words to the action. It was a wedding ceremony that I watched, and from the places where the parties stood I guessed the priest was asking, as the canon required, if anyone could show just cause why he should not unite the man and woman in the bonds of matrimony. From groom and bride the celebrant inquired, "—I do solemnly require and charge ye both—"

Something skittered past me up the chapel aisle. It might have been a wind-blown leaf, so lightly did it scuff along the flagstones, but—it wasn't. It was a girl,

young, slender, lovely as a flower nodding on its stalk, or—

There was something odd—unnatural—about her. I could make her features out, her clear-cut, small, sweet features, the mistiness of the dark hair that rippled down each side her face and swept across her shoulders. I could see distinctly that she wore a one-piece smock of blue linen with a hempen girdle bound about its waist and that her arms and feet were bare, but also I could see through her. She dulled but did not hide the candles' light as she stood between them and me. Dimly, as through a fog, I saw the outlines of the white altar behind her; as she stood full in the candle-rays I saw she cast no shadows.

She stretched her empty hands appealingly to the priest. Something had hurt them, they were crushed and bloody, drops of red welled from her finger-tips and fell down with a slow dribble to the flagstones.

For a minute—or an hour, or eternity, I couldn't say, for all time seemed suspended—they stood stone-still in a tense tableau, the priest about to say his office, the bride and bridegroom, and the visitant.

Then I saw the bride's mouth square in a shrill scream of terror, saw her waver like a reed hit by a blast of furious wind and fall full length upon the altar steps. The tonsured priest stepped back and raised his hands as if to ward off physical assault, then, brought to halt against the table of the altar, made the sign of the cross and spoke in hurrying, gabbling Latin. No skill in lip-reading was required to tell the words he said: "—*te conjuro—ad locum tuum!*—I conjure thee, return to thine own place!"

I saw the bridegroom's fingers crawl up to his throat. His lips drew back, his teeth showed white and hard as they ground on each other. There was less color in his cheeks than in the face of a corpse. Distorted as his features were I recognized them as those of the stone face of the statue that stretched supine on the Junker Gustav Hohenneitschütz' tomb with hands joined palm to palm as if in prayer. Consternation glazed his eyes, his skin seemed wrinkling as with sudden frostbite. It was not merely fright that held him paralyzed, it was terror multiplied by horror, with sheer panic added to it. "*Du?—Thou?*" the word jerked from him. "*Ach, mein Gott—*"

THE specter made no answer, but from her waist she took the double-twisted hempen rope that served her for a girdle, wrapped its loose ends about her wrist and swung it like a scourge.

Blow after blow she reined upon the cowering man, striking his face, his shoulders, his neck. He cringed and crouched beneath the flailing lash, holding up his hands to guard his face, dropping them again as the whip bit into his neck, groveling beneath the flogging like a beaten cur.

The maimed ghost-woman pointed with one bloody hand. The trembling, shuddering man obeyed the gesture, and slowly, as though unable to hasten, he walked down the aisle and out into the moonfilled ruin of the castle garden. Step for step she matched his tortured march, striking mercilessly as she flogged him round the angle of the chapel wall. Amazingly, there was no look of anger, hatred or vindictiveness in her still face. It was quiet and immobile, almost void of expression as were the features of those wooden Indians with which tobacconists once advertised their wares. Almost, but not quite. From her set and staring eyes great tears ran slowly, coursing down her bloodless cheeks in one another's tracks. She didn't sob or cry or wail, but drop on shining drop the great, slow tears slipped down her face.

I waited breathlessly. Would she— Before I framed the question in my mind I had its answer. She was driving him around

the building in a never-ceasing circle, lashing, scourging, beating him without surcease or mercy.

Again it seemed that time hung in abeyance. How long the beater and the beaten trod their dreadful via Dolorosa I had no idea. I do know that it seemed an age before I heard the far-off crowing of a cock and, fainter still, but silver-sweet in the cool summer morning air, the echo of our bugles sounding reveille in Coblenz.

The beaten man turned in his path and ran into the chapel, paused to genuflect before the altar, staggered drunkenly across the flagstones to the tomb and fell across it. For a long, shuddering moment he lay there, his arms outstretched across the graven image of himself, then raised his swollen, lash-bruised face. I noticed with a start there was no trace of priest or bride left in the sanctuary.

The woman dropped her scourge and took the young man's cheeks between her crushed and mangled hands. For just a moment she stood thus, then bent and pressed a kiss upon his bloody, swollen lips. Her loosened hair fell round their faces, hiding them from me as with a cloak, and I turned my eyes away. Dreadful as the agony of scourging was, this kiss—this embrace of renunciation and farewell—seemed infinitely more so.

The sky was brightening swiftly. In a branch a sleepy bird awoke and scolded musically. I turned again toward the chapel. It was empty. On its bed of weathered stone the statue of the Junker Gustav Hohenneitschütz lay with folded hands imploring mercy. The fragment of his epitaph still showed against the moss-discolored granite, "—*orate pro ejs*—pray for them," but of ghostly knight and ghostly peasant maid, of spectral priest and phantom bride there was no sign nor trace.

"Lord, what a nightmare that was!" I exclaimed.

But even as I said it I knew that I had not dreamed; that what I'd seen had been no dream-bound vision of a sleeping man, but something terrible, inexorable and tragic. "He was wicked, foolish, headstrong, now he bears a dreadful penalty!" the caretaker had said of the Junker Gustav Hohenneitschütz.

Why? I wondered as I tramped along the road to Coblenz. Who was he and what was his crime? Where did the peasant girl fit in? Why did she scourge his tortured ghost around the chapel from the fall of dusk till cock-crow, and, most of all I wondered, why did she embrace him when the terrible ordeal was done?

"HI, LUG!" apKern called to me as I sat in the lobby of the Monopole digesting a so-so dinner and wondering what was happening in Brooklyn right then. The Dodgers would be playing out at Ebbets Field, and—

"Hullo yourself," I answered none too cordially. apKern had recently been transferred to the Office of Civil Affairs where there was more to do than at the provost marshal's, and as a result both his leaves and his attentions to the little buck-toothed British girl at Cologne had been curtailed. I had troubles of my own and didn't want to spend an evening listening to his grievances, but his next words made me move over and make a place for him beside me on the lounge:

"I think I know somebody who can shed some light on the mystery of the haunted chapel you've been deviling everyone about these last two weeks."

His accusation wasn't accurate. I wasn't going to be fool enough to tell them I'd seen ghosts at Castle Hohenneitschütz—they'd have me up before the psychiatrist so fast my head would swim, and the best thing I could hope for was a discharge for mental disability if I let that story out—but I had made inquiries about the Hohenneitschütz legend, and probably had been a

nuisance with my questions. "Who is it?" I demanded, tendering him my cigarette case. apKern was chronically just out of cigarettes. I knew he'd stay with me as long as mine held out.

"Cove from the Benedictine convent down by the Castor Platz, sort o' sub-prior or something, named Brother Ambrose. He comes into the O.C.A. 'bout every ten days, and the other day I got to talkin' with him. Seems like the Night-Shirt family's chapel was supplied by Benedictine fraters in the Middle Ages, and most of their old records are down in his convent library. He wasn't very talkative. Said there was a curse on 'em, and that there chapel is an evil place, 'specially on Midsummer Eve." He gave me an appraising look. "That would have been about the time you visited the ruins, wouldn't it?"

I nodded. "And—" I prompted, as he took a second cigarette, but made no move to continue his narrative.

"Well, that's about all, I guess. This Brother Ambrose feller seems to have the dope on the old chapel, so, if you'd like, I'll make a date for you to visit him next time he comes in. He's due tomorrow or the next day to get his fuel order renewed."

"apKern," I asked, "how would you like a nice, long brandy-soda?" Two minutes later we were in the bar and I was ordering, *"Zewi branntwein."*

ONE doesn't bribe a frater of the Order of Saint Benedict, but I did something very like it when I called at the old convent by the Castor Platz two days later. Tobacco was at a premium in Germany those days, and I'd stopped at the Q.M. for a big tin of Prince Albert on the off chance that Brother Ambrose, like most of his countrymen, was addicted to pipe-smoking. The smile that lit the little cleric's face when I presented him with the gift was a reward all by itself. Even if he knew nothing about the Hohenneitschütz curse, I was repaid, I felt, as I watched while he tamped long-cut in his china pipe and set it glowing like a little furnace.

But virtue was not to be its reward alone that time. *"Ach,* yes," he answered in his oddly thick English, "those Hohenneitschütz, I know him—as who does not around these parts? He was a very wicked family, false to his vows of knighthood, false to his plighted word, false to everything. But ah, Herr Leutnant, he has paid a dreadful penalty! On each Midsummer Eve—"

"I know," I shot the interruption at him. "I was in the chapel of the Hohenneitschütz on Midsummer Eve."

If I had suddenly announced that I was Mephistopheles, or Martin Luther's shade, he could not have been taken more completely aback. "You—the *Herr Leutnant* was in that devil-ridden, accursed place on Saint John's Eve?" he faltered. "Did you —did the *Herr Leutnant* see—"

"Natürlich. I saw the priest and bride and bridegroom, I saw the peasant maiden's ghost when she came in to stop the wedding; I saw her scourge him from the altar and around the chapel—"

"Heilige Maria!" the little frater blessed himself fearfully. "Then it is truly true; it is not merely legend—there *are* such things!"

"It's true enough," I answered grimly. "I wasn't asleep and I wasn't drunk that night. On the contrary I was very wide awake and alert, expecting—" I broke off lamely. After all, it was hardly courteous to tell him that I'd been on the lookout for some of his countrymen, expecting to be wiped out but resolved to take a few of them along for company. "It seemed to me that I was witnessing the reënactment of a scene from one of those old tragic dramas," I completed. "I've heard it said there is a theory that stones and wood and similar insensate matter have power to absorb vibrations from human beings labor-

ing under great emotion, and give them off again, like *tableaux vivants,* when a person emotionally attuned to them comes near. I was very much keyed up that night, and possibly that would explain why I perceived that scene, but why should it be there to see? Do you know the history of the Hohenneitschütz legend—or should I say their curse? Can you explain what that scene meant?"

He bowed his head in silence a moment, pulling at his pipe with long, thoughtful puffs. "All my life—and I am nearing seventy—I've heard the legend of the Hohenneitschütz, now from this one, now from that. In our archives we have documents which tell of it, but I have never read them through. You read Latin, *Herr Leutnant, nicht wahr?"*

"Not well enough to translate Medieval parchments, Father."

"Jawohl, I might have known as much. The classics are neglected in the schools these days. Never mind. I will read the records for you and inscribe an English translation—"

"But that would take you weeks, months, perhaps," I objected.

"When time hangs heavy on an old man's hands he does not count the minutes, my son," he assured me with a smile. "You have been most generous to me"—he tapped the tall red cannister of tobacco affectionately. "Cannot I do you some small favor in return?"

WHETHER Brother Ambrose had done me a favor was a moot point I thought as I looked at the great sheaf of manuscript the lay brother had brought me. Ambrose was a scholar with the Teuton's love of detail. He had made a literal translation of the records of the Hohenneitschütz, and though it was informative to read their armory contained *sallets*—which, I gleaned, were a form of helmet something like our own tin hats—for a thousand men, five hundred arcubalists and enough arrows to supply them for a month-long seige, it was certainly not helpful in determining the reason for the family curse. Also, though he had written English in a lovely, clerkly hand which was almost wholly undecipherable, he had been thinking in German, with the result that his nouns and pronouns bunched at the beginning of his sentences, the adjectives were strung along the middle, and the verbs packed in close order at the end.

It was a long time before I came to the meat of it, but when I'd winnowed out the chaff of cluttering data I was in possession of a story as poetical as that of Faust or Tannhaüser and as tragically appealing as the song of Tristam and Isolde or Troïlus and Cressida.

The Roman Empire of the East and the proud Hohenneitschütz family found oblivion the same year, it appeared, for it was on a lovely April evening in the year of Our Lord 1453 that the young Graf Gustav von Hohenneitschütz und von Ketlar rode the white horse he had jestingly named Weiss Tod—Pale Death—through the lush alleys of the wide greenwood that rimmed his father's castle round on every side.

It was the season which the Germans call *vorfrüling*—the forespring—the spring-before-the-spring—and the newly budded trees were bright with shining green leaves or frothy with a snow of blossoms. A soft breeze played among the branches and the black soil had a sweet, warm smell. In the meadows calves and lambs skipped playfully, the birds were carrolling as they sought straws and twigs to build their nests, and Gustav, being young and heart-whole and romantic, felt the urge for song well in his throat resistlessly as the sap forcing its way through the tree trunks.

"The minstrels sing of a jovial king;
A wonderful king was he—"

he raised his voice in the old *lied,* then broke the song abruptly as he reined Pale Death back almost on his haunches. Unmindful of the charger's hoofs a flock of geese had debouched into the wood path, waddling majestically in long single file, pausing now and then to stretch their serpentine necks down to nibble at a sprig of new, fresh grass, then taking up their march again with slow, unhurried rhythm.

"Herr Gott," the young knight swore, "is my road to be blocked by these confounded, squawking—ah, *mädchen,* I am sorry if I startled you!"

Shepherding her toddling charges with a long thin wand of peeled willow, came the goose-girl, and at sight of her young Gustav's annoyed frown gave way to a quick smile.

She was a pretty thing, this peasant girl, straight and slender as a reed beside the river's rim, yet with a sweetly rounded figure whose desirability not even the almost shapeless smock she wore could quite conceal. Her hair was dark brown, clustering round her white brow in a coronel of loose curls like the tendrils of new grape vines, then sweeping down each side her face and cataracting over her shoulders until it nearly reached her waist. Her skin was very white and smooth, her lips as red as the rose Gabriel brought Our Lady. Her eyes were dark blue, blue as distant hills before rain, blue as midnight skies in winter. Round her head, as it had been a crown, she wore a chaplet of wild flowers, her one-piece smock of coarse blue linen was bound in at her small waist by a rough cord of plaited hemp. Her arms and feet were bare, but as he looked down he thought that he never had seen such white, slim, shapely feet; her insteps were two lines of arching loveliness, her ankles were as sharply cut as those of a blood-mare, her heels were narrow and the long, straight toes that never had been cramped by rigid shoes were like the fingers of a high-born lady's hands. Certes, this were loveliness enough for anyone upon a soft spring evening.

The dark blue eyes moved up to his, demurely bright. "I am not feared, my lord," she told him softly, "only startled at thy advent. I had not thought there was another in the *grünwald* at this hour of this day, for the sun is sinking quickly, and with darkness comes those whom good Christians should not see—"

"Do they, i' faith?" he answered laughing. "And who might they be, pretty one?"

"Hast thou forgotten this is May Eve, *Herr?* It is the feast of Saint Walpurga, and tonight is Walpurgis-Nacht when the olden gods who were but devils and the witches who adore them gather for their unclean rites in secret places—"

His laughter cut her sober warning short. "Well spoken, *mädchen!* There be trolls and devils and all sorts of wicked beings in the wood this night, and here is he who will defend thee from them all. 'Fore God, I'll bring thee to thy father's cot unharmed, though twenty times ten thousand witches barred our way!"

She signed herself with the cross as he spoke and turned serious eyes on him reprovingly. "It is not well to speak thus lightly of the hosts of evil, good my lord. Thy challenge might be heard—"

He had dismounted from Pale Death, and now he bent and took one of her slim feet in his hand. "Up with thee, pretty one," he made, and raised her to the saddle. "Thou shalt ride like any princess to thy home, and I shall be thy courier and knight-defender."

Well-favored as the maiden was her escort matched her beauty. He was well made, though somewhat inclined to the lankiness of youth, with long fair hair and apple-cheeks and wide blue eyes that verged on gray. If his chin receded somewhat, the small beard of flaxen hair ob-

scured the failing, and he walked with the slight swagger that denoted all his kind and kin, for he was of the *herzogs,* noblest blood of the empire, and answerable to no one but the church, the kaiser and his father for his actions.

His apparel matched her person: a shirt of fine white linen, hose of brown silk, high boots of Spanish leather, and a doublet of brown satin slashed with gold and laced with gold-tipped points. A closely-fitting silk cap with an eagle's feather in its crown topped his fair hair, from his shoulders hung a heel-length cloak of bright red velvet fastened with a golden clasp at the throat.

"How art thou called?" he asked as he paced by her side, one hand upon the saddle-bow, the other steadying her in her seat. "Methinks 'twould take a name of wondrous sweetness to do justice to thy beauty, little forest-girl."

"My name is Else, an' it please your lordship," she responded softly. There was no need to ask if she had any other, for he knew well she did not. Peasants, like the beasts they drove to labor in the fields, had no family designations, nor would they for some centuries to come.

"It pleases me most excellently well," he assured her. "Knowest thou who I am?"

"Yea, thou art the young Graf Gustav who one day will be our lord and master," she replied, and a slow flush mounted to her cheeks and brow.

"One day, quotha? Am I not thy lord and master now, *mädchen?*"

She blushed still more violently, and he had to strain his ears to catch her whispered answer. "Aye, lord, as God is to thee so art thou to poor Else."

"Well spoken. And thou wilt obey me in all things, as becomes a peasant maiden when her lord commands?"

"Thou knowest it—"

"Then I command thee, as my serf and thing and chattel, to embrace me straightway, fairest Else."

She put her hands upon his shoulders and leant downward till her lips touched his. The fragrance of her hair swirled round him, her arms clasped round his neck, he felt the quickening of her breath against his mouth—"*Bei Gott*" he muttered in a voice gone suddenly as hard and sharp as honed steel, "thou art the loveliest thing in all the world, my Else," and swung her down from the saddle.

THE chronicle does not record their idyl, but it is not hard to picture it. There were other meetings in the *grünwald* when the moonstained trees and shrubbery stood about them like a sentinel host, meetings when he held her close against his heart and they rehearsed the aching sweetness of their first kiss. The owl and the *fledermaus*—the little, harmless cheeping bat—heard their love vows, the stoat and weasel and the little timid rabbits that made nests deep in the wildwood watched them from the covert of the flowering thorn bush. *Ich liebe dich*—I love thee, little Else of the greenwood," he told her not once but a hundred times each night, and she, struck speechless by his condescension—breathless with adoration as the daughters of men when the sons of God first looked on them and found them fair—could not say anything at all. But her sweet bare arms showed whiter than the apple blossoms drifting from the forming fruit as they crept tightening round his neck and drew him to the yielding sweetness of her lips, the tender warmth and pulsing of her bosom.

We know the Junker Gustav's breed, its stiff-necked arrogancy, its pride of blood and family, its blind worship of caste. But she was a woman, sweet and young and lovely as a half-blown rose. He was a man, young, impetuous and sanguine. What else could matter in the softness of

the scented woodland summer night? His heart, his blood, his youth were in league to defeat his pride. So, almost but not quite inexplicably, we find them standing hand in hand upon the packed-earth floor of the hut where a peasant village priest had his rectory while they repeated after the brown-cassocked religious the sacramental words that made their twain one flesh.

The days sped swiftly as a weaver's shuttle, and with the coming of high summer Gustav's ardor seemed to cool. The meetings by the rowan tree were less and less frequent, when she came running forth from the shadow, hands lifted toward him, he was slower in dismounting from Pale Death.

One July night when the moon was awash in a sky tremulous with silver clouds he lay with his head couched in her lap while she let down the waterfall of her hair above his face and brushed the silken ends of the unraveled strands against his lips and cheeks. "And thou wilt surely take me to the castle and acknowledge me as thy true wedded spouse eftsoons?" she whispered, bending till he felt the flutter of her breath like moth-wings on his mouth.

"Have I not said it, little bride of my heart? There are grave reasons for my tarrying, my father's consent to our nuptials must be first obtained, for I am not of lawful age as yet," he answered somewhat petulantly. "Why plaguest thou me thus?"

"Oh lord and master of my heart and life and soul, believe me it is not for myself alone that I ask," she replied, and her voice sank till he rather felt than heard the words. "Thy condescending love is all that thy poor Else asks. To meet thee thus beneath the greenwood tree, to feel thy arms about me and thy kisses on my lips, *ach, Gott,* it is such heaven as I had not thought existed, but"—pride made her words shine like new-minted silver—"there is another with us now, my lord. We are not alone in the forest."

"*Herr Je,* how meanest thou?" he asked in mock-fear. "Dost mean the fairy-folk—"

"Nay, silly one!" her laughter rippled like the running of clear water over stones. "'Tis here—" She took his hand and laid it just below the gently-swelling rondure of her bosom. "'Tis of thee, my Gustav, and of me. And, oh my lord, when first I knew it I felt as the ever-blessed *beilige Maria* must have when the Angel of the Lord appeared to her—" sublimity of prideful joy rendered her inarticulate, but he could feel the quickened pulsing of her heart in the hands pressing his.

Slowly he rose to his knees, then to his feet. His hands felt cold, and the hollows of his shoulders ached suddenly with a fine pain. Each word she'd spoken ate its way into his brain as if etched by strong acid.

To make love to a pretty peasant maiden in the moonlit forest while the little cheeping insects hymned their lyric canticles and the wind crooned a soothing song among the branches of the rowan tree, even to go through the form of marriage before an obscure priest who knew neither him nor her—that was one thing. But to stand before his cold-eyed, sneering friends and own this peasant woman as his wife, to tell his race-proud sire that he was wedded to a serf, the father of a villein wench's child—his heart gave a cold, nauseating lurch inside his breast. "*Auf weidersehen, liebchen,*" he faltered as he climbed into the saddle. "I—I must away to the castle—my august sire—" His farewell faded to an echo broken by the clacking of his horse's hoofs against the flints of the roadway. And so Gustav von Hohenneitschütz und von Ketlar rode out of little Else's life—but she had not gone out of his.

SHE could not understand. Night after night she went to the trysting place by the rowan tree and waited while the stars

came out and the moon swam across the sky, telling and retelling her rosary of deferred hope—"He will come; oh, surely, any moment he will come!"—until the eastern sky grew bright and the sun rose amid a tossing surf of ruddy clouds.

At last her desperation made her bold and, greatly daring, she trudged up the long road to the castle. She knew the risk she took in doing this, for though the stiff-necked townsmen had begun to curb the nobles in their arrogance the peasant still had no rights of property or person which the lord or his underlings were bound to respect.

A bugle-horn was sounding as she neared the moat and a troop of cavaliers and ladies clattered through the gateway and across the drawbridge. First came the *fauconiers,* the men who trained and groomed the falcons, brave in livery of Lincoln green and gold and riding on small shaggy horses, then, two by two upon their blooded mounts, the gentle folk, each with a hooded hawk perched on his gauntleted left wrist.

Her breath quickened with sudden joy, for in the foremost rank she glimpsed a tall white horse—Pale Death—and striding him in green doublet and russet cloak was Gustav.

Beside him, laughing at some jest he made, a lady rode upon a delicately-pacing palfrey. Tall, elegantly slender, white-skinned, black of hair and black of eye she was, with thin red lips that made her white teeth even whiter as she shrilled to sudden tinkling laughter at her partner's sally. "Well spoken, kinsman, thou must come to court, they would appreciate thy wit there," Else heard her say as they swept past her at a brisk canter.

Pale Death gave her a whinnying greeting and would have turned his soft nose toward her, for she had often fed him tender grasses while he stamped impatiently beneath the rowan tree, but his rider jerked the bridle sharply, dragging him away as he struck spurs into his flanks.

"Gustav, my lord," the girl raised empty, pleading hands, "thou comest not—" Her voice snapped like a broken thread, for the young man glanced down at her with a look void of recognition as if she had been a roadside bush or boulder.

"Who was the lady riding with the Junker Gustav?" she asked the guardsman lolling on his pike beside the drawbridge.

"It is the Graäfin Elnora von Hernsdorf," the man-at-arms replied negligently. "She is the Junker's cousin and bethrothed. They wed at Michaelmas—"

Three men-at-arms came grinning from the guardroom. They were off duty, and the summer day was young. The pretty chit might prove amusing, though she were as mad as any hare in March.

Else realized her peril. Once they had her inside the castle— Like a doe pursued by greyhounds she fled headlong down the path, the guardsmen's raucous laughter following her like hurled missiles. *"Ach Gott,"* she moaned when she had reached the sanctuary of the forest and regained her breath a little, "he passed me by unheeding as if I had been a stock or stone, his horse knew me, but he—"

A single scarlet word burned in her brain: Witchcraft! Her lord and husband was bewitched. Nothing but an evil spell could make him renounce his pledged word, only witchcraft could have wiped the memory of her kisses from his heart. She must fight fire with fire, she must find a wise woman who could lift the spell from her adored and make him own her as his lawful spouse before the world.

IT WAS Lammas Night, the first night in August, the Feast of Saint Peter's Chains, when witches and warlocks and all the host of those who forswore God and served Beelzebub were gathering for their unclean worship. The sun had gone down

in a riot of wrathful color and dusk had fallen early. The sky was sullen with the weight of rain that would not fall, and from every hilltop blazed the guardian fires the peasants lighted to keep off the witch-brood. Else had been wandering through the forest since the first long shadows had begun to dull the outlines of the trees. Somewhere, she knew, a witches' coven would be meeting, somewhere thirteen lost souls would be giving adoration to the Evil One; she must find them and secure their help. A dozen times she'd thought she heard the skirking of the witches as they cleft the air on flying broomsticks, but each time it had proved a flight of water-fowl flying homeward from their feeding-grounds. Once or twice she thought she heard a witch-hag running through the woods, but when she followed she had found it a red deer or spotted buck that hurried down a by-path of the forest.

At last, footsore and weary, she had sunk to rest beneath the rowan tree where she and Gustav had met in the happy time before he was enchanted. "Oh, good, kind *Herr Teufel,* regard me if it pleaseth thee," she prayed with all the simple trustfulness she would have used in offering a petition to Saint Anne. "I am very tired and most miserable. My wedded husband is spell-bound, and I would have one of thy people lift the spell from him. Lead me to their congregating-place, good Devil, and I shall thank thee very much. Amen."

Like an echo to her closing words she heard a muted drumming, a hurrying, insistent rhythm that beckoned her like a bent finger. She knew the place from which the sound came—the fairy-ring that stood deep in the forest. A dozen times she'd crossed it with half-bated breath, for it was said to be a meeting-place of witches, yet never till that moment had she thought to look there. She ran half stumbling down the trodden woodland path, crashed through the wall of flowering briars that cut her feet and legs until the red blood spurted from them, and came at last with fluttering heart and wide eyes to the border of the clearing.

Upon a flat stone in the center sat a creature robed in red and masked with leather. Deer's antlers crowned his head, and from the falseface that obscured his features swept a long blue beard. One hand was hidden in his scarlet robe, in the other he held a thick club with which he drummed upon the stone, and round him danced a ghastly crew of thirteen forms, half-animal, half-human, wholly evil.

She saw that they had human legs, thin, knob-kneed, spindle-shanked, but from the thighs up they were clad in goatskin, topped with the beasts' heads, haired and horned. In their furred hands each bore black candles which gave a little light but more smoke, and a sharp, unpleasant smell. Round and round the throne they jumped and capered, leaped and danced with squeaking, shrilling cries that made her think of rats caught in a trap.

Scarce daring to draw breath she looked at them with wide-set, staring eyes. She knew now that she could not do it, she dared not! These were votaries of Lucifer the accursed, to speak with them, or even stay to witness their abominations would be—

With a sudden squeaking cry one of the demons darted from the ring, leaped straight at her and seized her by the wrists. Before she realized her plight she had been dragged into the center of the circle with the witches chattering round her, thrusting at her with their flaming candles, threatening her with claw-hooked hands.

"What dost thou at our secret session, maiden?" The seated figure's voice was deep and rumbling, but not angry.

"May it please your worship, good Herr Devil, I was not spying on you," she mustered courage to reply. "I did but seek

for a wise woman who could lift a spell from one I love—"

"What wilt thou pay for such a service?" broke in the masked master of the coven.

"Pay?" she faltered, taken utterly aback. In all her life she had not touched a piece of money; except for the blue linen smock she stood in she had nothing she could call her own. "What can one who has nothing pay, *Meinherr?*" she asked simply.

He laughed, a booming, rumbling laugh which somehow had no mirth in it. "Wilt promise to give anything we ask, no matter what, if we perform this service for thee?" he demanded.

"Yea, good Herr Devil, anything that's mine to give I'll give thee freely, if thou wilt do this for me," she promised.

"'Tis well, tomorrow morning go to Margaretta's hut hard by the water-ford, and do what she commands thee. Speak not to any of thy visit here tonight, or we shall wreak such vengeance on thee that in years to come thy story shall be used to frighten children from their naughtiness." He waved his hand in dismissal, and her captors led her to the margin of the clearing and thrust her out into the briar-patch, where the sharp thorns tore her tender skin until her feet and legs were criss-crossed with bright bloody weals.

OLD Margaretta's hut was dark and dirty and overflowing with the odor of evil. A stuffed and much moth-eaten owl graced the shelf above its fireplace, a black cat with a single eye arched its back and spat at Else as she paused trembling on the threshold of the witch's house.

The mistress of the place was suited to her surroundings. She was clothed in evil-smelling rags no one of which matched any other in weave or color, around her neck was strung a chain of tarnished metal plates, brass rings gleamed dully in her ears and on each finger of her gnarled and dirty hands. As far as Else could discern she had but four teeth, none of which met, and she had been chewing some dark aromatic herb so that the odor of it almost stopped the girl's breath, and discolored spittle ran down from the corners of her withered mouth and made twin lines across her bristly chin.

"Come in, my dear, come in!" she bade in a cracked, cackling voice. "Hast come to pay thy call on Mother Marg; good, kind old Mother Marg?" The laugh accompanying her words was anything but good and kind, and Else would have turned and fled had not the old hag grasped her by the wrist with such a grip that she was almost fainting from the pain when finally she sank down on a stool before the empty fireplace.

"And what can Mother Marg do for thee, my sweet pigeon?" asked the crone when Else, after two attempts, found that she could not speak for very fear and loathing of her hostess.

Now her words were loosed, and tearfully she told how she had met Gustav Walpurgis Night, how they had loved and wed, how he had passed her by unseeing and how he purposed to be false to his vows and take his cousin Elnora to wife.

The old hag listened, nodding understandingly. At last, when Else had completed her recital: "It is his father, the *graf,* who has made him thus, my child," she announced. "He has cast a spell upon his son and wiped all recollection of his marriage from his mind—"

"The Graf von Hohenneitschütz a warlock?" Else asked incredulously. "One so noble, one so high—"

"Eh, eh, thou'd be surprised at those who worship at the witch's altar, and at the things the noble Graf von Hohenneitschütz knows," the beldame answered with another cackle.

Which was quite true, for nearly every noble in the empire those days had his favo-

rite sorcerer or witch, and as for Johann Hohenneitschütz—the old witch Margaretta had once been young and pretty, and he had met her in the *grünwald,* wooed, won and left her empty-hearted. Like father like son, the hag reflected as she nodded at her tearful visitor. He had taken all and given nothing. Now to strike him through his son, his dearest treasure—

"Hast anything of thy true love's?" she asked abruptly. "A lock of his sweet hair, belike, or the handkerchief with which he wiped his dainty face—"

"Thou'lt—thou'lt give it back to me?" asked Else tremulously as she reached into her bosom and drew out the linen sack in which she kept a ringlet clipped from Gustav's hair.

"Of course, I will, thou silly little fool!" the hag replied as she snatched at the treasure. "I do but want it that I may attune my spell to him. When I am done thou'rt welcome to it. Now begone, and come not here again until I send for thee!"

That night old Margaretta made magic. Out of candle wax filched from the parish church when none was looking she made a poppet, a doll with features strangely like the features of the Junker Gustav Hohenneitschütz, and with cloth chopped from her rag dress she clothed it in doublet and hose and painted blue eyes in its face and red lips on its mouth. Finally, upon its head she set the lock of Gustav's hair and combed and curled it till it fell in clustering ringlets round the neck.

This done, she laid the image on her clean-swept hearth and knelt beside it while she said six *Parternosters* backward and summoned her familiars:

Black spirits, white spirits,
Spirits brown and gray,
Hear me, heed me, give me what I pray:
May this wax be as his heart,
May he feel my baneful dart,
May his flesh and spirit part
At thy dread command!

She drew blood from her wrist and made a ruddy circle round the supine image, then, with a smile so terrible it would have frightened Satan, drove a long pin slowly through the waxen figure's middle. "As this poppet wounds, so may you be wounded, Gustav Hohenneitschütz; as this wastes away, so may your bones and blood and body waste away to nothingness; may you suffer torments never-ceasing till you wait for death as the bridegroom waits the coming of the bride."

Slowly, very slowly, with the science of a surgeon and the neat precision of a torturer, she thrust the cruel pin deeper and more deeply in the yielding wax.

And, recites the chronicle, it was at that precise moment that Johann Georg Ulric Mathias von Hohenneitschütz und von Ketlar clapped both hands to his right side and fell face-forward to the floor in a groaning-fit. Leeches came post-haste, but though they rubbed him with a salve made from the fat of weasels mixed with badgers' blood and dosed him liberally with the ashes of burned toads mixed in white wine with moss scraped from a murderer's skull his pains increased, so that the doctors were dismissed and an exorcist sent for. Even this proved unavailing. The patient lapsed into a coma on the second day, and never regained consciousness.

The cry of witchcraft was raised forthwith, and the officers of justice went from house to house, arresting all who could by any chance be deemed in league with Satan, old Margaretta among them.

Her case was hopeless from the start. The one-eyed black cat, the stuffed owl, the waxen image with the bodkin thrust into its midriff would have been evidence enough to send her to the stake on charges of black sorcery even if she had not made a full confession of her sins.

Of course, she did not damn herself without persuasion. The thumbscrews proved inadequate, for she was very strong

and very stubborn, but when her legs and arms had been disjointed by the rack, her feet crushed in the boot and hot lead poured upon her naked belly she broke down and confessed fully, naming all her witch-companions in the cavern and saying she had worked her mischief on the *graf* at the behest of Else the goose-girl.

Else lay upon a straw-stuffed mattress, and though it was an afternoon in torrid August and the logs heaped in the wide-mouthed fireplace before which she lay flamed with almost blistering heat, she shivered as if she had been exposed to a December blast. Three men looked down on her as she lay there, three learned doctors of the law, two in the black stuff gowns with fur hoods marking them as civil justices, the third in the black cassock and white scapular of an ecclesiastic. "This is thy full and free confession, woman, made without fear and with no hope of favor?" asked the chief magistrate.

"Yea, good, my lord, the words are mine," she whimpered.

"*Is gut.* Subscribe it." He tendered her a quill pen dipped in ink.

"I cannot, *Exzellenz;* I have no schooling—"

"*Jawohl,*" the judge spread the parchment upon a table and wrote her name in a fair hand. "Make thou a cross mark here"—he pointed to a spot above the signature—"we will bear witness to thy mark."

Slowly, painfully, she drew the pen across the cracking parchment in a wavering X. Her hands were bandaged, and as she moved them a drop or two of blood oozed from the linen bands and fell upon the document. The justice nodded to the leather-aproned executioner who stood in readiness and at the signal dropped upon his knees beside the girl and held a bowl of meat soup with an egg in it to her lips. "Drink, *mädchen,*" he whispered, "'twill give thee strength."

The judges put their heads together, reading through the statement she had signed. They made little deprecating noises with their tongues against their teeth as they perused the document, for in it she admitted that she was a witch and the consort of witches; that she had enchanted the Junker Gustav by devilish arts; that her story of their marriage was a monstruous lie; that she, in concert with the self-accused witch Margaretta, had connived by prayers and supplications to the Evil One to bring about the death of Johann Georg Ulric Mathias von Hohenneitschütz und von Ketlar.

When they had first arrested her she told her story with an artless fearlessness. Gustav was her lord and adored husband, they had been wed according to the rites of Holy Church, she loved him better than her life and only sought old Margaretta's help because she thought he was bewitched. No, she knew nothing of the witch's spells and magic. What should she, a Christian, know of such things?

They set her hands in the thumbscrews.

"Thou didst bewitch the Junker Gustav by thy wicked arts—thy story of thy marriage to him is a monstrous lie, is't not?"

"Nay, lords, it is the very Gospel truth. We loved each other from the moment that our eyes first met. He wed me out of love and nothing else, for I had nothing I could bring him as a dowry save my love and devotion—"

The judge signed to the executioner, who tightened the thumbkin, and she shrieked and writhed and tried to draw away.

"This story of thy marriage is a wanton's lie, is't not?"

"Nay, *Exzellenz,* it is the truth—O gracious heaven, mercy! Mercy on me, my lords!" as the thumbscrews bit with sudden crushing pressure on her hands again.

Little Else was not made of Spartan

stuff. Old Margaretta stood the torment for a day and night, and even then the rack and boot and molten lead were necessary. Less than an hour's screwing in the thumbkins dragged from Else sobbing assents to their accusations. So, at last, we find her signing a confession in which she admits crimes she never heard or knew of till the magistrates informed her she was guilty of them.

IT WAS a pompous, awe-inspiring scene when they brought her before the court to hear her doom. The judges in their robes of office sat at a long table of age-darkened oak raised three steps from the courtroom floor. Behind them and before the doors and windows stood the halberdiers in leather jerkins and steel helmets, sunlight glinting on the polished heads of their weapons. The Emperor's justicer—the executioner—stood by the steps that led up to the judges' table, and he was in full regalia, habited in red from neck to heels, coiffed and masked in red, and holding on his shoulder his great axe with its red handle and red blade, the gleaming white of whose edge never had been wet save with the blood of men and women.

A crowd of boors had gathered in the hall of jutsice, and at sight of Else they broke into a murmurous outcry, but the clamor of the halberd butts on the stone floor brought instant silence, for the halberdiers were not slow to rap for order on the heads of the rabble if their first admonition went unheeded.

She halted before the long table, and the president of the court rose facing her, a parchment scroll in his hands. Before him on the table lay a light wand of dried willow, and her face went paler at the sight, for well she knew what it portended.

A pause ensued which seemed as long to her as an eternity, then she heard her sentence pronounced: That the self-confessed witch and murderess be dragged by the hair of her head to the gallows in the public square and there be flogged with knotted ropes until she die, and afterward that her body be burned to ashes."

As he finished the judge took up the willow wand and beckoned to someone waiting in the shadow of the arras. Dressed all in black, with falls of white lace at his throat and wrists, the Junker—now the Count—Gustav . Hohenneitschütz stepped up to the bench, took the light stick from the judge and crossed the little space that separated him from Else. She raised her bandaged hands imploringly to him. "Gustav—husband, lord—adored lover—"

He looked full in her tear-brimmed loving eyes and nothing moved in his face. It was as if he looked at a stone thing that had no power to look back. Holding the wand by each end he raised it over her head, snapped it in two and flung the pieces on the floor at her feet. This was to signify that as the wood was broken in two parts so should her soul and body be severed in the furtherance of justice. As Count of the Mark Gustav had the right to perform this ceremony, for Else had been his serf, and he was giving her up to the Kaiser for execution.

He turned upon his heel, but as he moved away she pointed at him with one maimed hand and spoke the first unkind words she had ever uttered in her sixteen years of life:

"False! False to thy pledged word and plighted troth art thou, Gustav von Hohenneitschütz. Flogged I may be till I die, but I shall last to scourge thee for thy perfidy, and never shalt thou call another wife—" Then the jeering of the rabble drowned her words and she was led back to her cell to wait the morning and her death.

Despite the sentence passed upon her,

it seems she did not suffer greatly. More merciful than judge or priest or husband, the executioner, whose business was to kill and torture, struck her on the head with a club ere he dragged her to the gallows, so what hung swinging by bound wrists beneath the flailing of the flogging-ropes was nothing but a corpse.

THE bride and bridegroom stood before the altar, and Brother Josef waited to unite them. Young Count Gustav was smiling as he took his cousin's slim white hand in his. All was well, exceedingly well, with him. His father, for whom he had never had much real affection, was dead and one might hope well on his way to heaven by this time; he was about to wed the Gräfin Elnora von Hernsdorf, one of the richest heiresses in all the Rhineland, and an orphan with no brothers or sisters. He had escaped the toils of a romantic mistake, Else—and the child—were ashes now.

All that stood in his way had been burned with them. The past was really nothing to him. He could just open his hands and let it slip away. He was striding ahead into the future—

The priest's low, droning admonition broke through his pleasant musings: "—if any man can show just cause why these two should not be wedded—" What was the matter with good Brother Josef? His face was drawn, his eyes were staring, there was a horrid moisture on his brow.

He looked from the priest to his bride. She was staring past him, face fright-frozen, lurking terror wakening to life in her wide eyes. *Herr Gott,* was everybody gone stark, staring mad? He swung about to see what they looked at.

Stark panic clutched him by the throat; terror hammered at his will, for, near enough to touch him, Else stood at his elbow, bandaged hands held out implor-ingly, as she had held them out to him before he broke the wand of doom above her head.

There was no anger in her glance, but oh! her lovely eyes were tragic in her white, set face. Hope was dead and sorrow mourned in them.

"*Mein Gott, Du*—thou?" he gasped. "Back from the grave—the fire—to haunt me with—" The broken words died on his lips, for she had taken the hemp girdle from her waist and swung it like a lash against his face.

He felt the stinging bite of it, but greater than the pain the horror of it struck him, overwhelmed him. "I shall last to scourge thee for thy perfidy," she'd said, and now—O, gracious heaven!—she was doing it.

He staggered from the altar steps, ran stumbling toward the chapel door—ah, but he could not run! His feet seemed cased in leaden boots, he could not make them do his bidding. Slowly, like a man who wades breast-high in water, he moved toward the doorway, and step by step the spectral shape kept pace with him, lashing, beating, scourging—

He woke at last as from a nightmare. He was in bed and Brother Josef was at-tending him. Elnora? She had left the castle, gone back to her home, they told him.

Had he been ill? Yes, very ill, and he was still too weak to rise. He must rest quietly—"Father," he asked feebly of the priest, "is there forgiveness for me?"

"*Was sagst Du, mein sohn*—what hast thou done?"

"She—it was true, Father. Else did not lie when she declared I was her wedded husband. I married her and then repented of my bargain. I thought that I could face her down—who would believe a peasant woman's word—" Half sobbing, half raving in delirium, he told the sordid story of their pitiful, brief romance while the little priest stood by with horror

mounting in his eyes. At last: "Can I find absolution, Father?" he besought.

"I—I do not know, my son. The girl was condemned for a witch and murderess, and though she pleaded for the last rites of the church they were denied her. She died unshriven. It may be that they fate is linked with hers throughout eternity, that not until she finds release canst thou look for redemption."

Gustav groaned and turned his face to the wall. He did not answer when the priest spoke to him. Later, when they came to rouse him to take nourishment, they found that he was dead.

He must have been a man of parts, this Brother Josef. Certainly he was a skilled sculptor, as the Calvary he carved and set up at the crossroads testifies. It was he who carved the legend "Pray for Them" upon the shrine, thinking in the simple goodness of his heart that those who knelt and said a prayer by it might offer a petition not alone for Gustav, but for the wife he had renounced and betrayed to her death. And on the tomb where they laid Gustav with the pomp and circumstances befitting his high rank good Brother Josef carved a goose to nestle at the dead knight's feet. He could not put an effigy of Else on her husband's sepulchre, but—she had been a goose-girl—let the symbol stand for her.

BROTHER AMBROSE had attached a letter to the manuscript:

My very good, kind friend: From what you told me you had witnessed, and what we learn from reading these accounts of the old days, it seems that Gustav Hohenneitschütz is earthbound and doomed to suffer flagellation every Saint John's Eve until the wife whom he renounced and sent to cruel death finds peace within the quiet of the grave. They would not let her be absolved before she died, but she had the desire and intention. Tomorrow I shall exorcize the Hohenneitschütz chapel, and grant her plenary absolution. Thereafter, every Saint John's Eve I shall say Masses for the rest of their unquiet souls. We cannot know if this will win them rest eternal—all things are with God, my son—but we can try. Will not you come with me and help me in the rite of exorcism?

Nothing could have pleased me more, but next morning a field clerk handed me an order typed in triplicate stating that I would proceed to Saint Nazaire. There was of course, no telephone by which I could reach Brother Ambrose, nor could I stop to call on him. I sent an orderly with a note —and another tin of tobacco—but could not wait for his answer.

My letters to him all came back. Perhaps they moved him to another convent, maybe the postmen didn't try to deliver them.

Things were pretty chaotic in the last days of the Weimar Republic.

Did he bring peace and rest to those two troubled shades, or does poor little Else still come to the Hohenneitschütz chapel every Saint John's Eve and lash her faithless lover through the long night from sunset to cock-crow? Does she still weep soft, compassionate tears as she lays on the scourge, and does she heal him with the kiss she gives him when they part at last, he to go back to his tomb-sleep for another year, she to go—who knows where?

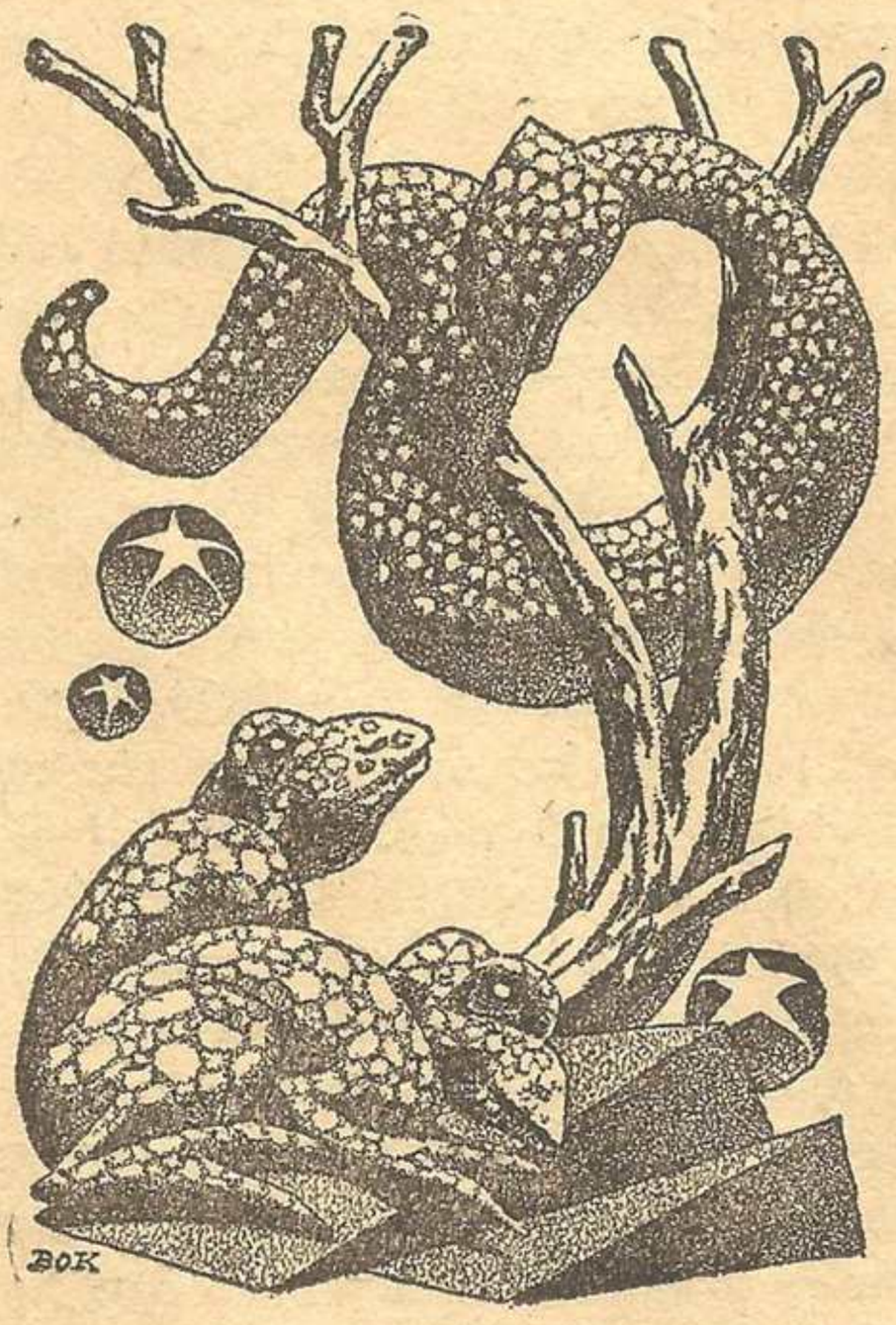
The Ballad of Lalune

By LESLYN MACDONALD

THE grey worms blinked at the little green frogs,
And the pale mists rose from the age-old bogs,
Shrouding the trees in perpetual fogs,
And this is the tale of Lalune,
Lalune,
And this is the tale of Lalune.

Her white robe dragged on the dank, sour ground
And the will-of-the-wisp fires circled her round,
While her hurrying feet made never a sound
To tell that there passed Lalune,
Lalune,
To tell that there passed Lalune.

Her eyes were topaz, her hair was bronze,
Her step was light as a frightened fawn's
As she went through this place of colorless dawns,
The fair feckless lady Lalune,
Lalune,
The fair, feckless lady Lalune.



Over and over she muttered The Word,
Searching in vain for the purple bird,
And her own voice the only sound to be heard,
The low, sobbing voice of Lalune,
Lalune,
The low, sobbing voice of Lalune.

Why does she seek in this place of shame,
Why does she call on that blasphemous name,
Why is she followed by quivering flame?
And what is the curse of Lalune,
Lalune,
And what is the curse of Lalune?

Forever she moves in this grim charmed trance,
Forever she seeks with her terrified glance,
And forever about her these fires must dance,
The ghostly, immortal Lalune,
Lalune,
The ghostly, immortal Lalune.

THE EYRIE

The Lovecraft Tradition

AUGUST DERLETH and Donald Wandrei, co-discoverers of *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward,* tell here of Lovecraft's working methods—and how they put his story together.

When I first visited Lovecraft at Providence in the summer of 1927, he showed me among other things the ms. of a long story which he had just written. This was "Ward." He had spent months writing it, but he simply refused to type it over for submission to magazines. He hated to typewrite anything, even a letter. The length of that particular story made the task seem superhuman, for him. At the time I was just learning how to operate a typewriter; I therefore proposed to gain experience by practising on his story. He agreed with alacrity, and I brought the ms. back to St. Paul with me.

Then I discovered the full magnitude of what I had let myself in for. The story was written in longhand on the reverse side of letters he had received, some 130 or 140 sheets of all sizes and colors. He didn't believe in margins or "white space." Every sheet was crowded from top to bottom, from left edge to right, with his small, cramped handwriting. That was his original draft; you can imagine what happened when he got through revising, words and sentences crossed out or written in, whole paragraphs added, inserts put on the back of the sheet where they got tangled up with the letters from his correspondents, and the inserts themselves rewritten with additional paragraphs to be put in the insert which was to be put in its proper place in the story. Lovecraft's handwriting was not easy to read under the best of circumstances; he had his own peculiarities of spelling, often used Latin and Greek phrases, and often used coined words of his own. These made the problem of deciphering his complex puzzle-pages even more difficult. All in all, working after my classes at the U., it took me four months to get through the labyrinth.

My typescript was doubtless loaded with errors. When he received it, he may have decided that it would take as much time and trouble to correct my typescript as it would to retype it. At any rate, there is no evidence that he took either step, or that he ever sent the story to any editor in any form.

After Lovecraft's death, when we were collecting all the Lovecraft stories, published and unpublished, we located "Ward" in the possession of R. H. Barlow and secured its loan. When the package came, there were the pages I had typed many years ago, but, to our consternation, only the first thirteen pages; and there was the original ms., but, to our greater consternation, less than half of it. After much correspondence, we decided that the rest of the ms. had been lost beyond any hope of recovery. Thus it was that "The Outsider And Others" was published over a year ago without this major Lovecraft story. Recently, however, we received from the same source the remainder of the ms. which had somehow been separated and mislaid. We at once were able to verify it as the complete ms. And by this time we had a typist skilled in reading

Lovecraft's handwriting; even so, it took another two months to prepare a fresh typescript and to proofread it minutely.

That "Ward" should be published first in WEIRD TALES is natural and fitting. The great majority of Lovecraft's tales appeared originally in WEIRD TALES; and to many of us who have read the magazine since its first issue the word *Lovecraft* and WEIRD TALES are almost synonyms. It was chiefly through WEIRD TALES that Lovecraft won recognition as being preëminent in his field, and, by his creation of the "Cthulhu" mythology, came to exert a broad influence on other writers. "Ward" is one of the earliest stories in which he used the "Cthulhu" mythology.

After his first tales, there began to develop in his later ones a curious coherence, a myth pattern so convincing that readers began to explore libraries and museums for certain imaginary titles of Lovecraft's own creation. Probably the best known of these imaginary titles is the *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred. "Yog-Sothoth" and "Cthulhu" were two of the entities or Old Ones in his mythology which were often used by other writers. It was in "The Call of Cthulhu," originally published in WEIRD TALES, that this Cthulhu Mythology first became fully apparent. Lovecraft himself wrote in a letter, "—all my stories, unconnected as they may be, are based on the fundamental lore or legend that this world was inhabited at one time by another race who, in practising black magic, lost their foothold and were expelled, yet live on outside ever ready to take possession of this earth again—" In later stories in WEIRD TALES, like "The Dunwich Horror" and "The Whisperer in Darkness," he continued to develop the Cthulhu Mythology around the mysterious and terrible Old Ones who live on outside, and the secret rites and suppressed magic books that are the only surviving links to them.

It will indeed be a pleasure to see "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" in print in the magazine where H. P. L. would most have wanted to see it published—thus rounding out the Lovecraft tradition and the Cthulhu Mythology.

Invitation to Future Lovecrafts

There's a welcome on the mat here to new writers—those authors who are now completely unknown, in the weird field at any rate, but who are capable of growing into regular WT contributors.

In the past WEIRD TALES has developed unknown writers who are today the prime favorites of all fantasy and science fiction readers. To find those authors—unrecognized today, but who will grow in the same way during the years to come—we'd like our readers, and all writers everywhere, to know that *every* story is assured of the most careful and considerate reading; known and unknown authors alike are given the same attention.

If you have a weird tale, or an idea for one, up your sleeve, why not tell us about it? Who knows—you may be the Lovecraft of the future!

Uplifting

Mrs. Pearl Kwookala writes from Grand River, Ohio:

I had to go to Mexico City, D. F. And on my way home I purchased WEIRD TALES. I think it is a very nice book. There are some very interesting things in it that uplifts us and our imagination from these very troublesome times. I shall do all I can to introduce your book to my friends.

Any Lovecraft Photos in Existence?

Robert Rosen writes from the Bronx, New York:

I have been a reader of WT for some seven years, and in that period I have had the pleasure of reading the superb creations of H. P. Lovecraft. His passing has left an unfillable gap in the ranks of creative fantasy literature, and it has been my unquenchable desire to secure a photograph of this great man. If you can in any way assist me in the securing of same, I will be in your gratitude always.

If anyone happens to know of any HPL pictures—how about letting us know? We could tell readers about it in the next issue—so that anyone who wanted a picture would know where to get hold of one.

Weird Tales Omnibus?

Mr. H. S. Scarritt writes from Hutton Park, West Orange, New Jersey:

I have often wondered why you have never gotten out a *Weird Tales Omnibus*. I imagine that you have a sufficient following to make this successful, and that by conducting a poll among your older subscribers, or perhaps a contest of some sort, you could arouse considerable interest and doubtless secure a substantial number of advance orders.

After having read the magazine for some years, there are a few stories that stand out in my mind, that I would like to have, and this must be so with many others. It would make a good gift book, for the summer vacationist, next Christmas, and so on.

What do you think of Mr. Scarritt's suggestion? The idea of such an omnibus has come up for consideration on various occasions. Why not let us have your ideas on the subject?

Weird Tales Quarterly?

And from Quincy, Mass., Harold F. Keating writes:

Thinking it over, wouldn't it be wonderful, every three months, to find a WEIRD TALES QUARTERLY? With full page drawings by Harry Ferman, Hannes Bok, and Margaret Brundage. Stories by the incomparable Seabury Quinn, Edmond Hamilton, Eli Colter, Greye La Spina, Robert Bloch, Clark Ashton Smith, August W. Derleth, Dorothy Quick, Mary Elizabeth Counselman, Carl Jacobi? But what a vision this is! If you could put this up to your readers, and only print the amount actually subscribed for in advance, you might be able to do it, without counting on newsstand wastage. I wonder just how many would subscribe to this idea?

Harold Keating seems to have a rather similar idea to Mr. Scarritt's. We'd appreciate your opinions on both these suggestions.

Half Melted Music

From New York, Charles Hidley writes:

. . . a most intriguing simile was Brown's in the Astrakhan Hat story describing Arabic script as half melted music . . . and Miss Sloan gave chilling atmosphere to her horrible cat yarn—the parting grass and glowing eyes and materializations were really scary!

Bewitched!

The author of *There Are Such Things* writes a sidelight on his story's background—the age of a "thousand years without a bath"!

IT HAS been suggested that the scene at the witch's Lammas Night meeting and the incantation of old Mother Marg in *There Are Such Things* seem rather childish and slightly silly. I concur in this criticism, but like a lawyer entering a plea in confession and avoidance, defend my story by replying that (judged by modern standards) the whole structure of Medieval witchcraft was silly and childish, and that the learned judges, both lay and ecclesiastical, who sent the witches to the stake or gallows were themselves more than a little ridiculous.

On the other hand it is unjust and rather silly to judge anything pertaining to the Middle Ages by comparison with modern standards. The Medieval period—placed for convenience, but not very accurately, between the fall of Rome in 476 A.D. and the discovery of America in 1492—was an age of almost unbelievable ignorance, dirtiness and superstition, and all classes of society fairly wallowed in these undesirable qualities. Outside the churchmen and a few students at the universities hardly anyone could read, and even ability to scratch one's name laboriously was considered a great achievement.

Philosophers were concerned with such weighty matters as "How many angels can dance at once on the point of a needle?" Earth, sky and sea were peopled with a multitude of demons and hobgoblins, and no story or "wonder" was so fantastic or obviously absurd that it did not meet with immediate and wide acceptance. Those who doubted held their peace, and wisely, for the rack and stake were waiting (though not patiently) for scoffing skeptics.

Contrary to general modern belief physical development was at a low ebb. Malnutrition, either from actual starvation or unbalanced diet, was the rule in all orders of society, and few modern men of even fair physique could crowd themselves into such authentic suits of

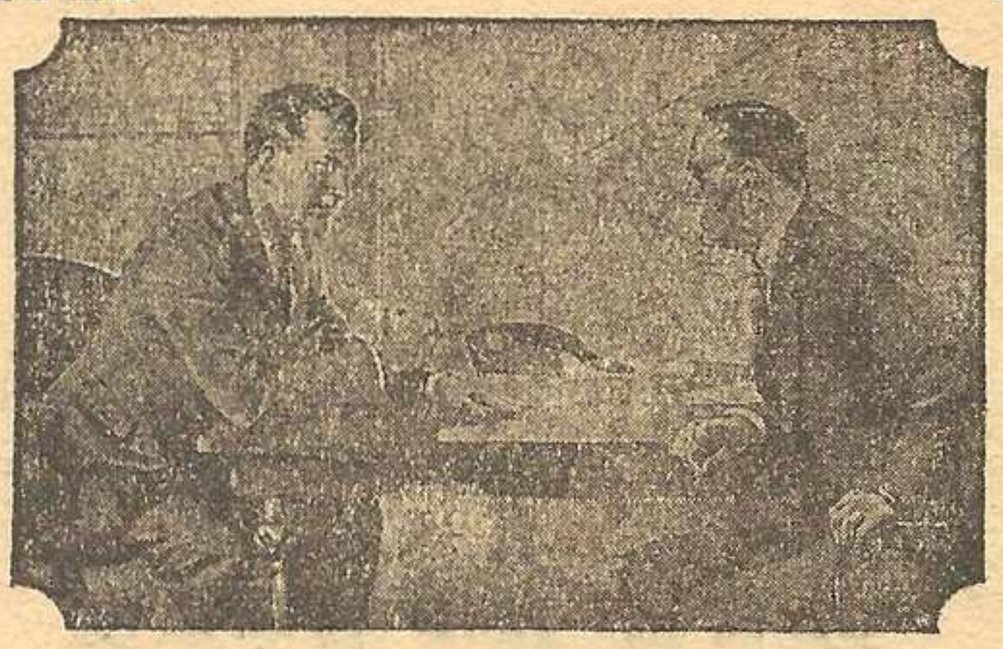
Medieval armor as have been preserved to us. Mental development was on as low a plane.

In a time when illiteracy was well-nigh universal, witchcraft spells, charms, invocations and evocations were of necessity transmitted by word of mouth and reduced to rhyme to aid remembering. Crude, unlettered people composed crude, inelegant verse, hence the crudity—or, if you prefer, the childishness and silliness—of the spells recited by the witches who were, after all, drawn from the dregs of a woefully depressed society.

The gatherings of witches (sabbats) were the recreation of child-minded people. Silly? Of course. But just as the modern lad of five or six who sticks a feather in his hair and jumps around and yells, imagines himself to be an awe-inspiring spectacle of an Indian brave performing a war dance, so did the poor, ignorant, childish peasant man and woman imagine themselves figures of terror when they changed their customary rags for a cape of goat skin and danced about the stone or stump on which their "devil" was enthroned.

They knew no language but their own, and that imperfectly. Five hundred, or even fewer, words composed an adequate vocabulary for the peasant. But when they pranced and jabbered in their "orgies" at the sabbat the homely words were insufficient for the grand occasion, so they devised a "language of hell" —a sort of double talk which was entirely meaningless, but satisfied their longing for "strange, unearthly words."

The witches' sabbat seems to have been a dull, childish and altogether innocent meeting. Most of the descriptions of sacreligious ceremonies were "confessed" by accused witches under torture. Knowing they could purchase surcease of their torment only by telling their accusers horrifying and fantastic stories of the doings of the coven, they drew on their imagination freely. Probably the most inspired fiction of the age was that inspired by the rack, the strappado and the thumbscrew. For real sacrilege and the horrors of the Black Mass we have to go to the more refined and cultured period of the Renaissance or even the France of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan, or to such outstanding nobles



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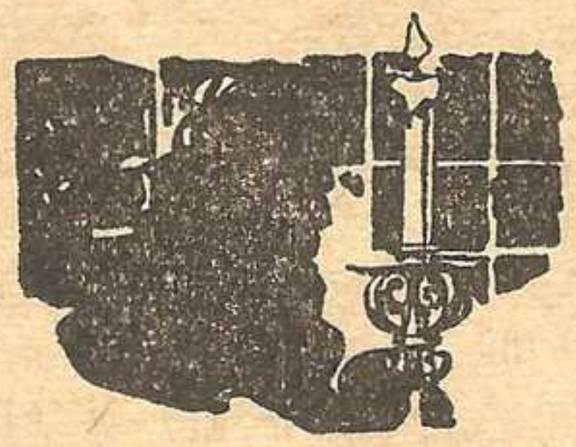
as Gilles de Rais (1440), marshal of France, who certainly rated mention in the social Blue Book of his day. The simple witches of the rural districts would have been as horrified by such goings on as were the judges.

A word about "poppets." Traditionally these were made from drippings or butts of blessed candles filched from the church. These were hard come by, accordingly the



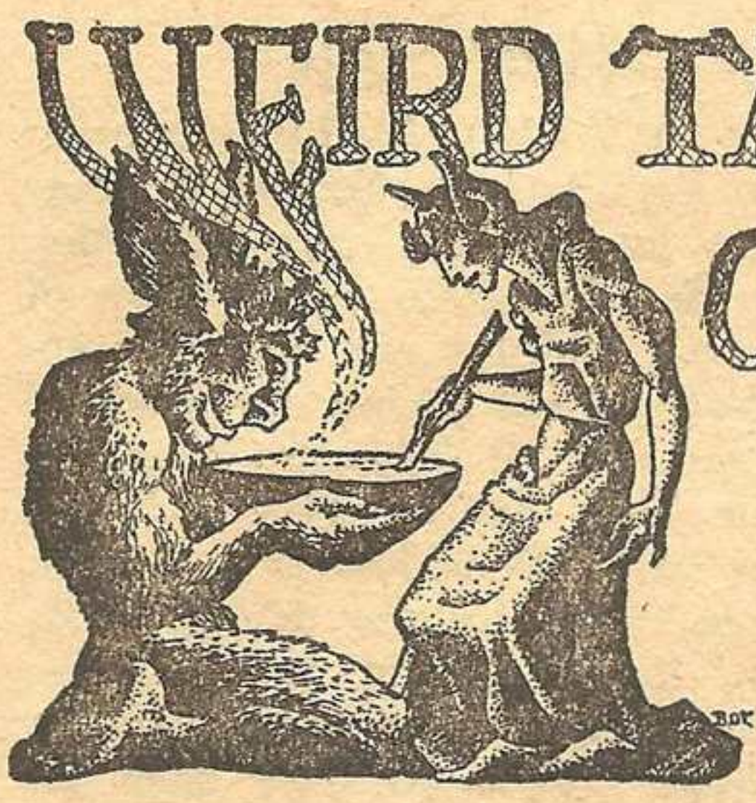
poppets were of small stature. Dough could be used if wax were not available, but in an age when starvation grinned with bare-boned malice through every peasant's window flour was not lightly to be expended, even for purposes of witchcraft.

"Sympathetic magic"—the killing or injury of an enemy *in absentia* by doing violence to his image or picture is as old as man. Paleolithic man drew a crude likeness of the animal he intended hunting on his cave wall, then harangued it, telling what he was going to do. That done, he set out for the hunt serene in the belief that he would bag his game, for he had intimidated it and made it less fleet or fierce by the "magic" he had worked beforehand. The modern lover who kisses his sweetheart's photograph is practicing a sort of sympathetic magic in reverse, so is the man who anoints his head with bear's grease—the bear is a hairy animal, hence he who rubs its fat on his head will grow or retain a fine suit of hair.

Books could be—and have been—written on the subject of Medieval witchcraft, but it all boils down to a rather silly and childish business, though often it lacks the sweet innocence of childhood, and there is nothing laughable in its silliness.

My job, and the job of every writer who takes himself at all seriously, is to give as faithful a presentation of the time and place of which he writes as he can; not to gloss or tint or color it, but to try to mirror it. That I have tried to do in *There Are Such Things*.

SEABURY QUINN.



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Eddie Clever.

New Cumberland, Pa.

A Peridromophilist

I am twenty-three years old and am a peridromophilist. That sounds as though it might be in the category of a werewolf or something, but it just means that I study street railway transportation and collect information and data concerning this industry. I never indulge in this on stormy nights, however, as they are reserved for WEIRD TALES. May the day come soon when you are again a monthly!

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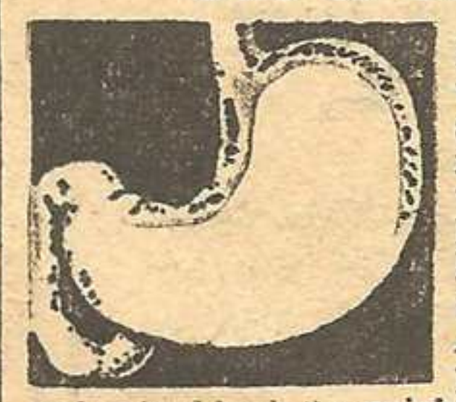

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"The Insiders" Write

Our last notice in WEIRD TALES about us "Insiders" (The Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society) netted us four visitors—one interesting young lady from San Francisco, as a matter of fact—but this is not enuf for our voracious appetites! We've had present during our near-175 meetings celebrities you all know, such as Dr. Keller, who wrote "The Solitary Hunters," and a dozen others; the "World-Saver" himself, Edmond Hamilton, Henry Kuttner, Hannes Bok, Arthur J. Burks, Robert Bloch, Ralph Milne Farley, Eando Binder, and others truly "too numerous to mention." Featured have been art exhibits of original oil, pastel, water-color and pen-and-ink work by Brundage, Bok, Ferman, and many more. A large library containing many back issues of WEIRD TALES is available to members. A number of "fanmags" are published locally. So climb out of your coffins, guys; get the ghoul-friends; or bring the skeleton-in-the-closet as a visitor; but come to our meetings! Held first four Thursdays every month in the Brown Room of Clifton's Cafeteria, 648 S. Broadway, downtown Los Angeles, Calif., starting 7:30.

Sinceyriely,

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I'd also be tickled to death with one of Hannes Bok's skillfully designed membership cards.

And now back to my copy of WEIRD TALES. It's tops on my list of magazine recreation.

Yours for more thrills and chills,

E. James Allard, Jr.

50 Cottage Street,
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Travels—with W.T.

Though I have been reading WEIRD TALES since it was first published, this is my first letter to this most wonderful magazine. A sailor's life is prosaic, the same thing day after day. With a copy of WEIRD TALES and my radio I can travel from this mundane world into the far-off realms of fancy. Although I'm only a novice in the line of deep thinking and the various arts that go to make up the study of Black Magic, I would like to learn more.

We just returned from the Far East. Our ship visited Manila, Shanghai and Hong Kong.

I would like to receive some letters from sailors, soldiers and marines as I am an ex-gob. They can reach me at either one of these two addresses.

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Are there no WEIRD TALES readers in Astoria, Long Island, N. Y.?

I would enjoy to discuss unusual things and weird ideas with a science-fictionally-minded person of any age.

I also wish to join WEIRD TALES CLUB and possibly get in touch with some of WEIRD TALES readers.

Weirdly yours,

Joseph Jirinec.

22-35 Twenty-ninth Street
Astoria, Long Island, N. Y.

Clue to Truth

Since I joined your WEIRD TALES CLUB some months ago, in an earnest endeavor to contact minds who have the same serious conviction that there are certain so-called psychic phenomena that are directly an indication of and a guide to the real truth underlying all our own lives and of all Nature around us, I have had real reason to believe that there are some very earnest seekers and thinkers interested in your WEIRD TALES CLUB for the same reason I am, and who find in your magazine not only real recreation for their leisure hours, but a very real clue to minds that are seekers after truth like themselves. For I have made some very interesting and sincere contacts—and I am grateful to your club as the medium through which these contacts were brought about.

May you keep up your good work, and may both your work and yourself have all the benefits and blessings that the New Year may be able to bring you.

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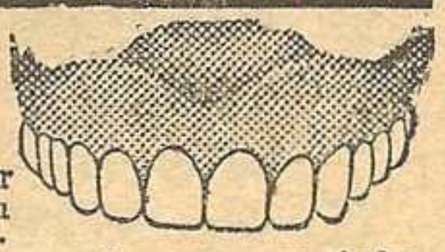

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