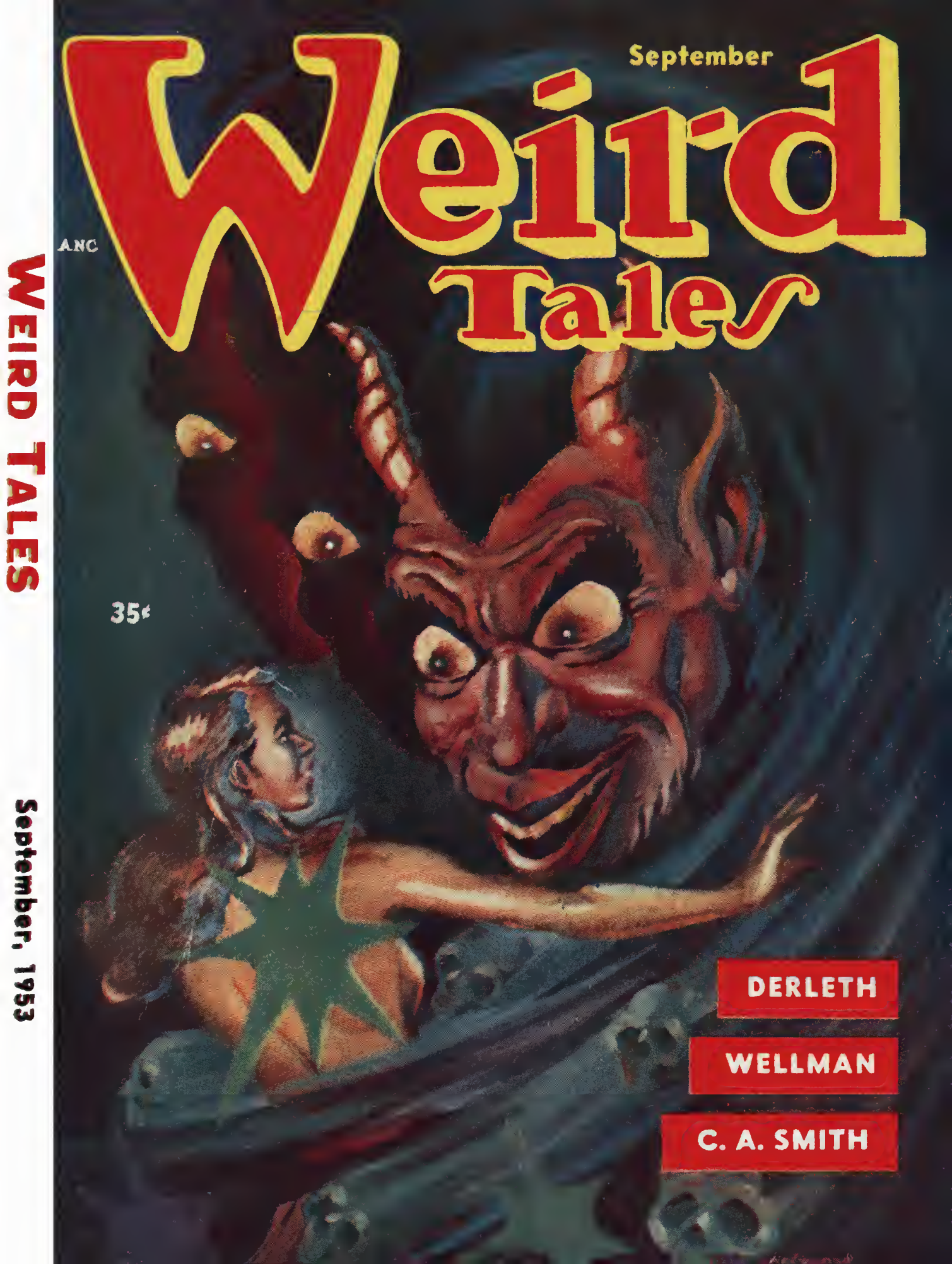
September
Weird Tales
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35¢
DERLETH
WELLMAN
C. A. SMITH
WEIRD TALES
September, 1953

We have with us:—

AUGUST DERLETH We can tell you the title and issue of August Derleth's first story in WEIRD TALES, but we can't tell you how many tales of his we have printed between that date and the story in this issue. A goodly lot and a lot of good ones.

Derleth writes us on Arkham House paper—Arkham House being his own publishing concern among many, many other activities.

"On April 1, 1926 my first story appeared in WEIRD TALES. It was a shocker entitled 'Bat's Belfry,' clearly deriving from Bram Stoker's 'Dracula'; it had been written at 14, while I was recuperating at my grandmother's house from a case of mumps—a purely fortuitous circumstance which does not seem to have affected the story in any way; but was not sold until sometime later. It was actually the 18th story I had written, and 22 more were written before 'Bat's Belfry' was sold to WEIRD TALES in Sept., 1925. That was the beginning; the end does not seem to be in sight."

EVERIL WORRELL Everil Worrell's story of a hesitant and charming witch appeared in our January issue—"Once There Was a Little Girl." That was Jennifer; in this issue another Worrell witch appears—Miranda. About this Miranda the author says that she was compelled to write, because Jennifer was such a sweet little witch that she found it utterly necessary to do equal justice—or injustice—to a modern witch who really ought to be spelled with a 'B'. So we leave you to Miranda; or Miranda to you, as you will.

Mrs. Worrell also gives us an amusing quote from a letter to her from Ray Bradbury to whom she had written commenting on the patronizing note she had observed in certain reviews of fantasy books. "Yes," wrote Bradbury, "their attitude was not unlike someone walking up to an expert harpist and saying, 'None of that nonsense now; when are you going to learn to play the tuba?' "

KIRK SHAW "The Watcher Awakes" is Mr. Shaw's second story in WEIRD TALES. The first was "The Raft" the grim reality of which won some commendatory letters.

About himself Mr. Shaw tells us in a letter from his native Scotland: "I'm a seafarer and I started short story writing to pass the off watch periods while at sea. Although I write uncanny stories even my greatest enemy could never call me 'spooky'. I'm short, fair, stocky and Scottish (I gave up the kilt when I left school—too cold) and I have just started to slide past the thirty mark. I am married, and despite the fact that I am a sailor it was to the girl next door. We have two blonde little girls, one 3½, the other nine months.

"I left school and joined the merchant service on the outbreak of the war, had my share of bombs and torpedoes, then like the bad penny came through safely, and have sailed the world ever since.

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Cover by JON ARFSTROM

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D. McILWRAITH, *Editor*

Familiar—"one bound by a supernatural law of servitude."

I Loved Her With My Soul

BY EVERIL WORRELL

IF I COULD have known her for what she was in the beginning, would the end have been different? I imagine that a great many men have asked themselves that question. But a merciful God, the mysterious laws that sustain the universe against chaos, or just the law of averages must prevent the appearance on earth of many such women as Miranda.

I think not many such have walked the earth since the days of Lilith. There have been traffickers in black magic always, and only those who scoff at the existence of anything not to be weighed and measured in their laboratories would care to deny that their cults continue. But black magic should not be allied to beauty. Old hags, warlocks, medicine men and voodoo priests—barbarians with feathers and nose rings—these are its fitting exponents.

And, Miranda! That beauty is not the word for her strange charm, I know. It would take a master of words to describe that. I can say only that it was enough to deprive me of my soul, as it had deprived other men before me. Her pitiful husband, for instance.

I ought to have shunned her from the first occasion of our meeting, even if I did not denounce her. Ina knew—Ina with the clever eyes and the faithful heart of a good, loyal child. And I saw, that evening at the ambassador's reception, exactly what Ina saw: the simple, obvious, and utterly damning fact of murder.

That is—my eyes saw. But they had already seen Miranda. It would be easy for me now to say that the woman was a witch, and that I could not help myself, but it would not be true. I think there is always a choice. One does not lose one's soul so easily. It isn't necessary to sign your name in a black book with a

quill dipped in your own blood. That isn't the way it is done, in modern times. But the process is as clearcut and definite, and as irreversible, as ever.

I loved her with my soul.

We were at the embassy party because someone had invited Ina to sing there. I had taken her, just as I had taken her to things

Heading by Jon Arfstrom

since our boy and girlhood. I was seven years older than Ina, who now had reached the ripe old age of eighteen. To me she was a combination of kid sister and young comrade-at-arms, knightly squire and page boy, left over from childhood days. Orphaned at three, Ina had come to live with us then. My mother was first Cousin to her father, making us no closer than second cousins, but we were Ina's next of kin.

We Clivedales lived in a huge monstrosity of a house which some romantic ancestor had built on the plan of a medieval castle. The place tinctured my boyish imaginings as far back as I can remember, and I played with wooden swords before I finally got my hands on a fencing blade. When Ina was six and I thirteen, I had her all over bruises; she was my squire and fencing partner, then. When we were sixteen and nine, I combined my first interest in architecture with my love of historical romances, particularly those of the days of knighthood all the way back to King Arthur's court, and I painted and modeled castles surrounded by moats. Ina would sit by the hour, singing to herself in her clear, lovely young voice, watching and making suggestions.

It was in that seventeenth year of mine that I made such a model —it was almost a replica of our home, but it had a moat, and behind the moat a stand of forest on one side, and, stepping delicately and gracefully out of the forest a little clay figurine of a doe. This model won a prize that determined the course of my studies definitely, and it stands on a table in my apartment in the city where my work as an architect established me.

I DREAMED of that doe, before I modeled her. She was the only animal figurine I ever had any success with, although she seemed so all but alive in miniature that for awhile I did try other figures. But the dream must have inspired me. It was vivid enough, and real enough, and seemed to have a poignant significance I could not quite grasp.

In the dream, she walked out of the forest, coming down toward the moat.

Then a horrible thing happened. The doe faltered, shuddered, tossed her head, seeming to pant for breath—and fell lifeless at the very edge of the moat, so that she rolled down, inert and limp, into the quiet water.

I woke, then. And might have forgotten the dream, but for the impulse that made me, next day, set to work on the little lump of clay. It took me the free hours

of a long, happy, idle summer to finish the whole thing: figurine and castle, moat and bit of woodland. By that time I had worked the dream, the vision, call it what you will, into my life.

I told the dream to Ina, and she took it strangely to heart and cried hard—as she had not done since she was a very little girl.

After that summer I was busier, and my studies absorbed me, and that was the last year of my playing knight and squire with Ina, who began even then to grow up in her different way. It was a coincidence, I supposed, that she found work in the same city to which I had come as a budding architect, and yet perhaps it wasn't quite that. Ina had always given me a child's hero worship, and she continued to do it; and I had always loved her and tolerated her when she tagged a little too closely, and there were opportunities for studying voice and music in the city, and after all it was near home for us both.

Anyway we had been established there for all of a year before the evening of the party, Ina living in a girls' club, working and studying, and beginning to receive invitations to sing—as on that night.

Never mind the name of the embassy. The party was in honor of a Mr. and Mrs. Dale Nugent, who had been attached to the American embassy in one of the little mid-European countries and who had come home after five years abroad.

Ina sang beautifully. She looked like a little girl—I believed she always would. I couldn't imagine Ina really growing up, though I knew my incredulity on that score was strangely annoying to her. She was wearing a fluffy, filmy gown of pale pink shot with glimmering golden threads, and had a kind of golden, woven snood on her fair hair, which curled naturally down to the nape of her neck, at which length it stopped. Her eyes were so dark a blue that excitement made them black. It occured to me for the first time that she was very fond of me indeed, and I was very fond of her, and after all, we were only second cousins! I listened to her, and wondered that I had not thought of these things before, and a kind of happy lightness seemed to possess me, as though the champagne cocktails had been made of something more ethereal, something that had the magic power to link all the best elements of childhood and manhood so that life became for just that moment a fairyland thing come true.

For just that moment.

Before the song ended, I heard

behind me the slight commotion of late arrivals slipping in quietly. As the applause began, a man and woman were being seated beside me—and directly behind Mrs. Nugent, the lady just returned from near Hungary. I saw that the man was rather thin and pale, with the eyes of a man who works or worries too many hours and sleeps too few. I saw the woman. I was introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Adam Wallace, and they were introduced to Mrs. Nugent, and to the others sitting and standing near. Ina came to sit in the vacant seat on my other side, and she met them also, and there were compliments on Ina's singing and Ina's songs. The Villanelle, I remember, particularly the Villanelle, which was wonderful and had sounded like a bird singing, like water flowing, like bells chiming over water—all the pretty similes a singer loves to hear, and they were true.

I hardly heard them. I was looking at Miranda. I knew her name already, I could think of her by it, and not as Mrs. Adam Wallace. The Ambassador's wife herself made the introduction, and called her Miranda when she spoke to her. They were friends. One saw that Miranda knew important people, went to important places. Adam Wallace probably knew the same people and went to the same places—but he, without Miranda, would probably have been a nonentity.

These things drifted in my mind, as the small talk drifted in and out of my ears. I was living in my eyes, I was looking at Miranda.

She sat gracefully, as though the gilded chair was not hard and uncomfortable—which I knew it was, for it was exactly like mine. She had a light erectness, a dainty fragility that seemed incompatible with the articulations of the human skeleton. She might have been, actually, air-borne; a figure moulded of cloud or mist.

Her dress was a drift of silver gray—like mist. Her eyes were gray, and to look at them made my heart turn over with loneliness and longing. They were lonely eyes, I thought—lonely as a sea that longs for the sun. They were hungry eyes, I thought—hungry for happiness and love. The nervous tense man at her side had not been able to fill them with laughter. I caught a glimpse of her in a wall mirror, and of myself beside her—a tall young man with black hair and brows and dark blue eyes that looked at Miranda as I had seen Ina's eyes look at me, but with more intensity. Beside the suntan of my face, Miranda's pearly translucency become pallor.

I tried to give a name to the

color of her hair. It was neutral, yet shining. There was no glint of gold in it, nor hint of bronze; perhaps it was a dark ash-brown, although the definiteness of brown was lacking too. Certainly it was not gray—but when gray touched it, one would hardly notice. It might have been woven of mist, thick, and shining. And it was simply combed back from her white forehead, and fell mistily like rain about her shoulders. The simple straightness of it made her look very young. Not childlike, as Ina looked, but ageless. Like a young thing born old, with the wisdom of years, the knowledge of centuries in it, so that age could never touch it, as the crude, simple excitabilities of youth had not.

The woman returned from near Hungary turned then, and spoke to her so directly that I must pay attention.

"It is incredible to me, my dear, that we haven't met before," she said to Miranda. "I've been thinking and thinking—and the name isn't right. Mr. and Mrs. Adam Wallace—Miranda Wallace. I keep remembering Budapest—we were there for a while, and I feel as though I must have met you there. You are so lovely, I don't see how I could forget. But—the name isn't right, I'm sure. I'm sorry my husband, Mr. Nugent, was called away; particularly as we sail tomorrow for London. Yet—my mind works slowly, sometimes, but—it nearly always comes up with the answer! Somehow, I'm thinking of dancers."

A SERVANT passed punch in wonderful crystal cups and a lady's exclamations of admiration cut across the words. Mrs. Nugent took a cup, as did nearly everybody else.

I took a sip from mine, silently making it a toast to Miranda, my eyes fixed on her, drinking in her strange beauty while other people drank and gabbled around us.

Someone called out to Mrs. Nugent, and she set down her cup on a low table as she turned. She exchanged a few sentences, settled back in her chair, and picked up the cup.

But in those seconds, it happened.

Miranda's white hand drifted out in a gesture so swift, so smooth and sure and quiet that it was like a white blossom floating away from her. On the third finger was an antique ring with a heavy, massive emerald setting. There was a skillful movement of thumb and finger, and the ring turned emerald under; and a white powder fell into Mrs. Nugent's cup.

It was a matter of seconds

only. I leaned forward, impulsively—but in the wall-mirror Miranda's sea-gray eyes met mine and their light shone into mine, and I caught my breath and all but gasped with the impact. Without my volition I put my own hand on Ina's arm with a clutch that demanded and admonished; and Ina's little gasp was checked, and I heard her half speak my name in surprise.

The cup was at Mrs. Nugent's lips. When the moment had passed, when I released Ina's arm and tore my eyes from their silent communion with those mirrored eyes, the cup was empty.

Ina's face was more than pearly white when I glanced guiltily sidewise at her. It was the white of chalk, the white of shock and terror. She looked like a sick child.

Yet is was nothing, it meant nothing, I told myself. Mrs. Nugent sat still for a moment, then rose quietly and walked out of the room. And it was a matter of five minutes before the party was shattered and broken and dispersed by news of what happened after that.

To a cloakroom maid, Mrs. Nugent said that she felt faint and would go home. To the ambassadress who followed her out, she repeated this with composure. Then—

"It was heart failure. She simply dropped dead at her feet!"

"But—she was so *young* to go like that! And quite well—Wasn't she? To have travelled all over the world, and here at home, at a reception in her honor—and, oh, her poor husband! The man looked like death, himself!"

"Well, it won't help her to go home—but I can't stay. It seems too heartless. Yes, I think the best thing will be for all of us to leave."

ON THE way home Ina was silent. Only at her door she spoke.

"You *saw*—didn't you, Cedric? You *saw,* and you were afraid to speak. I wanted to warn Mrs. Nugent. I would have told her—that woman had poisoned her drink. And you caught my arm and stopped me for just a moment—and then it was too late.

"But, Cedric! We must tell what we saw even though it *is* too late. We must, mustn't we? And—oh, why did you stop me?"

I kissed her goodnight, which I did not usually do. It was to comfort her. It was a plea for forgiveness. I told her I would talk it out with her tomorrow. It would be difficult to say we had seen what we—or she

thought we had seen; and that we had been silent. She promised to talk to me before she let us in for anything like that. I think she saw us—me, at least—hanging as an accomplice, at the very least. I think she was confused by her pain at what I had done. She knew, of course, that I had fallen in love with Miranda.

I did not hope for sleep that night, but it overwhelmed me as soon as my head touched the pillow. It was a sleep like drowning. Waking was like rising up out of an abyss; it took me awhile to orient myself, and then I saw that it was late in the day, late, even, in the afternoon. By the clock, it was five—and the sun was westering. I had never in my life slept over like that.

I dressed hastily, made coffee and drank it, eating and begrudging the time it took. I must decide on a course of action, and I must phone Ina at once.

I had been a fool last night. Not only had I seen, as Ina saw, the dropping of the powder into the cup of the woman who had died, but I had heard enough to explain the action. Poor Mrs. Nugent had been trying to remember where she had seen or known the Wallace couple, especially Miranda. Because of that, Miranda had poisoned her, and she had died.

Nearly twenty-six years old, I had fallen at the feet of this murderess and worshipped her like an adolescent. Obviously there was nothing to do about it now, but to tell the whole story to some responsible person. The ambassador's wife? But she was a friend of the Wallaces. Another person might be better. Or maybe the only thing was to go directly to the police.

I decided that Ina had the right to decide our course. I had bullied her and involved her; and this must be made clear along with the rest. It was Ina's turn to talk, and mine to listen.

I dialed her number several times, amazed at getting no response. Amazed, if it came to that, that she had let the whole day pass without calling me. And it was only then that I saw two envelopes which had been shoved under my door.

They were both marked "Special Delivery," and the one on top had Ina's name on the back. I opened this one first; the other could keep. Inside was a hastily scrawled letter in her bold backhand script:

"Dear Cedric:

"Since you don't answer your phone, you must have gone out. And since you haven't called me, you want to forget about what happened last night.

"If I went to the police,

they would question everyone. If I were involved, I know you would involve yourself, to excuse my having done nothing. Or would you? If you did not, perhaps no one would listen to me. There would have to be an autopsy, wouldn't there? People don't like to give permission for that, unless they're pretty convinced.

"I can't drag you into it anyway, unless you drag yourself. But if you decide to tell, you know I will also tell what I saw. I can't decide for you, Cedric; I can't lead you into trouble, and it wouldn't help poor Mrs. Nugent now.

"It hurt me so much to see you staring at that Mrs. Wallace in a sort of horrible fascination—as though, it seemed to me, you were a bird and she a snake—that sometimes I try to tell myself I was hysterical and imagined more than I saw. When a little time has passed, perhaps I will have gotten over that feeling, and perhaps then I will know that in spite of everything I *must* go to the police.

"At any rate, I am going out of the city for a few days. A wonderful thing happened this morning—I was offered an engagement to sing at the Sea City Ocean Pier Theater. If you have time to drive over there, and care to do it, we can talk. Rehearsals start immediately, and miserable as I am about what happened last night, I am just starting for Sea City with a group of other singers.

"I will look for you. It is hard to go without seeing you.

"Yours always,

"Ina."

The relief that flooded me, reading that letter, was as incredible as it was inconsistent. Now I no longer felt the pressure to immediate action, and I became a little bitter against Ina. Whatever had happened was a dirty mess to get into now; I couldn't get into it without dragging in Ina, court cases had always been hard on innocent witnesses, and seemed to be becoming harder. If their characters couldn't be challenged, their motives must be. Yet because I had waked expecting insistence and urgency from Ina, I had been ready to plunge into something that after all it might be better not to start.

I sat down—I had read the first letter pacing up and down—and opened the other note which was only a few lines of finely slanted writing on a thin gray sheet:

"Dear Mr. Clivedale:

"It was a dreadful thing which happened last night—and particularly so to me.

"Please forgive my temerity in writing to you, and even more in asking that you call on me and my husband. We are at the Stratford Arms, and I will look for you tonight at eight. Please, please come. I *must* talk with you.

"Miranda Wallace."

THE Wallaces' apartment was on the top floor of the Stratford Arms, which was the tenth floor. I was admitted by a dark skinned maid whom I took to be an East Indian, shown into a pleasant, airy room, and asked to wait. The minutes passed, and I grew painfully conscious of two things.

First, a low toned conversation was going on in an adjoining room which I couldn't help hearing, and this gave me an uncomfortable feeling of eavesdropping. And second, my solitude was shared by another creature—a queer sort of pet, for I could not identify it.

At first it seemed to me a small monkey, as it sat regarding me—and that regard was hard to take. The eyes were somehow *evil,* and it studied me with a positive avidity which made me feel as though it regarded me as a potential dinner.

Then its nondescriptness took over, and it worried me beyond reason that I couldn't classify the little beast. It sat up almost like a monkey, or even a child; something about its pointed ears and sneaking expression reminded me of a jackal—and its straight, long, hairless, pointed tail was disagreeably rodent.

After awhile the talking grew louder and more careless. Two women were talking—Miranda and another. The second voice was strange to me, and fell harshly on my ears. There was what might have been a Slavic accent, and the brittle sound of age, and it was hard and occasionally cackling.

"You could have done without him in the beginning, and you must get rid of him," this older voice was saying. "He is soft and cowardly, and since he has this—obsession, they call it?—for a soul purging, a confession, there is no doubt what must be done now. If you let him talk to others, what happens to you?

"Only, my dear, I tell you as I have done before—you must use *our* methods. Your own are crude—you have seen what danger they place you in. You used your own methods in Budapest—remember? Sometimes I think that you would like to be independent—free of me. It is impossible. Your power is as mine only when you conform to our ancient laws. Because you are beautiful, you try to be as other

women. Not a good woman, but still an ordinary one. You play at being that which is impossible for you. As to what happened last night—Phah! It was common, cheap and disgusting.

"Adam is on the roof?"

"I asked him to go there and wait for me. He's hoping for my consent to his confessing, expiating, as he calls it, *all* his crimes. He thinks, somehow, he can take most of it on himself, say he drove me to be his accomplice, rather than saying that he has been mine. Anyway—whatever happens, he has made up his mind."

"Then you must join him on the roof, my dear! Comfort him there. And—you know what else. And, about—*the other*?"

"I know, Madame. He must see what I do and what I am. And I must have from him not his heart, which I want, and which may learn to hate me; but I must make him give—*his soul*!"

Miranda's answers were low pitched and sorrowful. None of the conversation made as much sense to me as the sound of her voice made to my senses. I longed to take her in my arms, to help her in her trouble, to comfort her. Most of all, I simply longed to take her in my arms.

I caught a brief glimpse of Miranda through the doorway into the next room. Tonight her gown was green. She passed the door slowly, head bent, face turned from me.

It was the woman with whom Miranda had been talking, who entered through the doorway and advanced toward me.

"Permit that I greet you for our Miranda, who is so grieved—" the woman said. "I am her very close friend, Madame Slovani. She would make the introduction, but she has gone by a private stairway to the roof to warn her husband of your arrival—and to try to comfort him as a wife may. Poor Adam is equally distraught—

"Miranda asks that you go to the roof by the stairway at the far end of the corridor. This will give Adam a moment to compose himself, and they will receive you together there. The roof—it is not a garden, nor a penthouse roof—but on a summer evening it has charm."

Madame Slovani was short, a little bent, and somehow tawdry in appearance. Her face was upturned because of my height. She seemed dry enough to crackle like a stick, yet she was stocky rather than thin. Her dress was black and fashionably cut, her gray hair short and loosely curled—and yet there was about her that suggestion of sham, of pretense, of veneer. Perhaps it was because of her eyes. They

fawned on me, and yet they were as cold as the eyes of a crocodile.

She gave me no chance to answer her. Somewhere a clock began to strike, and she reached out and pushed me with her ringed, gnarled hands.

"Go!" she cried urgently. "It is time. Do not keep her waiting!"

I went the way the woman pointed, found the stairway to the roof and climbed it.

THE building was rectangular, the frontage and rear the narrow elevations. The stairway exit was toward the front. Accordingly, most of the length of the roof lay before me as I stepped out on it. The Stratford Arms was the highest building in the immediate vicinity, and it was like coming out on a lonely plateau. At nine o'clock daylight time, the afterglow lingered, but the first stars of evening were whitely visible. Venus swam through an amethyst sea, companioned by the slender sickle of the new moon. The zenith was an upside-down well filling with midnight. Away from the west, the horizon was flooded with sweeping swatches of the clearest lambent green. My eyes sought a green-clad figure, but did not find it.

Brick ramparts ran waist-high the length of the building on each side. Front and rear were provided with steel guard rails which did not impede the view. Brick chimneys, turret-shaped, and various small superstructures, rose in irregular serration along the rampart walls, and grouped darkly together near the center of the roof. Deck furniture was scattered everywhere; but at this hour and by whatever chance, the roof was untenanted except for myself and one other, and this other was a man. I recognized him at once in the clear twilight for Adam Wallace. He was sitting on one of the low ramparts—the one on the eastward side of the building. I walked back toward him slowly.

It was awkward that Miranda had been delayed. I felt a necessity to speak to him; but as each step brought me nearer I could see more clearly the utter despair and dejection of the man. When I had come quite close he lifted his head and looked at me, and the look in his eyes was like a silent scream of despair.

I could find no words. I drew back a little and simply waited. Miranda wanted to reach him first, I told myself. To help him pull himself together for our talk. It would be about last night. Some explanation, a desperate appeal—only Miranda knew why she had summoned me.

And Miranda must come soon. She *must.*

I turned to stare back at the doorway through which I had stepped out on the roof, although I knew she was to have come up by another way. I had, I suppose, to have a pretext for averting my eyes from the tortured face of the man who was Miranda's husband. Anyway I did look back into the gathering gloom. Then there was a movement, a cool tremble in the sultry summer air, and it seemed to me it was her coming that I felt.

I looked toward the central huddle of housing and chimney turrets, and then I looked back at Adam Wallace, and I saw her coming up behind him, walking on the outside of the wall.

There must be a catwalk on the very rim of the roof; but my heart missed a beat, seeing Miranda lined against the empty sky. I reminded myself that most likely a second guard rail separated her from the sheer, ten-story drop; then in the next instant, I was lost in the sheer spell of her beauty.

Her green dress was as filmy as last night's gray; but as it caught light from the green encircling three-fourths of the horizon, she seemed to be clad in a shimmering green flame. Her face and neck and bare arms, though, caught the reflection from the west and kindled to a rosy hue. She was a picture painted in pure light, seeming literally to float there outside the parapet, which rose no higher than her knees.

SHE glided to her husband's side, and spoke his name, and he started up; but she laid her hands upon his shoulders, and then her arms encircled him. He looked up into her face like a tired, lost child who has come home, and she pressed his head against her breast.

She spoke, so that I barely heard her words:

"Rest, darling. Lean so, against me, for a moment. Just let go and relax—yes, better—Ah, like that, Adam!"

She held him to her, yet she drew away a little; and still her arms were round him, encircling, drawing, as the low, weighted calling of his name seemed as if it must summon all his senses and his will.

He leaned against the glimmering green-clad figure, and the slant of his body suddenly became awkward and grotesque.

The rest happened in a split second.

Adam Wallace seemed to stiffen, to struggle desperately to regain his balance. There was a slipping, scuffling sound and the little thud of a dislodged brick

striking the roof. I saw a flailing of arms and then of legs black against the sky. For one moment, the soles of the man's shoes shone in the western light which had deepened and reddened. Then man and legs and kicking feet, horribly upside down, took the plunge, and a wild, hoarse scream trailed down and away and died.

Night fell out of the top of the sky. The lower varicolored air strata flowed together and went ashen. Out of the high abyss vertigo fell with the dark. My knees gave under me, and I staggered the few steps to the brick rampart.

I had seen Wallace fall. In that last moment I had not seen Miranda at all. Simply, she had been there—and then she was not.

I looked over the wall.

It went straight down without visible jointure, one piece of solid brick masonry with the side wall. It was a sheer precipice based in the alley alongside. A street lamp shone into the alley making the white paving dimly visible.

It made visible the crumpled dark heap that had been Adam Wallace.

No broken woman's body clad in green was down there. But then no woman could have stood outside the brick wall, or spoken there to Adam, or drawn him to his death.

Yet I had seen what I had seen.

I sank into a deck chair and lay there sick and dizzy, thoughts and senses reeling until I heard the first shocked outcry from below, and then other voices. Last, the siren of an ambulance.

Then I stumbled back down the stairs and to Miranda's door, and it swung open at my uncertain touch.

Madame Slovani blocked it.

"Go away," she said. "You shall come back—but go now. You understand, there has been a second tragedy—a worse. Miranda's husband has thrown himself from the roof. She came back for—for a handkerchief, and it was then the manager called this apartment. Someone had just found him lying in the alley, and now they have taken him away.

"We will not say that you had gone to the roof, Mr. Clivedale. The press is so eager for a scandal, and our Miranda is too beautiful—ever I must shield her from the gossip. Some might say you had seemed smitten with her beauty, found her husband on the roof edge and made a quarrel.

"Go, now! Go home, Mr. Clivedale!"

She was ordering me, I thought, like a dog. I looked into

the hard blackness of her eyes and took a forward step. A cold fury rose up in me. I wanted to force my way in, to force Miranda to talk to me now, while my eyes still held clear the image of that awful, impossible scene upon the roof.

It was not Madame Slovani who stopped me, either. It was Miranda, and yet she neither looked at me nor spoke.

SHE lay back heavily propped with cushions in a deep chair by the window, and the uncertain light from one shaded lamp lit her face and figure and the crouching little monstrosity at her side. One of her arms fell limply down toward the floor, and the little beast was licking it in a disgusting, slavery manner—I could hear the obscene sloppiness of soft animal lips. The green dress was livid in the lamplight, and the flesh of the woman's face was yellowed and flabby, the features slack, each line indescribably coarsened. From this caricature of Miranda's face her large eyes stared bleakly, nor it seemed, were they quite mated, one being as pale as the eye of a stranded fish, and the gray of the other catching the yellow light from the lamp as does the eye of a cat.

It was this sight of Miranda that drove me back, and away.

The old hag's voice came after me:

"She is spent. Youth will return and beauty—you shall see. You will comfort her shortly in my place. Only late of today I have come from Sea City to give her strength, and I must go immediately back. So many things have to be done! Even without the mishaps, the crises, so many!

"Dangers to meet. People who threaten danger to be crushed—crushed—"

Her voice rose until it sounded like the wailing of a wind.

I reached the waiting elevator, which was self-operating. The door slammed shut, and I escaped.

It was only a five-block walk from the Stratford Arms back to the Leicester. Going home I short-cut through a small park. I wanted to think, and something was pressing on my mind to be recognized. There was a thing I must do—an urgent thing. But an awful lethargy had begun to fog my senses and weight my limbs. I sank down on a bench under a twisted black walnut tree, and my heavy lids closed, and the sound of traffic and some kind of little peeping bird receded to a misty distance.

Yet I was conscious. I was conscious of hearing Miranda's voice. But it was muffled and husky and tired, and sometimes

the syllables blurred and it was like the voice of a woman who had been drinking—or like the voice of a tranced medium I once heard in a seance. I was conscious enough to tell myself, at first, that I was dreaming.

"Last night's spell was sounder, and it kept him sleeping through the day," the dream voice said. "Now I can feel that his mind is not closed to mine. Today I was able to use my pass key and see everything in his apartment that I needed to see. I looked at him as he slept, one dark strand of his hair fallen down on his forehead. I kissed him, Slovani, and he never stirred.

"Tonight he was near when I opened the gate to the dark power. Tonight he was drawn so near me that the wall between our souls has crumbled. He will belong to me; but neither can I withdraw from his knowledge. *I tell you, he hears us now!*"

"Yet sleep will delay him," Slovani muttered. "Our little Vermio will have had time to do his tricks. And I will be in Sea City in time to have my darling little troupe of horrors trained to their parts for tomorrow night. *You* whine, Miranda, because the youth that our dark powers preserve in you falls into age—and you're a hag for a few hours when you spend yourself to work the greater spells. Look well at me! I waste none of my potency on rose leaf skin or a girl's grace. To your new lover, I'm nothing but a hag—and the same, no doubt, to you. But I've my company of apprentice spell-binders and accomplished haters that I can use for any purpose—here in America, as I've done from Budapest to Peking. I can make them act, or dance, or sing at will, wherever I've introduced them, as well you know.

"So advanced are they, I scarcely need to hypnotize them now. And each serves the Dark Master, and each nurses a beastly familiar—and grows to resemble the little monster, I swear! None so clever as our sweet Vermio—who should be getting back to us, it seems to me.

"Pull yourself together, my girl. I've other things to do than comfort you for being obliged to pay the powers that serve you. You're free of Adam, aren't you? And Cedric, the new lover, caught in your web? Already you look less like a mouldering corpse; your eyes turn straighter in their sockets, and are near of a color again. Now you will dare to sleep. You'll wake in your known guise, Miranda!"

Somewhere, I thought, a door slammed. The older witch, the hag, Madame Slovani was on her way.

To Sea City.

But—she spoke of singers. And Ina, there? Ina was to sing at Sea City.

I must go to Sea City. Ina was dangerous to Miranda, and that meant that I must get to Ina. Ina had seen murder—but I had seen it twice; and I had seen worse. I had seen what doesn't exist—so men say in our time. I had seen black sorcery and witchcraft, and they were evil and ugly and loathesome. I was on my feet and running toward home.

The elevator ran me up to my floor, and I pelted down the carpeted hall to my door, key in hand. The door swung open, and I had stepped inside and lifted my right hand to the tumbler switch when the horrid thing happened.

Moist, sucking, slobbery lips closed on the fingers of my left hand. The wet heat of the unseen maw was indescribably loathesome; the hungry, avid sucking was worse; the obscene caress of a darting tongue, the worst of all.

I shook the thing, lifting it bodily from the floor, for it clung like an octopus. I went on shaking and dashing and slamming it about, and at last I was free of it.

It flew through the air, landed with a plop, tittered a too-human titter, and made off through the open window which must have given it entry. I caught a brief glimpse of a grotesquerie silhouetted against the star strewn sky before it swung sideward and was gone. There was a fire escape at the next window, but I would not have doubted it could scale a sheer wall. I had too good a view of one of those hand-like paws—the thing actually made a mocking gesture of farewell.

VERMIO, the hag Slovani called it. It was the thing that infested Miranda's apartment. Yes, the witch's familiar. Miranda had her familar, as the apprentices Madame Slovani had spoken of bad theirs. Madame Slovani's, I thought, should be a crocodile.

What "tricks" had she sent the ugly hybrid atavism to perform?

I wasted time which might be valuable, but I couldn't find the answer. I was thorough and painstaking—for, out of my depth as I was, wallowing in unreal, murky waters, anything might be important. Only one thing I found changed or different, and it was an odd little thing that brought a strange constriction to my throat. It was a childish thing, a little thing that no one but Ina, I thought, could have done on one of her brief calls on me. It was a thing I

might easily not have noticed, in an ordinary mood. A silly little thing.

Around the neck of the little clay model of a doe was a slender braid of shining golden hair that could have come from no bright head but Ina's. That mop of hers was thick and fast growing, and she herself snipped out tresses occasionally, after which the fluffy mass seemed quite as thick as before. I saw, then, on inspection, that the child—for these whimsies made me think of Ina so, again—had taken one of my brushes and very minutely and neatly traced on the forehead of the pretty little statue the letters of her name.

I found myself smiling. I knew an evanescent, tender, happy moment. So at the age of three, or five, or ten, had Ina done small things to make me notice and think of her.

My mantel clock began to strike three, and I remembered the last time I had listened to a striking clock in Miranda's apartment, and all the ugliness flooded back upon me. I had wasted too much time.

I threw a few things into a bag, raced downstairs and got my car from the garage. The early summer dawn whitened the east as I cleared the suburbs and pointed my headlights east, toward the ocean and Sea City.

IT WAS when I lit my first cigarette that I realized the tips of all the fingers of my right hand were bleeding. I felt no pain; but a slow seepage gathered on them again, a fine red dew, after I had wiped them clean. The sense of taint, of uncleanness and of degradation, that swept over me was beyond any words of mine. I found no trace of broken skin, no tooth wound. It was the sucking of the familiar Vermio which had broken the capillaries and inflicted microscopic skin lesions. The little monster's lips and tongue had all the suctional power of an octopus tentacle.

I remembered that familiars were supposed to "milk" blood from the fingertips and parts of the bodies of witches and warlocks, and was briefly overcome by nausea.

It was a day of maddening mishaps.

The motor of my car, usually smooth as the purr of a kitten, coughed its way through unprecedented streams of traffic. Traffic jammed. I had a blow out, missing a ditch by inches, had a long verbal tangle with a fat family of five bound for Atlantic City. My spare ran a mile and developed a slow leak, and I limped into a roadside garage at a mile an hour. The mechanic's inspection proved that I would

get no further without motor repairs, and hours dragged into hours.

I was groggy from lack of sleep and from shock. At a lunch counter adjoining the garage, I forced down a few mouthfuls of food and drank three cups of black coffee. I went into the wash room and washed my hands and sluiced cold water on my face; staring at myself in the cracked mirror. My eyes stared back at me, red rimmed, and sunken into circles nearly as black as my brows and hair. I bought band-aids from a vending machine, and tried to tape up the fingers of my right hand; but the slow, slight trickle not only discolored the tapes, but loosened them, so that they hung and flapped, and presently fell off.

WHEN I took the road again, the monotonous ribbon of paving slipping under my wheels exercised its hypnotic effect, and I drowsed at the wheel, jerking awake as the car made each first slip from control. I had to pull up in a side road then, as I had been dreading that I must do. My exhaustion was natural, but I thought of Miranda's sleep spells with no confidence.

I would reach Sea City, I feared, only if and when she permitted. All of the delays were, perhaps, no accidents. I only knew that the sun was pulling to the west, and the air growing cooler with a hint of the sea smell in it, that winged things were whirring and birds singing. Yet even as sleep took me, I poured my whole will into an effort to waken in an hour's time—a knack I possessed to some extent.

It was longer than that, but not by much, when I roused, feeling refreshed. Without the brief interval, I could have done little more. My hand seemed better; it was caked with dried blood, and only one tiny drop hung from the tip of my index finger. My watch marked the hour as six; but now Sea City was only a thirty minute run.

I knew where the pier stood out to sea, a few blocks northeast of the center of the boardwalk. Sea City was a revival of a resort that had gone down to almost nothing, by some unpredictable freak. The older Sea City had built the pier, the new Sea City had extended it. Certain promoters had plans of making it a rival to Atlantic City's, but it remained rather a sad compromise. The auditorium was near the end, which extended now perhaps a quarter mile from the shore base. A dance hall was built in at the shore end, and there were side decks and one across the front, where in stormy weather waves rushed in foam-

ing. Midway of the pier an old construction had been left standing—a portion built and operated as a kind of maze—or rather two. One was a black tunnel, in the old days, where you wound your way from horror to horror—Indians tomahawking a group of early settlers, and a major devil complete with tail and horns and surrounded by capering imps in waxworks, and an Aztec priest cutting out a human heart were among my own childhood memories. The other tunnel ran parallel, and was given over to ugly, unfunny "figures of fun." Some of the partitions had been taken down, some of the cave-like rooms had been wrecked and dismantled, and some, it was said, had just been left alone to gather dust.

I PARKED the car near this pier, and began my reconnoitering.

No one at the ticket office knew where any of the evening's singers were lodged, nor where rehearsals were held. I made my way onto the pier, having bought a ticket, and continued prowling about and asking questions. I was about to leave the place and begin a tour of the larger hotels, when a small boy pulled at my coat tail.

"I know where they are now, mister—the ones that are goin' to sing tonight," he offered. "Give me a package of Camels, and I'll show you."

I thought it some kind of a practical joke, when he led me by a door at the rear of the vacant ballroom into a narrow, twisting, black passageway, and I suspected the joke of being an ugly one when he declined to accompany me further.

"I've been," he said with a small-boy terseness. "I've been all over the whole place—but I don't like it, mister. I've seen where the old woman keeps some animals. The people that are supposed to sing for her, they stay at the Ocean Surf Hotel. It's a nice hotel, and I guess they got this old place to practice in for free. They aren't any of them at the hotel now, so if you want to see them you go straight ahead, and if you don't bump your own head hard enough to knock yourself out, you'll come to a door with a little grating up top, and you can see them and hear them and maybe make them let you in. They're all down there, havin' what the old lady calls a dress rehearsal. Me, I don't like it down here, and once was enough."

He took the cigarettes—he settled for what I had—and dived out into the fading daylight. I felt my way in the dark. It seemed that I went farther

than could have been possible, because of the blackness, and the constant winding. I thought of using my lighter, and decided against it. I wanted to look through that little grating before I announced my presence.

I saw a glimmer of light around a couple of turns, then a bright square on the ceiling, cross-barred by shadow. A murmur of voices reached my ears, and I took up my position behind the closed door, looking in at an angle.

There were half a dozen persons in there, two young men and four young women. That wasn't all, their pets were with them—the pets I had heard Madame Slovani refer to. The beasts seemed more normal than Vermio, and accordingly less loathesome. I found the men and women without exception repulsive; but what I recognized on second glance as the disconcerting and appalling factor in the little group was the repeated resemblances between animal and human.

A long legged, pop-eyed youngish man with batrachian features fondled a large frog—and surely there was a likeness between them. He capered about the room at intervals, at the same time running scales in a gurgly tenor. A short, fat girl with heavy features and a tendency to puff carried a fat toad. A small, thin girl with hanging elflocks was paired with a black monkey that capered about her; a tall, thin, hard-jawed blonde let an over-sized chameleon wander over her polka-dotted blouse, changing color appropriately in spots where it lingered; when she threw back her head and laughed, her slender pink tongue darted out, for all the world as the lizard's tongue darted after invisible insects, or at times, in what seemed a caress, to lick the girl's cheek or neck or chin.

I believe men are usually more tolerant of bassos and dogs than they are of tenors and frogs, so I found the man with the deep bass voice and the tendency to say "Ho! Ho!" when he laughed a little less trying. Men don't like eccentric females either, so I classed him above all the others, and found his coarse-haired black dog a better looking pet. But the animal's eyes seemed to shoot red sparks, and the basso's laughter was heavy and harsh.

There was considerable laughing. They seemed to be having a merry time of it. But before I could more than try to get the trend of their conversation, the tenor set his frog tenderly on his shoulder, looked at his wrist watch, and sybillantly hushed them into silence.

They lined up near the grand piano which bulked against the opposite wall, and a door opened, and Madame Slovani came in. I wondered again if she, too, had her familiar in the beast world, and what it could be like; and repeated my thought that it should be a particularly evil appearing crocodile.

She might have been wearing the same black dress, and her hair was combed and groomed. She advanced toward them, and each of her troupe bowed low, and the monkey bowed. She spoke to them all together, in what seemed a kind of ritual.

"Good evening, disciples," she said. "I am with you, your mistress. And you—what are you, and what is your duty?"

They answered with one voice:

"Madame, we are your disciples. And we have danced in Budapest and juggled in Tangiers; and tumbled in Baluchistan; served in tea houses in China, and performed masked pantomimes from Siam to Tibet. We have sung in the cities of Asia and Europe. We serve you and our Master, and hope to be accepted to take part in the Black Mass."

That part over, the animals chattered, croaked and barked, and the men and women (who were not, I thought now, particularly young after all) laughed as at a tremendous joke. And Madame Slovani did a very extraordinary thing—for with one deft movement she abstracted a pair of false dentures from her mouth and laid them tenderly on the top of the piano, before which she then seated herself. Light from two hanging bulbs cast heavy shadows on her face, and now she looked not like an old woman who was a bit of a hag, but all hag—and all witch. Also, the falling in of her lips added indescribably to the saurian features of her appearance.

She began talking in a cozy, studio voice, now—about the teeth being hard to wear for long, and it being against her nature to have the artificial things in her mouth. Her speech was considerably altered without the teeth, but I lost track of the proceedings here, for a very good reason.

Someone was approaching down the corridor behind me, carrying a light. At first I was not sure; the light through the grating was bright and near, and my eyes were full of it. Then I knew I was right, and I felt an impulse to blend my six feet of broad shouldered height with the wall—a thing which couldn't be done.

So I did the only other thing possible. I turned and waited to see who was coming.

The one who came carrying the light rounded the last turn, and I caught my breath.

Miranda, a black-clad, slender figure with the sad, white face of a suffering angel, confronted me. Her fingers clasped a candlestick in which was set a long, black candle. The smoke from it blew toward me, and I caught the pungent smell of it. The first whiff set my heart pounding and the blood racing in my veins. Miranda's eyes were deeply glowing, the black pupils widely expanded. Their tenderness enfolded me like a caress. When her hand went out to me I seemed to fall toward her rather than to be carried the short distance by my feet.

She drew her hand back before I could clasp it, though, and laid her finger on her lips.

"I was not able to come sooner," she whispered. "I had to rest. I tried to hold you back —there is more danger for you here than you could dream of, Cedric!"

An altercation seemed to be going on in the room behind the grille, and we both listened. But I had time to think: "Whatever she is, she has come to help me. I must make her help Ina."

I heard the tenor's overmellow voice:

"Mistress, I wish you'd answer just one question. *We* dance and sing, and learn hard roles—even with the hypnotism, they are difficult. Miranda does not work. She goes to the places we go to sometimes, but as one of greater rank. As someone who is different. She has been a benefactress to me, Madame. Sometime I think I shall make her more than that. And still I ask you—what is the difference between us?"

Madame Slovani laughed.

"The difference between a Morgan La Faye and a cheap maker of spells, Roberto. If I don't have to punish her some time because she fancies herself too much as a beautiful woman, she bids fair to be my successor—when finally my years run out. Why, it is because the blonde baby is dangerous to Miranda that I used my influence to arrange this evening. Few notables are coming. Do you think I craved to hear your hypnotized warblings, that I must plan it for my pleasure?"

Miranda and I stood close, our bodies pressing together; my breath came hard. I heard the skinny dark girl say harshly—accompanying the words with a look of pure venom:

"Ina, the beautiful young blonde. *Really* young, with no years to spell off her. Well I tell you, I hate her!"

Madame Slovani straightened and glowered.

"Remember that I am your mistress and that I tolerate no questioning! What are you all here for but to hate her? Hate I need from you tonight. Roberto, you know that this girl can sing, and you hate her for that. Romanoff, why do you hate? For hate I want from you all."

The big Mephisto—that would be *his* role—laughed, and the black dog barked briefly.

"I hate for the pleasure of it!" he declaimed robustly.

"And that is the best hate of all!"

The toothless mouth widened, the claw hand went up in the gesture of one drinking a toast and dashing the glass to the floor.

"All is prepared," Madame Slovani purred. "The costume cut and fitted by my hands to our new Mauguerite's slender curves. The hair close cut, for the fitting of the priceless wig, the long, golden-haired wig to snare Faust's heart. What a pity we shall use but the finale! And the severed tresses artfully disposed. Woven into the rope girdle around the prison dress of gray. Woven into a narrow necklet—a fine touch of authenticity! Woven into a tighter, narrower one for the little clay figure marked with her name in her own blood—drawn in a playful moment from her little wrist when she was induced to try to pat the devil's own dog before we came away!"

THINGS clicked into a ghastly pattern in my brain. Miranda had been in my apartment; of course Ina had not, not lately. The little horror Vermio had been in my apartment, sent there to "do his tricks." With his too human paws *he* had placed that necklace of plaited hair; with his too human paws he had copied a pattern given him, and dipped my own paint brush into a little bottle that held drops of Ina's blood, and traced her name.

Things clicked. The braid of the victim's hair; the naming of a clay figure—and they meant that Ina should die. Ina. The child who had watched me make the little doe that I somehow—now, so late—discerned, she had always identified with herself. The little doe I had dreamed of—that I had seen, in the dream, fall dead.

I turned on Miranda in a sudden rage. But Miranda's eyes were on me, and the scent from the black candle's smoke filled my veins with a burning fire it was torture to deny.

Her hand closed on mine now of its own accord, and her lips were soft at my ear.

"One false move, and I can do nothing," she whispered.

"You must trust me—there is nothing else you can do, *now*. When the performance is over—that is the only chance. They have ways of killing you—and her too, your Ina too, do you hear? Why, in this place in the pier they wouldn't need even a cover up, even a careful means. A spell, or a knife, what would it matter? Your body need never be found. Would that help Ina? You have not dared to talk—not even about the thing that happened at the ambassador's. As to the rest, who would believe? I promise you this: they will give the performance. They always do. Ina will sing tonight, and you will see her and hear her on the stage—nothing will happen before that—"

I heard a door open and close, and I turned and looked through the grille again.

Ina had come into the place.

Ina—so changed, yet so unchangeably herself! I tasted salt tears, and the tears were for her and for me.

She stood alone at the piano, facing Madame Slovani. The others gathered near—but not too near, and no hand was lifted against her. So far, Miranda seemed to have spoken truth.

Ina's hair was clipped short to her lovely little head. Her face was pale, but still defiant. She was not, I thought, actually frightened; resentful, puzzled, uneasy, rather. She did not, I believed, imagine that anything very bad could happen to a good little girl who only wanted to sing, and who had got into a queer place where queerer people rehearsed very briefly for a performance that would be tonight.

"You know your role," Madame Slovani said to her. "I can use you again, if you will do the very little thing for me tonight. No one hears what a singer says, and especially when they think in English and she is singing in French. Instead of singing 'Dieu juste, à toi je m'abandonne!'—use the word 'Maitre!' It means the same; but we have some high Russian guests, and they love not the name of deity. And instead of singing 'Anges purs, anges radieux—' you shall sing: 'Anges noirs, anges de nos Maitre!' Black angels—so what? No one will notice and no one will care; but we have as guest a Red leader from Transylvania who will laugh and say how very clever and humorous we have been. I have told him to watch for the little joke. He has great friends, this Red leader. He could buy you performances in Rome, Milan, or even Paris. You want life, and to rise to its heights? It is so very simple. You understand? You will not forget?"

She banged the piano then,

and struck a few chords. Miranda's hand was drawing me away.

"It will be a good performance, and possibly little Ina's future will be made!" she told me. "We will go. Afterward—it is lonely at the end of the pier—we can go there for a while, before the last scenes are sung. It's a series of short scenes, you know. We can be alone with the sea—you and I. We can plan what may be done for Ina. But Madame, I think, has decided to be kind!"

WE DINED at the Ocean Surf Hotel. Madame Slovani and the singers had a table across the room.

Miranda had disappeared briefly, and returned wearing a small black hat with a heavy veil.

"It is unthinkable that I should be here, while Adam is unburied, at the funeral parlor," she said. "I came only because I had to save you, Cedric. To save you—for myself. You must believe me."

She lifted the veil at intervals to eat sparingly. Nature had caught up with me; I was famished, and hot food and the sight of Ina eating her dinner made the world seem normal, and abnormal things seem sick imaginings. When Ina saw me, the shocked pain and anger in her face were normal, too.

I scrawled a note and had a waiter take it to her, and in the note I asked her to leave the table and let me take her home. A note came back. It said:

"No, Cedric. I can see that it wouldn't do any good."

Truly, there seemed nothing I could do.

I sat with Miranda near the front of the auditorium. There were several opera scenes before the Prison Scene from Faust. I sent a second note back stage by an usher—this time at Miranda's suggestion. In it, I asked Ina to slip away after the Faust and meet me at the end of the pier. Miranda watched me write, and inclined her black-veiled head thoughtfully. This time the answer was different. Ina had written:

"I will, Cedric. I will be glad to get away. No matter who you are with—I will come to the end of the pier."

Miranda murmured:

"I am sure she will be there."

Gounod's music filled the hall—magnificent, sublime. The curtain swished aside.

Ina lay as if asleep, clad in a clay-gray gown belted with yellow rope, the yellow tresses of the wig sweeping back from her face. Around her throat was the narrow golden circlet—we were close enough to see the braiding. Faust and the devil entered, and

the scene led into Marguerite's music. Ina rose up singing, her voice as sweet and pure as water flowing, falling gently. Faust importuned her, and Mephisto; and she soared like a bird into the climax. I listened, tense:

" 'Dieu juste, à toi je m'abandonne!—' "

" 'Agnes purs, anges radieux —' "

There was no tampering with the clear words of defiance to the dark powers; and three times the theme was sung, each time on a higher modulation, until the soprano notes seemed to beat at the gates of heaven.

She fell down, then, softly, like a snow flake settling; and the dark blue curtains swung together.

Miranda and I went at once to the end of the pier.

There were no waves dashing there; only a long, slow, glassy swell seemed to sigh softly to itself. Miranda threw back the black veil. Not only were we alone, but the night had veiled itself. Shoreward the lights were tiny stars with spreading halos. Straight down, the water had a faint luminosity of its own; this time of year the gulf stream carried northward the dim ghost of its southern glory.

"We have a few moments—" Miranda said, and drew me to a bench. I felt longing and urgency and a deep, trance-like languor sweep over me. It would be easy to forget all but Miranda—

I wanted to be alert, to think.

"What are the animals—Madame Slovani spoke of as *familiars?*" I asked. "What is the connection between them—and those of you who keep them? And why has Madame none? Or, has she?"

"They are atavistic hybrids, some of them. Like Vermio—*he* is a rare specimen, a rare being, rather. He was specially bred and specially trained. Remember, there are two codes. They call them good and evil—men do, and you would. But—what is good, and what is evil? To me it is good to be happy. Sometimes I have to do horrible things—and to pay horribly—for that. Under what you would call the good law, things follow the laws of evolution. Good little animals mind good little people, and the people don't get like the animals, but the animals take on less beastlike ways.

"While under the bad law, people get more like beasts, and beasts—oh, sometimes they grotesque humans, and sometimes slip down toward lower animal forms. But again—what is lower, and what is higher? If there was a Circe, and she turned men into swine—in some cases it must have been an improvement!"

"And Madame Slovani?" I asked again.

Miranda caught her breath, and had to start her words a second time.

"Slovani has no familiar. Because she has—among her gifts—the power—*to change herself!* Never defy her, Cedric, never! Even I am afraid of Madame Slovani!"

I stood up and leaned over the rail, looking straight down. Something had floated out from under the pier.

It was, I thought, a loose bundle of gray cloth, or gray rags. Clay-gray; the color of the clay doe; the color of the prison dress Marguerite had worn.

I strained my eyes. The bundle was wrapped once around the middle by a rope—wet and darkened, but yellowish still. I saw things trailing downward from that bundle, trailing like arms. I thought I caught the white gleam of hands floating submerged, like two drowned waterlilies. Then I was sure I saw, drooping below the surface at the far side, a rounded protuberance with the glint of gold.

Ina's shorn golden locks!

The swell lifted and dropped it, the slow sea swell that sighed. It was Ina's body, floating as the dead float, face down. But it was *not* the body of a dead girl. It floated because it had gone into the water unconscious, with lungs air-filled; it was settling lower—almost imperceptibly.

I climbed the railing shouting for help. Miranda impeded me, clung to me.

"It would have been kinder the other way!" she muttered, struggling with me, and her words confirmed my certainty. "Slovani ordered me to work—the death spell. Because I wanted to be a woman—to love you as a woman—I—spent myself to no purpose. *She is not dead—*"

I fought silently. Miranda's arms around me were like steel bands. She was half up on the railing too. But people were running our way.

Then it happened. From the black shadow of the pier a second thing emerged, and it took the form of nightmare.

It couldn't be. Not in these salt northern waters; but it was.

A BLACK crocodile, heavy and squat of body, circled with a swing of its tail that lashed the water into real phosphorescent fire. That hellish green illumination showed me the rest, while Miranda dragged on me now, so dead a weight that she might have been a corpse.

The monster saurian drove at the figure of the golden haired girl who was not quite dead,

and its jaws opened and clashed and closed on the limp body. There was a swirl and splash, and a trail of green light going down.

The running men and women had reached us, and there were voices, and it was all too late. A man and two women had come in time to see. The man was sick on the pier, the two women were screaming and gabbling:

"Someone had gone overboard, and *that thing*—I tell you it was a *crocodile!*"

"The phosphorescence! I never saw such phosphorus. And I tell you, I could see the monster's eyes. They glared—red!"

"Its jaws opened—so wide. And—being sick and stunned, I had the wildest impression that it was a crocodile without any teeth. A toothless crocodile!"

Miranda giggled, a high, mad little titter.

"She hasn't any—of her own. Slovani!"

Then she collapsed into my arms, drawing her veil down over her face as she fell. I thought I heard her say:

"Don't look at me. Don't look at my face!"

IT WAS the aged hag Miranda that I drove home through the night hours. The hideous, old Miranda who had worked a spell, though imperfectly—and expended for a while the youth that wasn't hers by right.

Around us frogs called, for the night had turned wet and a light rain was falling. Where there were trees, there seemed too many bats; and from high up in the sky—and worse, sometimes, from low and near—bird cries sounded that were not like any birds I had ever heard. Will-of-the-wisps slid through the valley places. It was a long night, the longest night I had ever lived, a real Walpurgis night. But the rain that fell didn't touch the windshield or the car. Rain doesn't fall, I have learned since, on witches.

Ina's body was found downshore the next morning. The tide brought it in. It wasn't torn or mangled, though the clothes were torn and it showed where it had been mauled, they said.

None of us had gone to Mrs. Nugent's funeral, but Miranda and I were at her husband's, and at Ina's. Miranda stayed alone with Vermio until the funerals, and at them she was beautiful. A vision of lovely, yearning sorrow. An angel of grief, exiled from heaven.

We are married now. We live in the apartment that was mine, where I found the little clay doe fallen down and limp and like a melted thing when I returned there first alone. I found, too,

that the innocent looking golden braid around the little neck had been drawn so tight that it had cut a deep groove in the unbaked clay. And I was sure the mauling by the toothless crocodile would have obscured a corresponding stricture under the braided necklace around my childhood playmate's throat. At the appointed time of the witch-spell, when "Marguerite" fell, Ina's breath failed and she swooned—to be carried to her bed in the dark waters of the Atlantic.

The doe is gone. Miranda got rid of it. But Vermio lives with us.

I do not think I will ever have a familiar. I do not think Miranda needs Vermio as much as she did, and I am sure Vermio hates me.

I am becoming, I believe, Miranda's familiar. I looked the word up in Roget's Thesaurus, and it said—giving the meaning that mattered to me: "Familiar: One bound by a supernatural law of servitude."

There is no doubt about the servitude. Or about the supernatural part of the life that is ours. It is a horrible life. We are to join Madame Slovani and her troupe somewhere in mid-Europe soon, and I think it will be even more horrible. But with the black dog and the monkey, the frog and the toad and the chameleon for company, perhaps Vermio will have something to do beside stare at me night and day with his evil, hating eyes.

And some time, like Adam Wallace, perhaps I will have the luck to die.

Not that I dare hope death will really solve my problems.

Like the heroine of Goethe's drama and Gounod's opera, Ina's prayer was not for life, but for the opening of Heaven's gates. I must believe in Heaven, being well acquainted with Hell. Ina's life would have been worth little to her on earth, seeing me indissolubly linked with Miranda. As it is, I know that Ina and I will not meet in any other place than earth. My road leads down. It is a sick imagining of mine of late, that even my appearance is changing. Something looks at me from my mirror that is not quite human, that seems to peer from my own eyes as through a window, and then slyly to withdraw. I look again, and see only the haggard face of shame and torture—and cowardice.

And I know, then, that I will never anger Slovani, nor fail to serve Miranda. I will tolerate the vicious caresses of Vermio.

As long as I can, I will postpone passing through the last door of all.


THE WATCHER AWAKES
by Kirk Shaw

JULY 3rd

AS THE longshoremen slipped the eye of the last mooring rope from off the bollard and let it fall with a splash into the murky waters of the Canal, the faint "TING" of the engine room telegraph came to our ears. Slowly the *Crown of Siam* separated herself from the quay wall and her siren roared out in the courteous three long blasts of farewell; a flutter of white handkerchiefs appeared over the heads of those who had seen her off, and the ship trembled like a wakening leviathan as her engines obeyed the bridge's orders.

Martin turned with a smile towards me and I realized with a start that it was the first time I had seen him smile since we had fled from the horror in the desert.

"We've made it, Donnie," he said quietly, his fingers tightening impulsively on my arm. "Even if it could follow us this far it's somewhere back there in Port Said. In three weeks more we'll be in New York with only the relics from the tomb to remind us of that nightmare. It's over, thank God it's over and we can sleep in peace once more."

Watching the statue of Lesseps pass slowly on the port side I had felt inclined at the time to agree with Martin, but now I'm not so sure. The Thing that killed the Professor and Morrison, drove Faulkberg insane, and has haunted us day and night ever since, won't give up so easily. If it could cross the desert after us it could quite as easily be on board this ship. Last night for instance the handle of my stateroom was tried and the steward denied all knowledge of it this morning. When I told Martin about it over the breakfast table he suggested it might have been a sneak thief, but I saw his face lose color and I knew that he believed that no more than I did myself.

For one thing, if it had been an ordinary thief, then I should have seen his shadow break the ray of light beneath the cabin door for I was lying smoking in the dark and there's a light burns in the alleyway all night. But there was nothing. Only the handle turning slowly back and forward with a horrible persistence, and then that devilish light tapping—like finger nails drumming on an empty packing case.

It was over the breakfast table

Heading by Joseph Eberle

that we decided I should write an account of what had happened to our party, for if the Thing does get at us then there will be no one left alive to warn the unwary of the curse that follows the mummy of Princess Naratiffi.

So today I'm starting the journal as arranged, and I'll begin by introducing myself.

MY NAME is Donaldson—Franklin Henry Donaldson, and I'm what I suppose is termed "one of the idle rich." My grandfather was old "Damn the Devil" Donaldson who founded the family millions with his oil empire. My father inherited his fortune and when he was killed by an exploding oil gusher, as his only heir I found myself with money to burn and no qualifications worth a tinker's cuss. I did learn to fly and drive racing cars, but the thrill of speed soon palled and I was forced to look further afield for adventure. My name became linked with anyone who wanted to explore the Amazon or bring gorillas back alive from the Congo. Providing the leader of such an expedition was sincere and would include me in his party, I would foot the bill and trust for repayment in adventure.

It was through this philanthropy (?) that I met Professor Anstruther.

He called at my home late one evening when I was feeling utterly bored with myself, and I was imediately struck by his appearance. Well above average height he walked with a slight scholarly stoop, but with a surprisingly agile step. Behind heavy bifocal glasses his eyes were alert and youthful and they betrayed the mane of silver gray hair that swept back from his high domed forehead. Later, when he had gone, I looked up his name in a scientific Who's Who and found that his research in archaeology had brought him wide acclaim in the scientific world, though his name was little known to the man in the street, more interested in political fossils than those of the desert.

His story interested me tremendously and moreover, it offered me the chance to explore a field completely unique in my experience—the search for a lost tomb in the desert.

For years Anstruther had searched for this tomb, working on a theory that for some unknown reason all reference to a certain Princess of the Blood Royal had been deliberately destroyed by succeeding generations of Pharaohs although he could produce no definite proof to substantiate his beliefs. According to the Professor a single mention had been discovered of an

unearthly beauty who had lived in the generation before Tut-ankh-amen, but nothing about her life or death had been found anywhere. This he was certain was the woman he was looking for—the mysterious Princess Naratiffi.

He had actually been leading a party in search of this tomb when a cable arrived to say that his backer had gone bankrupt and he would have to return immediately. The same day a stranger arrived in his camp with a story that had fired his enthusiasm anew.

This was a man called Faulkberg and he was a deserter from the Foreign Legion who had gone native. He wanted money to return to civilization, and in return for payment he offered to lead Anstruther to a hidden tomb known only to the Arabs. In proof of its existence he produced a small golden medallion with the head of a beautiful woman on it, and from the hieroglyphics round it, Anstruther was able to say it was the head of Princess Naratiffi. . . . Faulkberg told him how the nomadic tribe he had joined had a legend about a cave high in the mountains which led to the entrance of a tomb. Once three Arabs had gone in to loot it, but only one had come out alive, clutching the medallion in his hand—and he was raving mad. The terrified tribe had rolled a boulder over the entrance completely blocking it, and then fled. To this day no one had ventured to even go near the cave, but Faulkberg had wheedled the instructions for finding it from the native woman he called his wife, and this was what he had to offer.

SO FIRED was I by this story that two months later saw me joggling over the desert sands in the first of two heavy trucks we had bought. These had been fitted with caterpillar tracks, and although not very fast, were ideal for crossing the sand, and later, the boulder strewn mountain sides.

With me was the Professor, balancing a book on his knees as he brought his notes up to date, and driving, was the Professor's ward, Rigby Martin. Martin was a cheery young chap whom I had liked right from the start, perhaps because we were both of an age, and in the short time we had been together a strong friendship had grown between us. Behind us in the second truck rode Faulkberg and Morrison, two complete opposites thrown together by chance. Faulkberg was big and brutish, his hair close cropped and his skin almost black from exposure to the sun. Morrison, our photographer,

was a slightly built anaemic looking man whose frail body seemed to wilt before Faulkberg's crude jests. Besides these, there were also two Arabs we had engaged, Mustapha who was our cook, and Ahmed who was a kind of personal servant. As there was to be no digging we had no workmen with us. Nor did we require the services of a guide while Faulkberg was with us, for he knew the trackless desert as well as any Arab. Each of the trucks also pulled a small trailer behind it loaded with petrol, equipment, and crates, for we hoped to bring back enough relics to prove there really was a lost tomb.

We stuck to the trucks until the slopes we were climbing grew too steep for them, but by then we were more than half way up the low range of bare mountains and could look back on the shimmering heat wave of the desert for as far as the eye could see. On a fairly flat plateau we set up our tents and formed the main camp, then we trudged on by foot to Faulkberg's directions. These were simple to follow as he seemed to be using certain peaks as landmarks, and well within a mile of where the trucks had stopped we came to the great boulder that the Arabs had used to block the cave.

When I saw it I felt my heart sink for I knew that five of us could never muster enough strength to shift it; but again Faulkberg proved his usefulness. Using his experience of handling explosives in the Legion and the cordite from some of our cartridge cases, he laid a charge in a flaw of the boulder. From it he led a fuse to which he set light. Hurriedly we retired to a safe distance and took cover as the red spark danced across the stony ground and disappeared into the crack. For a second we thought the charge had failed, and then came a muffled explosion. As if hit by a massive invisible axe the boulder split cleanly in two and the halves fell apart to reveal the dark opening of a cave beyond.

Naturally we wanted to start exploring immediately, but this Anstruther forbade. He insisted that in our present tired condition we might damage some of the relics, and we would be far better to return to the camp, prepare the crates for carrying home our finds, and get turned in early for a good night's sleep.

JULY 4th

LAST night the Thing visited my cabin again. This time it was at the windows which open on to A deck, and I sat shivering with fear as I clutched at my

loaded revolver. But it hadn't enough strength to smash the heavy glass and I had taken the added precaution of closing the monsoon ports, even if the steward did think I was crazy. Around 2 a.m. it gave up the attempt to force an entry and I heard it tap-tap-tapping away.

But to get back to my story.

On the morning after we had split the boulder we were up bright and early to find that both Mustapha and Ahmed had disappeared during the night. At first we thought they had run off with whatever they could lay their hands on, but a quick check of the stores showed nothing to be missing and their disappearance without waiting to be paid remained a mystery to us.

Finally we set off for the tomb, each of us carrying a powerful torch, and Morrison bowed down beneath the weight of his cameras, tripods, and flash lamps. It had been agreed that the Professor as leader and the expert on these matters should lead the way and the rest of us keep a fair distance behind him, until at least he was certain we should not destroy anything of value. So when we entered the cave and found it to be much wider than we expected, the Professor went on alone and the rest of us followed in pairs.

It was much deeper than we anticipated too, and we had trooped down the long dark tunnel it formed for about a hundred yards when it came to an abrupt end. At least we amateurs thought it was a blank end but not so the Professor who examined the walls carefully.

"It's a door," he announced finally, "a door hewn out of the solid rock to make it look natural. But look for yourselves, you can follow the faint cracks round the edge where it doesn't quite meet flush. It's chipped a bit over here too; probably where the thieves Faulkberg told us about forced their entrance."

The Professor was so excited by his find that I'm quite sure he was hardly conscious that the rest of us had crowded round him as he searched for the pivot that would swing the heavy door.

"Isn't there something written above the door, Sir?" asked Martin who had been shining his torch all over the wall.

And sure enough there was some kind of picture writing cut into the stone.

Laboriously, being held up for a few minutes by each of us in turn, the Professor copied everything down in his notebook, then using a replica of the Rosetta stone translations he began to decipher the writing in the hope that it would yield some clue as to the occupant of the tomb.

Suddenly there came a blinding flash that scared me out of my wits and left me trembling like a jelly. It was only Morrison taking flash-light photographs of the door, but it showed me how keyed up I was in that eerie atmosphere.

BY THE time Morrison had finished the Professor had completed his translations.

"Here's a very rough translation as far as I can understand it," he said, " 'WHO BREAKETH THE SLEEP OF THE WONDEROUS ONE, SHALL CALL THE WATCHER TO GUARD HER GLORY.' Probably the curse that most tombs have in the hope of protecting them from robbers, but nothing for us to worry about. Our only danger will come from the foul air there's likely to be inside. If it does get too bad make for the open air and we'll wait for it to clear. Now, hand me over that crowbar, Faulkberg."

Faulkberg passed him the heavy iron bar he had been carrying, and inserting the wedge end where the previous intruders had chipped the stone, the Professor lent his weight on it. At first nothing happened, but when Faulkberg began to heave as well there came a low groan from the door.

Slowly, and with a lot of grinding, it began to swivel and I felt the strain on my eyes as I tried to peer into the darkness. With its opening there came a blast of hot musty air that set me coughing and gasping, but it wasn't too bad and forgetting our previous arrangement with the Professor we surged forward, our torches lighting but a little of the vast room we had entered.

The five beams bit into the darkness in slashing swathes as we swept them round the burial chamber, lighting first one, then another of the strange objects that lay within, each one more bizarre and unusual than its neighbor. Then the Professor's voice, though cracked with his suppressed excitement, recalled us to our surroundings.

"Pass out the torches and light them now, Martin," he said, and for a moment I wondered if the excitement had been too much for him as we all most obviously had our torches lit, until I saw he was referring to the tightly packed bundles of reeds and small twigs that Martin had been carrying.

"They'll give us far more light," he explained," and besides, the naked flame will warm us if the air starts getting bad, but for Heaven's sake watch you don't set fire to anything, everything in here will be tinder dry."

The torches had been specially

prepared by Ahmed before he deserted and as soon as a match was applied to them they flared into a brilliant, if smoky, light. Instantly we saw the treasure house we had discovered.

Stacked everywhere ready for use in the next life, were all the household goods that had belonged to the dead occupant of the tomb. Caskets, vases, and miniature sarcophagi stood round the walls, jumbled with a beautiful golden bed, golden chairs, and numerous heavy wooden chests. Life sized models of servants bore canopies of beaten gold and behind them was a replica of a state barge. There was even a mummified gazelle, perhaps the favorite pet of the long dead Princess. But it was at the far end of the chamber we looked where, barely reached by the light of our torches, rose a solid granite altar, and on it rested the sarcophagus.

Silently, and holding our torches high, we moved towards it.

It was magnificent. Of masterly workmanship it was shaped to conform to the body it contained, and carved on the top in the semblance of a woman with the hands crossed over the breasts. But the face! Beautiful is quite inadequate to describe it, and no mere words could convey the cold loveliness of those perfect features. Never did I dream that such beauty existed and if the living woman bore any resemblance to the effigy, all Egypt must have worshipped where she trod.

Faulkberg broke the spell for us by shouting excitedly, "LOOK! LOOK! Professor!" He alone of our party was not with us but on his knees by a heavy wooden chest with his arms dug inside. As I watched he raised them slowly and a cascade of flashing colors flowed back into the chest. "Jewels! Beautiful, beautiful jewels!" he slobbered, digging his arms in again and again.

"Leave them alone, Faulkberg!" snapped the Professor curtly. "Nothing must be touched or moved until Morrison has photographed the tomb, and then a complete record must be made of its contents. You'll get your fair share, don't worry about that, but leave them alone just now."

SULLENLY, Faulkberg obeyed the Professor and had closed the lid of the chest when I heard Martin whisper, "My God!"

He had walked curiously round the sarcophagus and when I joined him and saw what he was looking at I drew in my own breath sharply. On a raised

golden pedestal stood a life sized statue of a man, and it was the most perfect modeling I've ever seen in my life. Perfect is the only word to describe it, so much so that for a moment I thought it was real. It was a model of a warrior on guard over the sarcophagus, and every detail even to the corded muscles had been faithfully copied. It was well over six-foot in height and dressed in a short metal skirt like I'd seen in pictures of early Romans. The breast was protected by a metal breast-plate, and on the head was a tall plumed helmet. The face was hidden by a golden mask but through the eye pieces the closed eyes of the statue could be clearly seen. One hand rested on the hilt of a short stabbing sword it wore in a scabbard at its belt, but the other was raised above its head and held menacingly a wickedly sharp throwing spear with a broad blade.

"Professor," I called, "come here quickly!"

"What is it? What is it?" asked Anstruther crossly as he appeared beside me, "I want to copy the hieroglyphics round the mummy case. They're bound to hold the key of the mystery, and be—," his voice tailed off as he saw the statue.

"What the Devil is it made of?" I asked as he advanced slowly and laid a tentative finger on its foot.

"Made of?" he replied in a whisper. "Made of? Man alive this was never made, it's real. It was a living breathing man. It's a mummy, a perfect mummy. Donaldson!" he swung round on me, ". . . don't you realize what we've found? Can't you see the significance? It's— Why it's the greatest discovery since they found the Valley of the Kings. It's the perfect mummy! No wrappings, no embalming, nothing. It's undreamed of. We must find out the secret of this tomb. Who is he? Why and how was he placed like this? Why is there no reference to a Princess who could be buried with so much wealth and in such a God forsaken spot. Tell me, Donaldson, tell me if you can?"

The other two had joined us in time to hear the Professor's last words, and we stared up in awe at this man who had lived and died a thousand years before we were born yet looked no different today than he had in his lifetime, and in that silence Faulkberg's whisper sounded crystal clear.

"The Watcher!"

The Professor turned on him in a flash.

"What's that Faulkberg? Just what do you mean by the Watcher. That phrase was writ-

ten on the inscription over the entrance and now you use it again. What else do you know about this tomb that you haven't told us?"

For some unaccountable reason I felt my flesh creep as I looked at Faulkberg's pale face staring up at the statue and realized our surroundings. The golden mummy case that held the mortal remains of a once beautiful woman, the treasures worth a king's ransom, and the statue that was not a statue but the flesh and bones of a man preserved by lost skill.

Faulkberg never once removed his eyes from the figure as he began to speak in a hoarse dry voice.

"All I know is a legend. A legend handed down through countless generations of a beautiful but wicked woman. A woman who was born a princess but whose lust for greater power led her to dabble in black magic until her name meant FEAR. According to the law of the land she should have married her brother who was a weak and sickly youth much younger than herself, but her one weakness was that she fell in love with a captain in the palace guards. This man was proof against her blandishments and remained loyal to his master, and spurning all her advances he was instrumental in uncovering a plot to poison the young pharaoh. The girl was seized and tortured until she had confessed to the crime and was then condemned to death, but before she could be executed she managed to escape from her guards. Hunted like a wild beast she sought sanctuary in the home of the man she loved, but he coldly handed her back to her pursuers. As the guards dragged her struggling to her death she screamed and spat curses at the captain. 'You spurned me in life—' she cried, '—but in death you will guard my dust until eternity.' Then on the day that she was put to death the captain who had been in the prime of life, collapsed and died for no apparent reason. The superstitious people remembered the curse she had laid on him, and so they buried him in her tomb—to guard her dust until eternity.

"And that I swear is all I know."

A SILENCE followed Faulkberg's words, and I felt cold shivers running up and down my spine as I looked at the soldier who had died so strangely, until the Professor's cold voice cut in dryly.

"A typical story started by the priests to protect the tomb from robbers but nothing more than

that I assure you. The dead stay dead and can't worry the living. Now shake yourselves and stop gawking like credulous schoolgirls; we've lots to do. Morrison, you get started and take photographs of the tomb from every angle, the rest of you can help me by sorting out the smaller relics we'll be taking back with us. Meantime we'll remove nothing, but by tomorrow Morrison should be finished and he can photograph the individual exhibits outside."

The Professor was right in keeping us occupied, for work proved the antidote to our fears, and we toiled assiduously while Morrison's flash flared at intervals. Before I realized it the Professor was telling us to call it a day and ordering us out. Only Morrison pleaded that he wanted to take some more shots and promised to join us in half an hour.

Outside, we decided to shift our tents right up to the cave entrance so that we would have less distance to travel to and from the tomb, and we had pitched the new camp and were thinking about supper when Martin remarked that Morrison still hadn't joined us.

I volunteered to go into the tomb and remind him of the time and Martin said he would accompany me. So leaving Faulkberg to prepare the supper and the Professor studying his notes, we lit two of the torches and returned to the cave.

"What did you think of Faulkberg's story, Donnie?" asked Martin seriously as we walked cautiously down the long tunnel. So seriously for him that I glanced sideways at his face before replying, but he was keeping his eyes studiously in front.

"Rather a horrible story," I replied, "but I should think the Professor's theory was the right one. Why?"

But before Martin could answer we were at the open door of the tomb and inside all was in darkness. Thinking that the little photographer had tripped over something and laid himself out we hurried in, anxiously calling his name.

"Morrison! Where are you! Morrison!"

But there was no reply.

"He was taking shots of the statue when I last saw him." said Martin worriedly, and we made our way towards it.

Suddenly Martin stopped dead and I cannoned into him. Looking over his shoulder I felt my stomach heave—we had found Morrison.

He lay sprawled on his face with his shattered camera lying by his head, but he would never again be able to use it. Driven

down between his shoulder blades and pinning him to the ground like a bug-hunter's specimen was the massive spear I had last seen in the man-statue's hand. He was quite dead and already the blood was congealing round the rent in his white linen jacket.

Fearfully I raised my torch until its light struck the statue, but apart from the spear there was no change in its appearance.

"Could it have slipped, Donnie?" croaked Martin.

I shook my head in puzzlement. It must have, though how it gained enough momentum in that short drop to drive right through him I couldn't understand.

"Help me pull it out, Martin." I said, "There's nothing we can do for him, but we can't leave the poor devil lying here."

It was easier said than done for it took our combined strength to pull the spear clear. Then Martin took the feet and I the head as we started on our sad journey back to the camp.

JULY 6th

I MISSED writing up this journal last night because I was so badly shaken that I couldn't concentrate.

The Thing has got Martin! That means it's on board and I'm the only one left and I'm quite certain it will never allow me to leave this ship alive. There's no use in appealing for help to the Captain either for he would only think I was mad. At least I'm safe here as long as I stick to my stateroom and remember to lock the door and keep the windows tight shut.

Oh God, it's horrible! Martin! Why Martin? He never harmed a soul in his life yet he had to die the same as the rest. Martin! Martin!

But I must concentrate. I must write the full story before it gets me.

Martin was foolish. I warned him repeatedly against leaving his cabin after dark, but it seems he met some girl on board he had known back home, and he took her to the ship's dance.

The rest of the story can best be told as the girl sobbed it out to the Captain when they came to inform me of his death.

She said they had danced until about 10 o'clock, after which they had gone for a stroll in the moonlight round the promenade deck. For a time they had leant over the rail watching the phosphorus swirl past the ship's side, and then Martin had left the girl, Mary Coolridge was her name, to bring back two highballs. Mary had walked slowly towards the after end of the

prom deck and had turned to come back again when she saw Martin approaching with the drinks. Suddenly, as he passed in the shadow of a lifeboat, he let both glasses drop with a crash to the deck and staggered back clawing at his throat. The girl could see his face clearly in the moonlight as she ran towards him and it was twisted in agony as he coughed chokingly, then the safety chain between the boats caught him in the small of the back and he toppled overboard.

The girl's screams had brought members of the crew rushing to her aid and the ship was turned immediately. But though a motor boat was lowered and flares and searchlights turned night into day, there was no sign of poor Martin.

I don't want to sound callous or unfeeling for I genuinely liked Martin, but I pray the Thing went overboard with him —it's my only chance!

The Captain questioned me closely to see if Martin had been subject to heart attacks, but I could truthfully say that he hadn't. Never the less, the conclusion agreed upon with the ship's M.O., was that he had an attack, and temporary off balance fell overboard and was drowned.

Martin drowned! An interstates swimming champion drowned in a sea like a millpond? But what's the use of arguing, it's better to let it go at that.

There's nothing I can do to help Martin now and it has become all the more urgent that I complete our history for I have a feeling that my time is growing short.

THE morning after Morrison's death, Martin and I dug a fairly deep grave on the little plateau, and there we laid the little photographer. The Professor repeated what he could remember of the burial service, and we stuck a little cross—Martin made it from parts of a packing case—over his head with the few details we knew about him. Then in an effort to forget the gloom and despondency his death had thrown over us, we threw ourselves heart and soul into the job of clearing the tomb.

The Professor rigged up a camp table and stool at the entrance to the cave, and when the rest of us carried out the contents he made a note and rough description of the article. This way we hoped to compile a complete inventory of everything we brought out. The smaller articles we carried direct to the trucks where we crated and packed them straight away, but to make room for the larger pieces we would bring later, we had to

carry our spare petrol back up the mountainside, and this we stacked just inside the cave entrance to be out of the direct rays of the sun.

By noon a fair proportion of the lighter relics had been removed by this method, and after a scratch meal we started to discuss the best method of bringing out the mummy case and the man-statue. All except Faulkberg that is, for he had made an excuse about wrapping some of the relics and gone back into the cave alone. Looking back now, I've a feeling he was actually trying to hide some of the jewels to collect them at his leisure. Whatever his reasons he paid dearly for them when scream after scream brought us white faced to our feet.

Again and again the screams rang out, growing louder and louder until the ex-legionnaire burst into the sunlight and at first I could hardly recognize him. Gone was his florid coloring and deep tan, and foam flecked in dirty patches across his quivering lips. His eyes bulged hideously from their sockets and rolled horribly in his wagging head. Right across his cropped dark hair had appeared a broad strip of white—completely new since we had seen him last.

When he saw us he stopped abruptly, looking stupidly from one to the other, and then he started to laugh. To laugh and laugh with a hysterical quality that chilled our very blood while between his sobs of mirth he babbled.

"You! You're next! Ho-Ho-Ho! You wakened him—you wakened the Watcher! Ho-Ho-Ho! And now he's coming! Coming to get you—one at a time! Ho-Ho-Ho! One at a time he'll get you! Thieves! Robbers! Despoilers of the dead! The Watcher—The Watcher's coming!"

Still babbling and laughing he backed slowly away from us, then turning sharply on his heels he began running down the slope in great bounding leaps until we had completely lost sight of him.

"What happened to him, Professor?" I whispered, "What could drive an ex-legionnaire completely mad?"

Anstruther shook his head slowly, his brow furrowed in deep thought, then bracing his shoulders he looked defiantly at us. "I don't know. I don't pretend to know, but God or Devil I'm going to find out."

Both Martin and I pleaded that it would be foolhardy for him to venture into the cave again, and argued that we had enough relics to prove his case and to organize a proper expedi-

tion. But his mind was made up. He had met something beyond his comprehension and was determined to force an issue. Grabbing up one of the reed torches that lay by the entrance, he lit it and ran into the cave.

Our own hesitation was for a second, then as Martin grabbed the crowbar, I picked up a packing case hammer and we ran after the older man.

Ahead of us we could see his torch bobbing and flitting in the cold draft through the tunnel, but we were younger and fitter men than he was and by the time he reached the tomb we were right behind him.

Once inside he held his torch aloft so that its rays lit the whole chamber and we peered around.

"The statue!" cried Martin urgently, and I looked quickly in that direction. The statue was gone.

"What the—" began the Professor, but he got no further before the torch was dashed from his hand and spluttered out. In the split second before we were plunged into total darkness I saw something. I saw the tall brown figure by the Professor's side. I saw the long reaching arm and clawed fingers. I saw the dark piercing eyes and shining breastplate.

In the darkness the Professor choked gaspingly and I pulled desperately at the electric torch I wore clipped to my belt. Martin was shouting for me to show a light and I was knocked to my knees by scuffing figures before I finally freed my torch and pressed the button.

The sight that met my eyes aged me twenty years in as many seconds.

The great tall man-statue held the Professor by the throat at arms length in vise-like fingers, and already the old man's tongue was protruding from blackening lips. With a curse I scrambled to my feet, but with a sickening crack the monster snapped Anstruther's neck and tossed him aside like a rag doll.

Slowly it swung towards us, its eyes mere pin points in the glare from the torch, and its clawing hands reached out for us.

"Run, Donnie!" screamed Martin tugging at my arm, "For God's sake, run!"

I hurled my torch at the advancing figure, and panting and gasping we rushed back through the tunnel. Again and again I tripped and fell on the uneven ground until I could taste the salt blood trickling from my bruised mouth. But stark fear of the long dead shambling after us lent me added strength and I spurted for the daylight as Martin tugged at his gun holster.

ONCE out in the blessed sunlight he dropped to one knee and I had time to admire his courage as he sighted on the cave mouth.

Suddenly it was there!

With arms outstretched it staggered ponderously towards us and I was aware of Martin's gun cracking again and again as the monster walked unheedingly into the hail of lead. One of the bullets either wider than the others or deflected from his breast-plate, smacked into the stored petrol tins and with a thunderous roar and blinding burst of light the whole store exploded.

Sand and boulders flew into the air as the solid rock cracked and started to slide in a miniature avalanche that rumbled down over the swaying Watcher. Dust rose in a great cloud and small pebbles hammered around us as the blast knocked us sprawling, but apart from small rivulets of fire the falling stone prevented any great blaze by smothering the flames.

Dazedly I rose to my feet and staggered towards the heaped rubble that blocked the Professor's tomb and from under a heavy boulder I saw an arm protecting grotesquely. Even as I looked the tenacious fingers coiled and stretched and in my mind's eye I saw them curled round the throat of the old Professor.

Wild flames of hate licked at my heart, and my dry lips cracked and choked me as I watched its writhings silently. Then stooping I picked up a heavy flint.

Slowly I raised it above my head to hurl down and crush the life forever from that loathsome thing, when Martin yelled at me. Instead of crushing it the sharp stone bit in at the wrist, and I became violently sick as I severed the hand from the arm.

Horror stricken I stared at what I had done—and saw the hand start to move!

With white bone and torn ligaments protruding from the severed wrist, it was raising itself on long finger tips and crawling towards me.

Screaming, I kicked at it, sending it hurtling back among the debris, then with Martin by my side we fled for the trucks.

"Hurry, Donnie! Hurry!" yelled Martin as I slammed in the gears, "I can see it, Donnie! I can see it like a great hairless spider. Oh, hurry! Hurry!"

And so we fled from the hill of the tomb, leaving two dead and one raving lunatic to haunt its lonely dreadfulness. Nor did we rest in peace until the trucks rumbled in to the outskirts of Cairo.

Once there we thought we were safe as we had driven ourselves hard, but the third night of our stay in the hotel I was wakened by something tapping on the window pane. Thinking it was a frond from one of the many palm trees that grew in the garden and irritated by its persistence, I rose to see if I could stop it. But when I got to the window the moonlight was playing strongly down and immediately I saw it—the hand squatting maliciously on the window ledge.

Next day we paid our account and traveled by fast train to Port Said where we joined the *Crown of Siam* two hours before she sailed.

Now Martin has gone as well, and there can be no doubt it was the steely fingers from the tomb that were choking the life out of him. But whether it is still on board or went overboard with Martin I have no means of knowing.

What strange occult power gave the hand the—

EXTRACT From The Log Of The M. V. *Crown of Siam,* signed by the Master, Captain Bently-Whyte.

7th July. Time: 10.00 hrs.

On being informed by my purser, Robert Larkins, that the steward on duty at A deck could neither receive a reply nor enter stateroom 16, I proceeded to same accompanied by William Steele, the Chief Officer.

After again knocking and trying the stateroom door which was locked, I gave orders for it to be opened with the purser's duplicate key.

Inside we found the occupier, Mr. Franklin Henry Donaldson, lying sprawled across the enclosed journal. From the Medical Officer's report, the man had died from manual strangulation, and following the reading of the journal I carried out a thorough search of the accommodation.

As previously stated the outer door was locked, and all windows were closed with the monsoon ports battened down. But in the bedroom we found that the mushroom ventilator on the deckhead had been screwed fully open leaving a gap of some six inches in diameter and down this was hanging the end of a boat guy from the deck above.

Nothing else was out of place though a curious musty smell permeated the whole apartment.

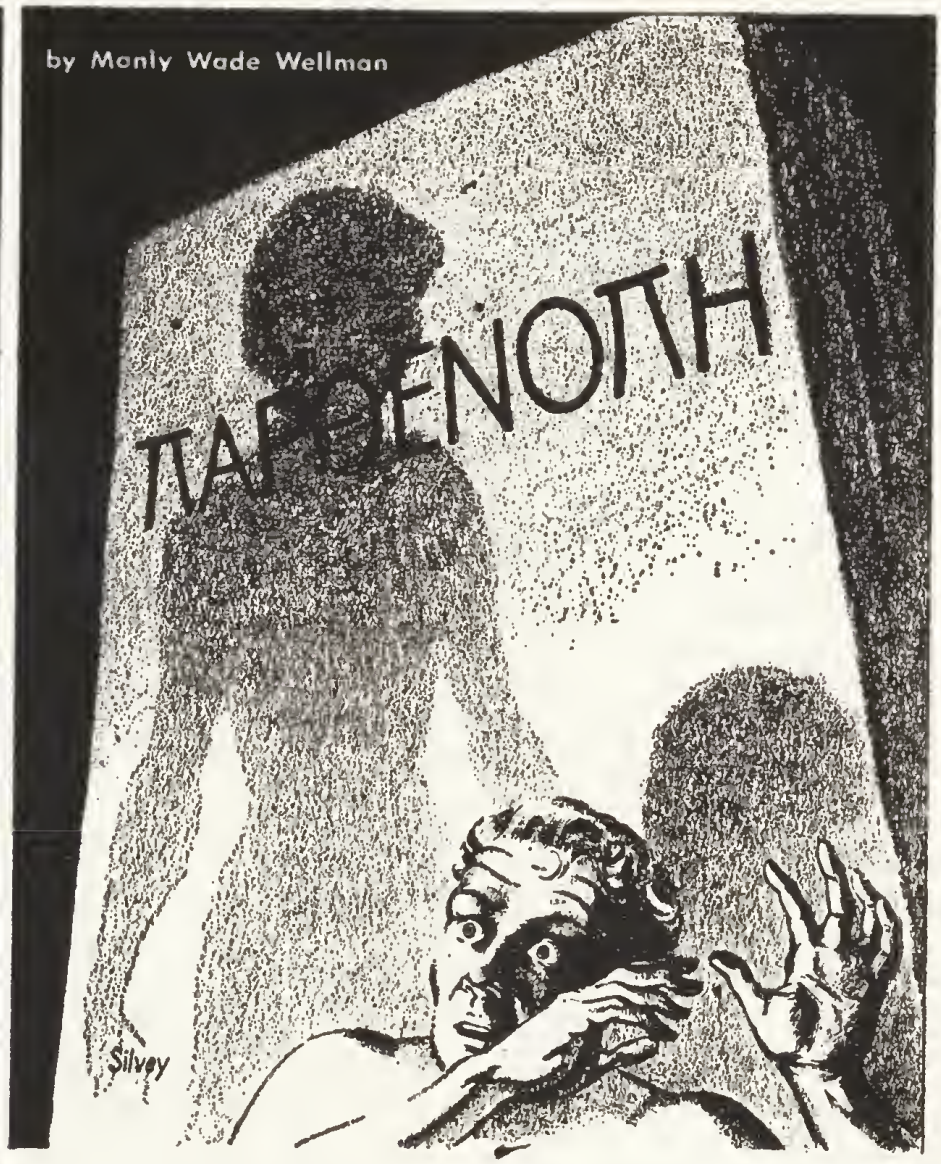
Signed, A. Bently-Whyte,
Master.

Witnessed, W. Steele,
Chief Officer.

Witnessed, R. Larkins,
Chief Purser.

PARTHENOPE

by Manly Wade Wellman



". . . there were so many lies in the Odyssey!"

TO HIS brine-deadened ears came soft, clear music. Had he been able to think after swimming so long, with salt water dashing into his sagging mouth, with his arms turned to dull stone, he might have pondered that this was the singing of death, a prelude to sleep under the waves of the Mediterranean.

But next instant he stirred, as though by another will, to a final effort. His hands, that had all but ceased flailing, framed once more a stroke-rhythm. His feet

Heading by W. H. Silvey

fluttered and kicked. His head came up out of the water, so that he saw what he had despaired of—a white beach with a face of dark rock behind, and at the blue water's edge a tall, waiting figure. The music rang its way into him, coursing through his blood like an elixir violently infused. He dared to bob upright, and solid bottom met his downward-groping toes. A few struggling strides, a scramble in foamy shallows, and he sprawled in the sand at the feet of the singer.

It was blessed to lie there, then it was painful. He made shift to gasp and pant, then to moan. Gentle laughter slid down from above, and a questing pressure came upon his sodden shoulder. With the last of his strength, he turned over upon his back.

She must have bent to touch him, but now she stood straight again. She towered, almost as tall as himself, with a figure both full and fine. Her garment was a plain dark drapery, so caught around her as to line out her strongly smooth curves from chin to ankle, leaving bare one round shoulder and one smooth, slender arm. Above this tilted her brown face, framed between winglike sweeps of black hair, with bright inky eyes under wise lids, a regally chiselled nose and full red lips that smiled but did not part. She'd be lovely, he thought, if he were in any condition to appreciate loveliness.

"I was almost food for fishes," he muttered in Italian.

"No, you're too soaked in salt," she replied, and her speech was as musical as her song had been. "Not even a crab would eat you."

"Who are you?" he croaked, and sat up. "A siren?"

"*Seiren,*" she repeated after him, in the Greek manner, as though to cheer him by falling in with the feeble pleasantry. And the rescued swimmer had recovered enough to look up at her with admiration. This was beauty, classic but living, and only a mannerless clod would sprawl at its feet.

He tried to rise, swaying, and she caught his arm to steady him. The quick grasp of her fingers was as strong as steel, and her nails dug into his water-sodden skin. He smiled thanks, trying to brush the drenched blond hair from his young face. He knew what a sorry sight he must be—naked except for his dripping white trousers, pallid and shrunken from his long immersion. But she smiled her slight smile—like the Mona Lisa, like the Empress Josephine—and asked his name and country.

"George Colby," he supplied. "I'm an American student. This

morning I was out in a fishing boat with some friends from Sicily. The boat sprang a leak, went down under us. Maybe they drowned. I just swam—kept swimming—got here—"

His head began to ring and whirl and, for all his efforts, he crumpled down to sit on the sand.

"You're weak," she said above his head. "Weak and famished. Wait."

HE WAITED, in a sort of dreamy blur. Then an arm slid around his shoulders. She knelt to support him, and held to his mouth a sort of big plum.

"Eat," she urged him.

He nibbled at the pulpy thing. The first bite refreshed him enormously, the sweet juice cleared his head like wine. "Eat," she said again, turning the fruit against his hungry mouth, as a mother feeds a child.

After a moment, he could stand again. His shadow was long on the sand. The sun was sinking—he had been swimming most of the day.

"I don't know how to reward you," he said.

"I will be rewarded when I see you well and strong," she made the gravest of answers.

"You're being good," he half babbled. "Now, may I impose further? May I go to a house, will you help me there to spend the night? Tomorrow—"

"My house?" she echoed, as though the word and idea came strangely. "You mean, a place where men live. There is none on this beach."

George Colby was far too weary and grateful to digest this amazing information. He only gazed into her steady black eyes.

"You may sleep on the sand," she told him. "It's soft and warm. I'll keep watch."

"Don't bother," he began to say, but she smiled compellingly. She put one hand on his shoulder, and with the other offered him a bunch of grapes.

"I don't want to eat up your fruit," he protested.

"I do not care for them. Eat."

He did so, thankfully, sitting on the sand. She watched with a sort of happy relish as he devoured the grapes.

"Now sleep," she directed as he cast away the stem. "Grow strong. Let the bitter salt seawater flow from your body."

There was nothing he wanted to do more. He let her hands apply pressure, he stretched out on the sand. "Sleep," she said. "Sleep." Her musical voice was hypnosis.

He wakened once, shivering under a high-prowling moon. At once she was there, moving to sit beside him. Taking him in her

arms, she held him close to her. She handled his considerable weight as easily and gently as though he were a baby. Colby mumbled a sleepy protest, but she began to croon a song, a soft memory of the music that had seemed to draw him out of the sea. Now it comforted him, it weighed upon his eyelids. His face drooped against her soft, warm bosom, and he slept again.

He wakened to daylight, and a sensation as of stroking. Starting violently, he looked up into her serene black eyes. She was washing his body with palmfuls of fresh water. Her tight lips smiled.

"I did not want to clean away the salt when it was dark and cold," she said. "But now you are better. Your flesh was ridged by the brine, and I have washed it away. Are you hungry?"

He was, and got up. He moved easily after the night's rest. His rescuer offered him a new fruit, that had a thick, thorny rind.

"Aren't you going to have breakfast?" he asked her.

"Later," she said, and watched while he peeled the fruit. Its flesh was firm, like a yam, but more delicate in texture. As he bit into it, she offered a great fluted sea shell, full of fresh water.

Now the sun had risen, and Colby could be aware, for the first time, of the place where he had come to land.

IT WAS not an island, really; rather a reef or a bar, with a tall central spire of rock, like a monolithic dolman reared with determined toil by some ancient cult. The sandy beach that surrounded this fragment was no larger than a ballrom floor, and almost as smooth and flat. Several small trees grew, in a scrubby clump, at one side of the stone pillar, and there were a few wisps of grass. Colby could see no house, nor any trees or vines that might have produced the fruit he had eaten.

"Don't tell me you live here alone," he cried protestingly.

"I've always lived here," she assured him. "Always." And her eyes looked at him critically. "Do you feel well? Healthy?"

"Perfect, thank you." He walked toward the foot of the rocky pillar. It towered above him like a gigantic domino set on end. Colby studied its substance. It defied what little he knew of geology—smooth and gray as whetstone, with dark veins that looked metallic. And there were cracks—no, carved lines, an inscription. Slowly he pondered the letters in his head, translating them in his classroom Greek. They spelled a word. Yes.

Parthenope.

"It is my name," murmured her voice at his shoulder.

"I've heard it before," said Colby, without turning. It's lovely—strange. Wait, I remember. Wasn't it the name of somebody in the Odyssey? Didn't Odysseus say—"

"Oh," she said gently, "Odysseus lied about so much. He said that, when he escaped me, I jumped into the sea and was drowned."

"Parthenope," Colby said again. "She was one of the three sisters, the—"

"My sisters perished, long ago. But I have stayed."

He turned and stared, wondering what joke she made. But she did not smile. She stood straight and tense inside her loose robe.

Her right arm crept toward him, the fingers crooked like talons.

"My song drew you," she said. "Odysseus got away, but you came. You were too ill and faint when you reached the shore. But now the salt is drained out of your flesh and blood, and it is sweet."

Colby drew back against the rock as she closed in on him.

"Who are you?" he screamed.

Her lips parted in a smile, and at last he saw her teeth, narrow and keen and widely spaced, the teeth of a flesh-eater.

"I am a *seiren,*" she told him again.

AN OFFERING TO THE MOON

BY CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Heading by Virgil Finlay

The moon's implacable, white, frozen lips were appeased only by warm blood. . . .

I

"I BELIEVE," announced Morley, "that the roofless temples of Mu were not all devoted to solar worship, but that many of them were consecrated to the moon. And I am sure that the one we have now discovered proves my point. These hieroglyphics are lunar symbols beyond a doubt."

Thorway, his fellow-archaeologist, looked at Morley with a surprise not altogether due to the boldly authoritative pronouncement. He was struck anew by the singularity of Morley's tones and expression. The dreamy, beardless, olive features, that seemed to repeat some aboriginal Aryan type, were transfigured by a look of ecstatic absorption. Thorway himself was not incapable of enthusiasm when the occasion seemed to warrant it; but this well-nigh religious ardor was beyond his comprehension. He wondered (not for the only time) if his companion's mentality were not a trifle . . . eccentric.

However, he mumbled a rejoinder that was deferential even though non-committal. Morley had not only financed the expedition, but had been paying a liberal stipend to Thorway for more than two years. So Thorway could afford to be respectful, even though he was a little tired of his employer's odd and unauthorized notions, and the interminable series of sojourns they had made on Melanesian isles. From the monstrous and primordial stone images of Easter Island to the truncated pyramidal columns of the Ladrones, they had visited all the far-strewn remains which are held to prove the former existence of a great continent in the mid-Pacific. Now, on one of the lesser Marquesas, hitherto unexplored, they had located the massive walls of a large temple-like edifice. As usual, it had been difficult to find, for such places were universally feared and shunned by the natives, who believed them haunted by the immemorial dead, and could not be hired to visit them or even to reveal their whereabouts. It was Morley who had stumbled upon the place, almost is if he were led by a subconscious instinct.

TRULY, they had made a significant discovery, as even Thorway was compelled to admit. Except for a few of the colossal topmost stones, which had

fallen or splintered away, the walls were in well-nigh perfect preservation. The place was surrounded by a tangle of palms and jackfruit and various tropical shrubs; but somehow none of them had taken root within the walls. Portions of a paved floor were still extant, amid centurial heaps of rubble. In the center was a huge, square block, rising four feet above the ground-level, which might well have served as an altar. It was carved with rude symbols which appeared to represent the moon in all its digits, and was curiously grooved across the top from the middle to one side with a trough that became deeper toward the edge. Like all other buildings of the sort, it was plain that the temple had never supported a roof.

"Yes, the symbols are undoubtedly lunar," admitted Thorway.

"Also," Morley went on, "I believe that rites of human sacrifice were performed in these temples. Oblations of blood were poured not only to the sun but to the moon."

"The idea is maintainable, of course," rejoined Thorway. "Human sacrifice was pretty widespread at a certain stage of evolution. It may well have been practiced by the people who built this edifice."

Morley did not perceive the dryness and formality of his confrere's assent. He was preoccupied with feelings and ideas, some of which could hardly have been the natural result of his investigations. Even as in visiting many others of the ancient remains, he had been troubled by a nervous agitation which was a compound of irresoluble awe and terror, of nameless, eager fascination and expectancy. Here, among these mighty walls, the feeling became stronger than it had been anywhere else; and it mounted to a pitch that was veritably distracting, and akin to the disturbed awareness that ushers in the illusions of delirium.

His idea, that the temple was a place of lunar worship, had seized him almost with the authority of an actual recollection, rather than a closely reasoned inference. Also, he was troubled by sensory impressions that bordered upon the hallucinative. Though the day was tropically warm, he was conscious of a strange chill that emanated from the walls—a chill as of bygone cycles; and it seemed to him that the narrow shadows wrought by a meridian sun were peopled with unseen faces. More than once, he was prompted to rub his eyes, for ghostly films of color, like flashes of yellow and

purple garments, came and went in the most infinitesimal fraction of time. Though the air was utterly still, he had the sense of perpetual movement all around him, of the passing to and fro of intangible throngs. It was many thousand years, in all likelihood, since human feet had trodden these pavements; but Morley could have cried aloud with the imminence of the long-dead ages. It appeared to him, in a brief glimpse, that his whole life, as well as his journeyings and explorations in the South Seas, had been but a devious return to some earlier state of being; and that the resumption of this state was now at hand. All this, however, continued to perplex him mightily: it was as if he had suffered the intrusion of an alien entity.

He heard himself speaking to Thorway, and the words were unfamiliar and remote, as if they had issued from the lips of another.

"They were a joyous and a child-like race, those people of Mu," he was saying; "but not altogether joyous, not wholly child-like. There was a dark side . . . and a dark worship—the cult of death and night, personified by the moon, whose white, implacable, frozen lips were appeased only by the warm blood that flowed upon her altars. They caught the blood in goblets as it ran from the stone grooves . . . they raised it aloft . . . and the goblets were swiftly drained in mid-air by the remote goddess, if the sacrifice had proven acceptable."

"But how do you know all this?" Thorway was quite amazed, no less by his companion's air than by the actual words. Morley, he thought, was less like a modern, every-day American than ever. He remembered, inconsequently, how all the natives of the various island-groups had taken to Morley with an odd friendliness, without the reserve and suspicion often accorded to other white men. They had even warned Morley against the guardian spirits of the ruins—and they did not always trouble to warn others. It was almost as if they regarded him as being in some manner akin to themselves. Thorway wondered . . . though he was essentially unimaginative.

"I tell you, I *know,*" Morley said, as he walked up and down beside the altar. "I have seen . . ." his voice trailed off in a frozen whisper, and he seemed to stiffen in every limb, and stood still as with some momentary catalepsy. His face grew deadly pale, his eyes were set and staring. Then, from between rigid lips, he uttered the strange words, *"Rhalu muvasa than,"* in

a monotonous, hieratic tone, like a sort of invocation.

MORLEY could not have told what it was that he felt and saw in that moment. He was no longer his known and wonted self; and the man beside him was an unheeded stranger. But he could remember nothing afterwards—not even the odd vocables he had uttered. Whatever his mental experience may have been, it was like a dream that fades instantly when one awakens. The moment passed, the extreme rigidity left his limbs and features, and he resumed his interrupted pacing.

His confrere was staring at him in astonishment, not unmingled with solicitude.

"Are you ill? The sun is pretty hot today. And one should be careful. Perhaps we had best return to the schooner."

Morley gave a mechanical assent, and followed Thorway from the ruins toward the seashore, where the schooner they had used in their voyaging was anchored in a little harbor less than a mile distant. His mind was full of confusion and darkness. He no longer felt the queer emotions that had seized him beside the altar; nor could he recall them otherwise than dimly. All the while he was trying to recollect something which lay just below the rim of memory; something very momentous, which he had forgotten long, long ago.

II

LYING in a cane couch beneath an awning on the schooner's deck, Morley drifted back to his normal plane of consciousness. He was not unwilling to accept Thorway's suggestion, that he had suffered a touch of sun among the ruins. His ghostly sensations, the delirium-like approach to a state of awareness which had no relation to his daily life, were now unlikely and unreal. In an effort to dismiss them altogether, he went over in his mind the whole of the investigative tour he had undertaken, and the events of the years preceding it.

He remembered his youthful luctations against poverty, his desire for that wealth and leisure which alone makes possible the pursuit of every chimera; and his slow but accelerative progress when once he had acquired a modicum of capital and had gone into business for himself as an importer of Oriental rugs. Then he recalled the chance inception of his archaeological enthusiasm —the reading of an illustrated article which described the ancient remains on Easter Island.

The insoluble strangeness of these little-known relics had thrilled him profoundly, though he knew not why; and he had resolved to visit them some day. The theory of a lost continent in the Pacific appealed to him with an almost intimate lure and imaginative charm; it became his own particular chimera, though he could not have traced to their psychal origin the feelings behind his interest. He read everything procurable on the subject; and as soon as his leisure permitted, he made a trip to Easter Island. A year later, he was able to leave his business indefinitely in the hands of an efficient manager. He hired Thorway, a professional archaeologist with much experience in Italy and Asia Minor, to accompany him; and purchasing an old schooner, manned by a Swedish crew and captain, he had set out on his long, devious voyage among the Islands.

Going over all this in his thoughts, Morley decided that it was now time to return home. He had learned all that was verifiable regarding the mysterious ruins. The study had fascinated him as nothing else in his life had ever done; but for some reason his health was beginning to suffer. Perhaps he had thrown himself too assiduously into his labors; the ruins had absorbed him too deeply. He must get away from them, must not risk a renewal of the queer, delusory sensations he had experienced. He recalled the superstitions of the natives, and wondered if there were something in them after all; if unwholesome influences were attached to those primeval stones. Did ghosts return or linger from a world that had been buried beneath the wave for unknown ages? Damn it, he had almost felt at times as if he were some sort of *revenant* himself.

HE CALLED to Thorway, who was standing beside the rail in conversation with one of the Norse sailors.

"I think we have done enough for one voyage, Thorway," he said. "We will lift anchor in the morning and return to San Francisco."

Thorway made little effort to conceal his relief. He did not consider the Polynesian isles a very fruitful field for research: the ruins were too old and fragmentary, the period to which they belonged was too conjectural, and did not deeply engage his interest.

"I agree," he rejoined. "Also, if you will pardon me for saying it, I don't think the South Sea climate is one of ideal salubriousness. I've noticed occasional

indispositions on your part for some time past."

Morley nodded in a weary acquiescence. It would have been impossible to tell Thorway his actual thoughts and emotions. The man was abysmally unimaginative.

He only hoped that Thorway did not think him a little mad —though, after all, it was quite immaterial.

The day wore on; and the swift, purpureal darkness of eventide was curtailed by the rising of a full moon which inundated sea and land with warm, ethereous quicksilver. At dinner, Morley was lost in a taciturn abstraction; and Thorway was discreetly voluble, but made no reference to the late archaeological find. Svensen, the captain, who ate with them, maintained a monosyllabic reticence, even when he was told of the proposed return to San Francisco. After eating, Morley excused himself and went back to the canecouch. Somewhat to his relief, he was not joined by Thorway.

Moonlight had always aroused in Morley a vague but profound emotion. Even as the ruins had done, it stirred among the shadows of his mind a million ghostly intimations; and the thrill he felt was at times not unalloyed with a cryptic awe and trepidation, akin, perhaps, to the primal fear of darkness itself.

Now, as he gazed at the tropic plenilune, he conceived the sudden and obsessing idea that the orb was somehow larger, and its light more brilliant than usual; even as they might have been in ages when the moon and earth were much younger. Then he was possessed by a troublous doubt, by an inenarrable sense of dislocation, and a dream-like vagueness which attached itself to the world about him. A wave of terror surged upon him, and he felt that he was slipping irretrievably away from all familiar things. Then the terror ebbed; for that which he had lost was far off and incredible; and a world of circumstances long-forgot was assuming, or resuming, the tinge of familiarity.

WHAT, he wondered, was he doing on this queer ship? It was the night of sacrifice to Rhalu, the selenic goddess; and he, Matla, was to play an essential part in the ceremony. He must reach the temple ere the moon had mounted to her zenith above the altar-stone. And it now lacked only an hour of the appointed time.

He rose and peered about with questioning eyes. The deck was deserted, for it was unnecessary to keep watch in that tranquil

harbor. Svensen and the mate were doubtless drinking themselves to sleep as usual; the sailors were playing their eternal whist and pedro; and Thorway was in his cabin, probably writing a no less eternal monograph on Etruscan tombs. It was only in the most remote and exiguous manner that Morley recollected their existence.

Somehow, he managed to recall that there was a boat which he and Thorway had used in their visits to the isle; and that this boat was moored to the schooner's side. With a tread as lithe and supple as that of a native, he was over the rail and was rowing silently shoreward. A hundred yards, or little more, and then he stood on the moon-washed sand.

Now he was climbing the palm-clustered hill above the shore, and was heading toward the temple. The air was suffused with a primal, brooding warmth, with the scent of colossal flowers and ferns not known to modern botanists. He could see them towering beside his way with their thick, archaic fronds and petals, though such things have not lifted to the moon for aeons. And mounting the crest of the hill, which had dominated the little isle and had looked down to the sea on two sides, he saw in the mellow light the far, unbounded reaches of a softly rolling plain, and sealess horizons everywhere, that glowed with the golden fires of cities. And he knew the names of these cities, and recalled the opulent life of Mu, whose prosperity had of late years been menaced by Atlantean earthquakes and volcanic upheavals. These, it was believed, were owing to the wrath of Rhalu, the goddess who controlled the planetary forces; and human blood was being poured in all her fanes to placate the mysterious deity.

Morley (or Matla) could have remembered a million things; he could have called to mind the simple but strange events of his entire pre-existence in Mu, and the lore and history of the far-flung continent. But there was little room in his consciousness for anything but the destined drama of the night. Long ago (how long he was not sure) he had been chosen among his people for an awful honor; but his heart had failed him ere the time ordained, and he had fled. Tonight, however, he would not flee. A solemn religious rapture, not untinged with fear, guided his steps toward the temple of the goddess.

As he went on, he noticed his raiment, and was puzzled. Why was he wearing these ugly and unseemly garments? He began to remove them and to cast them

aside one by one. Nakedness was ordained by sacerdotal law for the role he was to play.

He heard the soft-vowelled murmur of voices about him, and saw the multi-colored robes or gleaming amber flesh of forms that flitted among the archaic plants. The priests and worshippers were also on their way to the temple.

His excitement rose, it became more mystical and more rhapsodic as he neared his destination. His being was flooded by the superstitious awe of ancient man, by the dreadful reverence due to the unknown powers of nature. He peered with a solemn trepidation at the moon as it rose higher in the heavens, and saw in its rounded orb the features of a divinity both benign and malevolent.

Now he beheld the temple, looming whitely above the tops of titan fronds. The walls were no longer ruinous, their fallen blocks were wholly restored. His visit to the place with Thorway was dim as a fever fantasy; but other visits during his life as Matla, and ceremonials of the priests of Rhalu which he had once beheld, were clear and immediate in his memory. He knew the faces he would see, and the ritual wherein he would participate. He thought mostly in pictures; but the words of a strange vocabulary were ready for his recollection; and phrases drifted through his mind with unconscious ease; phrases that would have seemed unintelligible gibberish an hour before.

Matla was aware of the concentrated gaze of several hundred eyes as he entered the great, roofless fane. The place was thronged with people, whose round features were of a pre-Aryan type; and many of the faces were familiar to him. But at that moment all of them were parcel of a mystic horror, and were awesome and obscure as the night. Nothing was clear before him, save an opening in the throng, which led to the altar-stone around which the priests of Rhalu were gathered, and wherein Rhalu herself looked down in relentless, icy splendor from an almost vertical elevation.

He went forward with firm steps. The priests, who were clad in lunar purple and yellow, received him in impassive silence. Counting them, he found that there were only six instead of the usual seven. One there was among them who carried a large, shallow goblet of silver; but the seventh, whose hand would lift a long and curving knife of some copperish metal, had not yet arrived.

Thorway had found it curiously hard to apply himself

to the half-written monograph on Etruscan tombs. An obscure and exasperating restlessness finally impelled him to abandon his wooing of the reluctant muse of archaeology. In a state of steadily mounting irritation, wishing that the bothersome and unprofitable voyage were over, he went on deck.

The moonlight dazzled him with its preternatural brilliance, and he did not perceive for a few moments that the cane couch was empty. When he saw that Morley was gone, he experienced a peculiar mixture of alarm and irritation. He felt sure that Morley had not returned to his cabin. Stepping to the schooner's shoreward side, he noted with little surprise the absence of the moored boat. Morley must have gone ashore for a moonlight visit to the ruined temple; and Thorway frowned heavily at this new presumptive evidence of his employer's eccentricity and aberration. An unwonted sense of responsibility, deep and solemn, stirred within him. He seemed to hear an inward injunction, a strange, half-familiar voice, bidding him to take care of Morley. This unhealthy and exorbitant interest in a more than problematic past should be discouraged or at least supervised.

Very quickly, he made up his mind as to what he should do. Going below, he called two of the Swedish sailors from their game of pedro and had them row him ashore in the ship's dinghy. As they neared the beach the boat used by Morley was plainly visible in the plumy shadow of a clump of seaward-leaning palms.

Thorway, without offering any explanation of his purpose in going ashore, told the sailors to return to the ship. Then, following the well-worn trail toward the temple, he mounted the island-slope.

Step by step, as he went on, he become aware of a strange difference in the vegetation. What were these monstrous ferns and primordial-looking flowers about him? Surely it was some weird trick of the moonlight, distorting the familiar palms and shrubs. He had seen nothing of the sort in his daytime visits, and such forms were impossible, anyway. Then, by degrees, he was beset with terrible doubt and bewilderment. There came to him the ineffably horrifying sensation of passing beyond his proper self, beyond all that he knew as legitimate and verifiable. Fantastic, unspeakable thoughts, alien, abnormal impulses, thronged upon him from the sorcerous glare of the effulgent moon. He shuddered at repellent but insistent memories that were not his own, at the ghastly com-

pulsion of an unbelievable command. What on earth was possessing him? Was he going mad like Morley? The moon-bright isle was like some bottomless abyss of nightmare fantasy, into which he sank with nightmare terror.

He sought to recover his hard, materialistic sanity, his belief in the safe literality of things. Then, suddenly and without surprise, he was no longer Thorway.

He knew the real purpose for which he had come ashore—the solemn rite in which he was to play an awful but necessary part. The ordained hour was near—the worshippers, the sacrifice and the six fellow-priests awaited his coming in the immemorial fane of Rhalu.

UNASSISTED by any of the priests, Matla had stretched himself on the cold altar. How long he lay there, waiting, he could not tell. But at last, by the rustling stir and murmur of the throng, he knew that the seventh priest had arrived.

All fear had left him, as if he were already beyond the pain and suffering of earth. But he knew with a precision well-nigh real as physical sight and sensation the use which would be made of the copperish knife and the silver goblet.

He lay gazing at the wan heavens, and saw dimly, with far-focussed eyes, the leaning face of the seventh priest. The face was doubly familiar . . . but he had forgotten something. He did not try to remember. Already it seemed to him that the white moon was drawing nearer, was stooping from her celestial station to quaff the awaited sacrifice. Her light blinded him with unearthly fulgor; but he saw dimly the flash of the falling knife ere it entered his heart. There was an instant of tearing pain that plunged on and on through his body, as if its tissues were a deep abyss. Then a sudden darkness took the heavens and blotted out the face of Rhalu; and all things, even pain, were erased for Matla by the black mist of an eternal nothing.

III

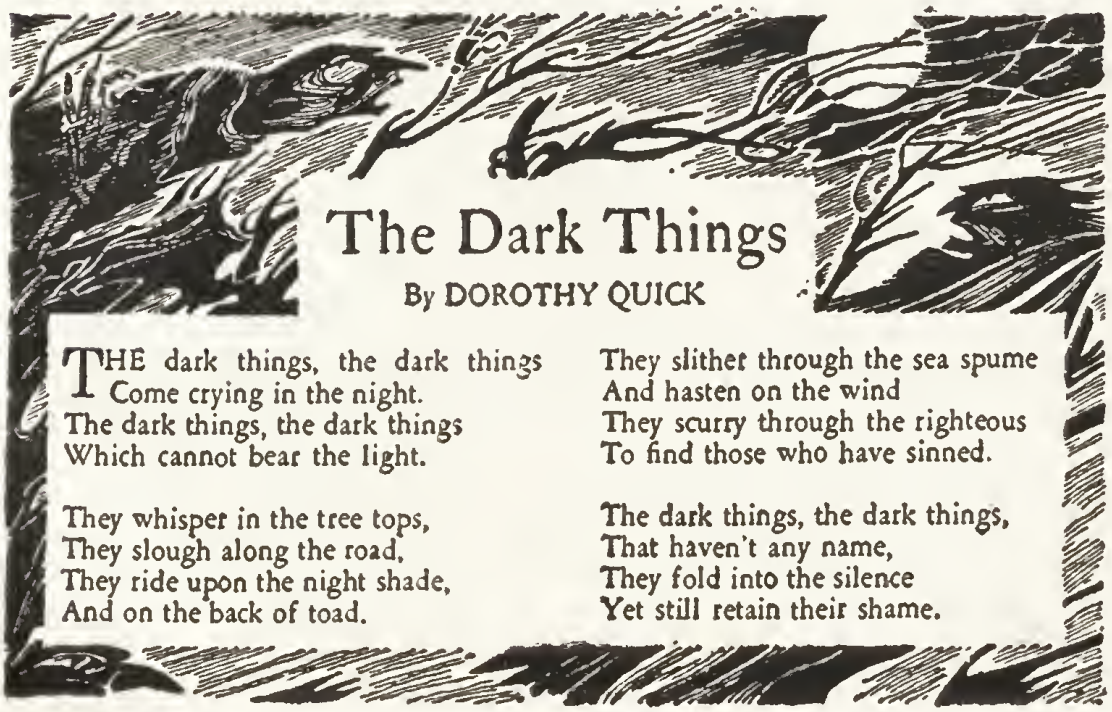
IN THE morning, Svensen and his sailors waited very patiently for the return of Morley and Thorway from the island. When afternoon came and the two were still absent, Svensen decided that it was time to investigate.

He had received orders to lift anchor for San Francisco that day; but he could not very well depart without Thorway and Morley.

With one of the crew, he row-

ed ashore and climbed the hill to the ruins. The roofless temple was empty, save for the plants that had taken root in the crevices of its pavement. Svensen and the sailor, looking about for the archaeologists, were horrified from their stolidity by the stains of newly dried blood that lined the great groove in the altar-block to its edge.

They summoned the remainder of the crew. A daylong search of the little island, however, was without result. The natives knew nothing of the whereabouts of Morley and Thorway, and were queerly reticent even in avowing their ignorance. There was no place where the two men could have hidden themselves, granting that they had any reason for a procedure so peculiar. Svensen and his men gave it up. If they had been imaginative, it might have seemed to them that the archaeologists had vanished bodily into the past.



The Dark Things

By DOROTHY QUICK

THE dark things, the dark things
Come crying in the night.
The dark things, the dark things
Which cannot bear the light.

They whisper in the tree tops,
They slough along the road,
They ride upon the night shade,
And on the back of toad.

They slithet through the sea spume
And hasten on the wind
They scurry through the righteous
To find those who have sinned.

The dark things, the dark things,
That haven't any name,
They fold into the silence
Yet still retain their shame.

. . . he even had to look the other way to kill a fly.

THE EBONY STICK

BY AUGUST DERLETH

MY UNCLE JACK was always a devil-may-care sort of fellow, debonair, handsome, with a marked aversion to work. All his nieces and nephews loved him. All his own generation, naturally, disapproved of him. On two counts—because he did not work but managed to live by his wits, and because they envied him his success at this, even though he lived from hand to mouth, so to speak, I always suspected that the only reason he kept his trim figure was that he

Heading by Virgil Finlay

never had enough money to gorge himself with the food and drink he loved. And the generation before his frowned on him heartily, with the exception of his mother, my grandmother, who was always slightly foolish about her children.

So it came as a distinct surprise to all of us when Aunt Maud died and left everything to Uncle Jack in a will discovered in a book in her library, which, by an earlier will, she had left to Uncle Jack, "to improve his mind and teach him that there is a great virtue and a lasting balm in labor."

We all guessed that Great-Aunt Maud, who had previously impressed us as formidably serious, had intended things to work out this way—if Uncle Jack had not begun to read the books he had inherited, he would never have found the last will and testament of Great-Aunt Maud. Still and all, it was a little strange that things should have happened this way; one would have thought she, more than most of us, would have wanted Uncle Jack to work a little harder for his windfall. And it was markedly unkind of Great-Aunt Maud to forget all the rest of us, especially Myra, who had been her favorite, and who was sure to grow up as helpless as she was beautiful, for having been petted so, and because her widowed mother, my Aunt Hester, never seemed to be able to hang on to any money whatsoever.

But that was the way things worked out, and that was the way we expected they would stay. But someone in the family had other ideas, as we found out soon enough. As soon, that is, as we found ourselves benefitted by Uncle Jack's good fortune, for one weekend he invited us all to what had formerly been Great-Aunt Maud's large and imposing old house, which sat in the middle of a city block, protected from the curious by a wall of trees, and a stone wall all the way around it, so that going there was just like going out of the city into the woods. The only sounds you heard there were the clanging of the street-cars outside, and an occasional car whizzing past the gate.

I WAS twelve at that time. I remember that my mother and my father did not care very much to go, they had been so upset by Uncle Jack's good luck, but our disappointment was so pronounced in the face of their hesitation, that they decided to accept his invitation.

"I suppose we may as well make the best of it," said mother.

"He's got some reason for inviting us," said father.

"What about Hester and Myra?"

"Their turn will come."

But their turn had already come. They were at Uncle Jack's house when we got there, and Aunt Hester flew into my mother's arms, embraced her, kissed her, and, when no one was looking, leaned to my mother's ear and said theatrically, "Something's wrong with Jack!"

And something was. He who had always been so debonair, was now distinctly preoccupied. He smiled for all of us, he made jokes—but it was not quite the same; the twinkle was not right in his eyes, his smile was insincere, and we all noticed it. When we children had a conference after dinner in the large playroom which was part of the house, we examined the subject critically.

"Do you know what I think?" said Cousin Myra. "Uncle Jack's afraid of something."

"Hoh! Of what?" demanded my sister. "He's got all Aunt Maud's money. What's he got to be afraid of?"

"Perhaps he thinks we'll get some of it," said my younger brother, Harry.

"You know what I think," pursued Myra with dream abstraction. "I think he's planning to poison us all. Then his money will be safe."

"Not Uncle Jack," said my sister. "He wouldn't hurt a soul." She scoffed. "Why, he even has to look the other way when he kills a fly."

We laughed at this suggestion to scorn.

AFTERWARD, we made a tour of the house, to see whether Uncle Jack had changed anything. If so, we could not find it. We thought certainly he would have taken down or turned to the wall that hideous portrait of Great-Aunt Maud which was in the living-room. It showed her clad in her usual color, which was black, wearing a black velvet dress with white collar and cuffs, with one claw-like hand resting on her ebony stick with the ivory knob for a handle, and her dark, beady eyes looking out into space, and her face just as if set to say, the way she always did, "Never be afraid to work, Children. Work sweetens living and earns its due reward on earth and in heaven." But he had not touched it; there it still was, dark, grave, forbidding, a constant reminder that, by her whim in favor of Uncle Jack, we would have no choice but to work and work and wait for that sweetening and that reward of which she had spoken so often, and with such affirmation that we never had a doubt they were to come.

Had they not, after all, come to Uncle Jack, even without work?

That evening at dinner we watched Uncle Jack closely. Every little while he was like his old self. He was a great tease.

He would kid Aunt Hester and poke jokes at my father. He seldom troubled my mother, who had as ready a tongue as he, and struck back fast. Aunt Hester was just helpless before his wit, and my father was too easily irritated. But when he was not his old self, he was a complete stranger; he seemed to forget all of us, and, if he had invited his sister and widowed sister-in-law and their families to that old house in order to impart some information to them, he gave not the slightest sign of it. He sat with a kind of strained expression on his face, as if he were listening for something none of us said.

After dinner, we children discussed him.

"You know what I think," said Cousin Myra again. "Uncle Jack's afraid of something."

"You said that before," accused my sister.

"I know, Jenny. I still think so."

"Why?"

"The way he sat at the table, listening."

"We didn't say anything."

I commanded my sister to pay attention to our cousin, since Myra was my personal favorite.

"He wasn't listening to us. He scarcely heard what mama or Uncle Herbert said," pursued Myra. "He was listening for something else."

We debated this proposition back and forth for a long time, and could not reach any agreement. In their own way, our parents were probably concerning themselves with a similar problem, because when we rejoined them, my mother was saying in a firm, if somewhat scornful voice, "It's perfectly plain that it's all your imagination, Jack. I've heard nothing at all since I set foot in this house."

"Wait," said Uncle Jack.

Aunt Hester, catching sight of us, said nervously, "Hush, the children."

"Are you telling fairy tales?" asked Harry naively.

"Ha! Fairy tales. That's a good one," said my father, laughing loudly. "Just what we were doing, too! That boy has the makings of a smart man."

AFTER midnight, my cousin Myra slipped into the room where Harry and I were sleeping. She shook me awake.

"Charles, listen," she whispered.

I sat up and listened.

"Do you hear it, Charles?" she asked.

I heard something, far away.

"What is it" I asked.

"Listen," she urged again.

It was a tapping sound. It came with marked regularity. *Tap, tap, tap. . . .*

I woke Harry up, and when I had convinced him no goblins were about to devour him, told him to listen, too.

"Do you hear anything, Harry?" pressed Myra.

"Tap, tap, tap," said Harry earnestly, looking from one to the other of us.

We slipped out and into Myra's room, to awaken my sister.

She listened, too, for a moment. Then she said, "I know what that is. That's Aunt Maud's cane."

"Aunt Maud's dead," whispered Myra.

"Don't be silly," countered my sister in a superior voice. "Somebody's using her ebony stick, that's what."

"Who?" demanded Myra.

"We'll find out." My sister got out of bed, cautioned Harry not to let a peep out of him, and led the way into the hall.

Stealthily, we made our way along the hall in the direction of the sound. Uncle Jack's house was T-shaped. We were in the right wing of the T, and the sound semed to be coming from the forend of the back wing. So we crept along in the dark in our nightgowns until we came to the hall that yawned blackly away from our wing. The tapping sound was plain and unmistakable. It came from up ahead in that blackness.

Harry began to whimper uneasily.

"You hush up," said our sister fiercely.

Being far more frightened of the immediate danger presented by our sister, Harry was obediently silent. Just to be on the safe side, he held on to my nightgown, even though I pushed out in front. I could hardly let my sister lead the way with Myra there.

We went on down the hall. The *tap, tap, tap* was right ahead.

At the end of the hall, now showing more clearly, was a double-window through which the moonlight shone. And, as we came closer and closer to it, we could see Great-Aunt Maud's ebony stick. It was moving up and down against the floor, making the sound we all heard. We could not see who was using it, only a dark shadow in the darkness of the hall. I would have pressed even farther forward, but at that point my brother planted his feet against the floor

and pulled back on my nightgown. Both Myra and my sister had stopped, too, unwilling to go farther.

The stick danced up and down there in the moonlit darkness of the hall. It was somewhere near Uncle Jack's room, I figured out.

Myra put her mouth to my ear and whispered. "Who is it?"

"Don't know," I whispered back.

At that moment a door opened up ahead, and Uncle Jack stepped out into the hall. He was carrying a large flashlight, and by its reflected light we could see how wild Uncle Jack's face was. We could see something else, too—there was nobody holding on to that ebony stick.

Even before we could take that in, something wonderfully strange happened. Whoever was handling that ebony stick, and however it was being done, it suddenly jumped up and began to beat Uncle Jack about the head and shoulders while he tried in vain to catch hold of it, muttering and cursing under his breath. But he couldn't do it; he dropped his flashlight, covered his face with his hands, and fell back into his room, closing the door.

COUSIN MYRA and my sister backed away and ran. Harry let go of my nightgown, and fled, whimpering, after them. The last thing I saw was that ebony stick, still making its *tap, tap* in the moonlit hall. Then I ran after them.

We all gathered in the room where my sister and Myra slept.

"I told you he was afraid of something," said Myra accusingly. "So now you see what it is. It's Aunt Maud's ebony stick."

"That's silly," said my sister scornfully. "It's not the stick, it's who's holding it, that's what."

"Who?" demanded Myra.

My sister did not answer.

"Who?" demanded Myra again.

"I couldn't see," said my sister.

"Ha!" exclaimed Myra scornfully. "I ask you who, and you say. . . ."

Harry interrupted. "Aunt Maud," he said in a small voice.

"Aunt Maud's dead," said my sister firmly.

"Aunt Maud," said Harry again. "I saw her."

"Aunt Maud's dead," repeated my sister.

"She's not."

"She is! You hush up, Harry Sanderson, or I'll paddle you."

Harry went around and stood behind me. "Aunt Maud," he said again in a whisper so low that my sister could safely pretend not to have heard it.

IN THE morning we were all going down for breakfast when we halted outside the large kitchen because we heard Uncle Jack's voice raised angrily.

"I tell you I chopped up that damned stick and burned it, do you hear? I did it myself. I didn't trust anybody else to do it. But you heard it last night, didn't you?"

"I heard a sound that might have been made by a cane," said my mother calmly. "But I don't know what it was, and I'm not guessing."

"Oh, Jack, what a story!" said Aunt Hester, and giggled.

"How did I get these, then?"

"Probably been drinking in your room and fell out of bed or ran into the door," said my father.

"Damn it, Herb. . . ."

"All right," said my father in a grave voice, "Let's assume it's so. Then tell me why. What's on your conscience, Jack?"

Uncle Jack didn't say another word.

So we marched into the kitchen, after agreeing not to say anything to anybody. Uncle Jack's head and face showed angry blue bruises. That ebony stick had hit him hard. We knew, because we had seen it. We looked from one to another with that sly assurance children have when they know something their parents do not. But not one of us said anything because we were determined to corner Uncle Jack.

And corner him we did.

We caught up with him in the old coach house out in back. Even there he appeared to be listening, and of course, we knew he was listening for the *tap, tap, tap* of Great-Aunt Maud's ebony stick.

"Do you hear it all the way out here?" Myra asked.

He just looked at her, as if he could not believe what she had said.

"We know," I said. "It's Great-Aunt Maud's ebony stick. What have you done, Uncle Jack?"

Uncle Jack's bruised face got as white as a piece of paper. His bruises and his mustache stood out dark against that whiteness.

"You kids don't know what you're talking about," he said gruffly.

"Oh, yes, we do," said Harry. "We saw you get it last night."

"You saw the stick?" demanded Uncle Jack, turning on him.

Harry nodded. "And Aunt Maud," he added.

Uncle Jack swallowed hard. He hardly heard my sister's indignant denial of Harry's words.

"It was so dark we couldn't see anything except the cane in the moonlight."

Uncle Jack got up and walked away.

"I told you, I told you," chanted Myra. "Uncle Jack's afraid."

We children held a pow-wow and promised one another that the first one who heard the ebony stick again would immediately hunt up all the others and tell them. After that we separated and each of us went his own way.

In that manner we found out that the ebony stick seemed to follow Uncle Jack around. It was strange, but though we could hear it, none of us could catch a glimpse of it. And it could not always be heard, either. Sometimes it was plain, then again there wasn't any sound at all. Sometimes we couldn't hear it for an hour or more; then, of a sudden, it was there, and Uncle Jack would jump and turn around and not be able to see anything any more than we could.

TWO things happened that day, apart from the *tap, tap* of the ebony stick.

The first was Harry's find. Harry had gone to rummage about outside. He was a great one to get himself lost in the woods. That afternoon he found a place where a lot of rubbish had been burned. When he came back he had with him a charred white thing that couldn't have been anything but an ivory handle just like that on Great-Aunt Maud's ebony stick. It puzzled us all a lot.

The second was our parents talking.

Aunt Hester said, "I think it was a wonderfully generous gesture on Jack's part to offer to divide the estate with us in equal parts."

My father said, "There's something behind it."

My mother said, "We'll wait and see what happens."

That night it was Harry who heard the ebony stick first. He pinched me and whispered, frightened, "It's Aunt Maud. She's going up to whip Uncle Jack again."

I woke the others. We took a vote on following or not. Harry voted against it, but because he was too scared to stay alone, he went along anyway, hanging back as much as he could.

Once more we followed the sound of that cane along the hall.

That night it was different. Instead of moonlight, there was a storm outside, and every little while the lightning flashed and flared at the windows and into the hall. It was scarey, but the four of us stuck together. I think each one of us, except Harry, was afraid to admit he was scared; so we all went on, follow-

ing that ebony stick to Uncle Jack's room, where it stood tapping and dancing.

I tried as hard as I could to see who was doing it. Every time the lightning flared I looked close, but I couldn't make out anyone definite. Maybe there was someone leaning there over the stick, just the way Harry said.

"It's Aunt Maud," he kept whispering.

"You hush up," my sister said inevitably.

Maybe there was no one there, only that couldn't have been, because otherwise the cane couldn't have moved like that. So there was someone or something, and we weren't smart enough to figure it out.

This time the door of Uncle Jack's room stayed closed.

But that didn't seem to make any difference, for suddenly the ebony stick wasn't there at all, and at the same time we could hear Uncle Jack shouting in his room, and then the door flew open, and he came stumbling out in his pajamas, trying to protect himself, and the stick came *after him,* though none of us had seen the door open to let it in.

Then, in a flash of lightning, he looked straight at us.

I don't know who he thought we were, but just then he fell down to his knees, with his hands over his face, and he shouted out, "Let me alone! Go back where you belong! I'll do anything—I'll give it back, all of it."

We ran like everything.

"He saw us," said Myra, once we were safely together in our room.

Harry shook his head.

"I don't think he could make us out," I said.

Harry whispered hoarsely, "It was Aunt Maud. I saw her. Oh, but she was mad at Uncle Jack!"

My sister shook him. "Aunt Maud's dead, do you hear?"

"She isn't!"

"She is!" she said so fiercely that Harry was cowed.

"Let him alone," I said.

"Let's not quarrel, please," said Myra.

"What shall we do?" asked my sister.

"Nothing," I said.

"I said all along Uncle Jack was afraid of something."

"He said he'd give it back," said my sister thoughtfully. "He must have stolen something."

"Oh, no!" cried Myra. "Not Uncle Jack! He's got everything. He's got all the money he wants."

"That's true," admitted my sister.

Harry had noticed something the girls had not seen. After we were alone, he whispered it to me.

"Charles, you could see the window-sill right through that cane."

Coming to think of it, you could.

We had agreed to scout the kitchen next morning, the last day of our stay with Uncle Jack, so that we would not miss anything.

Nor did we.

As soon as Harry let us know that Uncle Jack had gone down, we slipped down and stood outside the kitchen to listen to what went on inside.

"And how are you getting on in your affair with Maud's stick?" my father greeted Uncle Jack.

"I asked you all down here for one purpose," answered Uncle Jack soberly. "I wanted to offer you a share of what Aunt Maud left."

"You did, and I think it was a wonderful thing of you, Jack," said Aunt Hester.

"Thank you. But apparently it was not enough for Aunt Maud."

"How you talk!" That was Aunt Hester again; I could see her giggling.

"I guess Aunt Maud means you to have it all," Uncle Jack continued.

"Except the library," said my mother. "I thought so."

"Oh, no, Jack!" cried Aunt Hester.

"All right, let's stop pretending," said Uncle Jack. "It's true. I forged that will. It was a masterpiece. No one ever suspected. But I haven't had a moment's rest since then. That damned cane even follows me to hotels and resorts. You might have guessed. I thought I could appease her by sharing all this with you—but no, she'll have her way."

"We must avoid scandal," said my mother immediately.

"We'll let the will stand," said my father. "But you'll just deed over the property, and we'll make the proper division. You might have known Maud would resent being foiled."

We all felt sorry for Uncle Jack, no matter what a rascal he had been.

But in the end, Great-Aunt Maud was foiled, after all. Uncle Jack took after Aunt Hester and they were married. They came at last to live in Great-Aunt Maud's house. Neither of them ever saw or heard that ebony stick again, though Cousin Myra said that Uncle Jack kept on listening for a long while after they had returned to the house. This time the ebony stick stayed burned.

And what sort of devil inhabited it. . . ?

THE DEVIL'S CABIN

BY VANCE HOYT

I SHALL never forget those torturing days we spent in the nightmare jungle near the Jalan river.

Placer gold we obtained, to be sure; but there were other things that left their indelible imprints upon the memory. Chief among these was the fiend Rodriquez and the manner in which he was known as "La Fiera," the beast!

As a trail man and master of camp, Rodriquez probably never had an equal. But a thorough knowledge of pack, and the superhuman understanding of a mule, is not everything.

A halfbreed of Mexican peonage and Yaqui Indian was Rodriquez. Never shaven, his fat,

Heading by Vincent Napoli

swarthy countenance was indicative of the blood that flowed in his veins. His neck was short and powerful, like a gorilla's. Jet-black, greasy hair grew far down on his forehead to a slight space above the cruel, pig-like eyes. Everything about Rodriquez —every move, every attitude of his body—was that of a vicious animal.

He was commonly known as "a killer." Some proclaimed that he was possessed by a devil. Others that he was mad.

But not until we had obtained from our guide, the mozo, the cause of his scorpion-like hatred of Rodriquez did we learn for ourselves, Bill and I, the reason why he was feared and dreaded among the natives.

The incident had occurred several years before when the halfbreed made camp near the casa where Alamondo lived with his wife. There was no reason for the native to mistrust the man, never having heard of La Fiera before. But one day his wife complained of advances Rodriquez had made toward her.

The mozo demanded an explanation, but the halfbreed merely laughed in his beastly way and said nothing.

That night, when Alamondo returned to his case, he found his wife dead, a stiletto in her breast. La Fiera had attacked her. and she, in her distress, had thrust the dagger into her heart.

Alamondo swore vengeance!

Then came the moment of reckoning. A curse—the flash of steel—! But the little mozo lost his nerve. When he recovered, there was an ear missing!

After that, Alamondo never could summon sufficient courage to repeat the attack. He lived in fear of the beast. And so it was, when we emerged from the jungle into a small clearing where stood the devil's cabin!"

It was late in the evening, and I proposed that we bunk for the night in the deserted, log-adobe hut. But the mozo instantly fell up on his knees at my feet, seemingly terror-stricken at the suggestion.

"Hay diablo, senor!" he warned. "Sì, gran diablo!"

Not knowing the significance of his fright, I laughed and said to Bill, my partner, jocularly:

"Do you hear? Gran diablo, says the mozo. A big devil. Eh, Alamondo? A big devil!"

But the next instant, I stood speechless.

On the still, hot air of the approaching night, came the shrill scream of Felis Discolor, the black leopard.

"And I heard that, too," spoke up Bill, reaching for his Winchester. "I'm no coward, but I be doggoned if I'm going to

sleep in any ramshackle cabin even a native won't go near. Mebbe there's a devil in it and mebbe there isn't; but I'm not going to bunk in it to find out. No, siree! My hammock in the open is good enough for me."

BILL always was an obstinate cuss, so I paid no heed to what he said. I began questioning the mozo as to what he thought was lurking in the lonely hut.

It seemed that the cabin had not been inhabited for many years, perhaps hundreds—"quien sabe"—Alamondo did not know. Stray natives and travelers who had slept within its walls, seeking shelter from the poisonous jungle air, had invariably been all but murdered by some invisible devil. Several had been found terribly mutilated, and one native, whom the mozo knew personally, had died from wounds that would not heal.

No one ever had possessed courage sufficient to enter the hut and discover what the evil "thing" might be. Thus, in the uncertainty as to just what the "thing" was, everyone, light-footed and alert, swerved past the cabin at a respectable distance, crossing themselves and muttering: "Hay diablo!"

"Well, Bill, old-timer," I said, after turning the guide's story over in my mind, "here's where I tucker-it-out alone. Might as well die by the hand of the devil as from fever from sleeping in the open. Here goes!"

Bill stood looking in the direction of the cabin, rather chagrined. It was a bitter pill for him to swallow. He was no coward, this partner of mine. Back in the mining days of the Klondike, on a bet, he had gone into a cage with a mountain lion and bled the cat with a butcher knife.

However, this had been physical bravery. Bill was not so certain of himself mentally. So he kept peace with his soul and had nothing further to say. Save that it was poor judgment to seek risks that even a native declined.

This slur upon my judgment sealed the question right then and there. I was going to sleep in that haunted cabin, devil or no devil, or know the reason why.

I got up from the camp-fire and examined my Colt, a special .38-caliber on a forty-four frame, slipping an extra belt of cartridges about my waist.

I stood for a moment observing the hunkered form of Rodriquez hovered near the fire, where he was roasting the meat of a monkey he had slain for his meal. He had had nothing to say pertaining to the "devil's cabin," exhibiting not the slightest interest in our conversation.

As I watched him, more than ever in the crouched position he resembled the aspects of a beast. And in the flicker of the light, I thought I caught the faint traces of a cruel, crafty smile on his dark face as he sniffed at the odor of the roasting meat.

For a moment, I stood studying the man at his task. He had been left severely alone. None of the natives would have anything to do with him. He had moved back upon his haunches, like a dog, and sat tearing and gnawing at the steaming meat with his strong, yellow teeth—the beast that he was!

As I stood there, observing the grim scene before me, from somewhere back in the jungle came the weird cries of a howler, seemingly booming his wrath at the death of kith and kin.

In the stillness that followed, I heard the rustling of creeping things; the faint chirpings of metallic throats; the whir of fluttering wings and the purr and hissing of slinking creatures—evidence of a thousand living things, unseen but seeing—the ever-moving, sticky, hot jungle at night time!

AND as I stood there, scanning the darkness about us, two tiny diamonds caught my eye, twinkling in their yellow and green brilliancy. Further back, in the black, in the black-void, another set of living gems flashed their fire.

I stared at them, for the moment fascinated, not certain at first of just what I saw. They seemed to creep toward me with no perceptible motion, as a scene on the screen is focused closer by a moving lens.

Suddenly they vanished, as quickly as they had appeared. Then came a scream that brought my spine stiffly erect; the most terrifying cry I had ever heard! And two slender shadows, noiseless as a feather, cleaved the crescent of light from the campfire and vanished into the brush opposite.

Then another, and another, and another of these nightmare screeches—the blood-curdling voice of the jaguar!

In the palm of my hand I held the handle of my revolver, but the lightning bodies of the lithe creatures disappeared so quickly there was no time for a shot.

Rodriquez scarcely looked up

from where he sat crouched, gnawing the steaming meat of the monkey. The native carriers moved in nearer the fire, and Bill sat peering into the brush where the cats had disappeared.

But the mozo—! Terror had seized the man. He fell upon his knees before me in a frenzy, muttering a prayer and begging of me to tie a little red sack he held in his hand about my neck! He said it would keep the devil away.

Piqued at such superstition, but rather than offend him, I did as he asked, declining the trouble of ascertaining just what the little red sack contained—save that a pungent odor came from its contents.

THE poor fellow was so evidently pleased with the acceptance of his "devil-killer" that all fears for my safety seemed instantly to leave him. And as though it had in some mysterious way instilled a spark of bravery in the native himself, he deliberately walked over and entered into a conversation with La Fiera.

The move was so abrupt and foreign to his nature that I marveled at the confidence he held in his belief and faith in the powers of the little red sack.

But it was growing late, and I was tired and sleepy, so I did not take the pains to investigate the subject of their conversation. Thus, equipped with my trusty revolver and the odoriferous voodoo sack, I took my blanket and sauntered into the black void of the night.

I spent considerable time in locating the makeshift door of the cabin, which was really no door at all, but several logs stood on end and lashed together by tough vines and jungle grass. After much exertion, I managed to pry the logs apart sufficiently to worm my way into the interior of the hut.

For a moment I stood, listening and peering about in the dense darkness of the close, musty-smelling room. Assuring myself finally that I was alone, I relaxed my vigilance, lit a candle, and began to investigate.

My attention was first attracted to the floor. It was constructed of a series of split logs laid across sleepers, a foot or more above the ground. The logs creaked and rocked as I moved over them, exhibiting in several places holes large enough for a man's body to slip through. All of which was an unusual floor in this country. They almost always consist of plain earth, trampled to the solidity of concrete.

In the wall near the camp, I discovered an opening, which, in all probability, was once meant for a window. It was really a

large chink between the logs which had been plastered up with mud. I finally succeeded in tearing away the mud for purposes of dissipating the foul air that had accumulated in the long pent-up room.

Beneath the window, my eyes rested upon an old bunk securely fastened to the logs at the height of my knees. It was made of branches of trees, cut and lashed together with strips of split vines. A crude and rough affair.

However, here was my resting-place for the night. It was, at any rate, solid, and firm. No sliding and shifting in an elusive hammock for me, turning turtle and fetching up on the earth, face foremost.

As I stood there, thrilling to the thought that I had chanced upon this piece of luck in finding a fairy couch where I might stretch and ease the muscles of my tired body, something caught and held my interest for a considerable time. On the bunk, and along the side of the wall, were several dark brown stains, some more red and fresh than others.

I bent forward to the muddy logs of the wall, then down to the matted work of the bunk, with the lighted candle before me, so that I might examine more closely and minutely these stains, and, to my horror, I discovered that they were splotches of blood!

There is always something in the sight of blood that forces one to sniff, to become alert, and in the movements of the body to direct them more swiftly.

I wheeled about, taking in at a sweep every lurking shadow the sputtering light of candle flitted into the far corners of the room. There was nothing to be seen, nothing to be heard except the humming of a few insects that had come in through the window.

I released my grasp upon the handle of the revolver, then looked about, cautiously. I raised and lowered the candle, moved over the loose logs, got down upon my knees to scrutinize the flooring more carefully.

Here, I found more splotches of blood. A considerable amount in one place, which had soaked

into the log, thick and dark—blood that had not been spilt so very long!

I arose and stood near the window looking out toward the camp-fire, thoughtfully. Except for the space it illumined in the dense wilderness, everywhere there was total darkness. It was the dark of the moon.

ALAMONDO and Rodriquez were still in conversation. The little native stood very near the powerful, slouching form of La Fiera. There was not the least sign of fear in his attitude toward the halfbreed. They were excitedly arguing some question which seemed to be of intense interest to both.

All the while, the mozo prodded the camp-fire, which he had kindled into a bonfire. He was wildly gesticulating and waving his hand toward the cabin wherein I stood. Now and then his hand wandered to the stub of the severed ear as though it pained him. And once, when the beast stooped and lighted his cigarro with a burning brand, I saw Alamondo quickly place something in the pocket of the halfbreed's cotton jacket.

The rest of the party could be seen in their hammocks, swung in the trees nearby. They looked rather snug and comfortable beneath their nettings.

For a long time I stood observing the mozo and La Fiera in their talk, marveling at the mysterious change that had suddenly come over the native and wondering what he could have placed so stealthily in his enemy's pocket.

But no explanation could I conjure to solve the enigma. So I turned my attention to the crackling sound in the near brush. A noise like an animal crunching brittle bones. Peccaries, I thought; the rooting, grunting scavengers of the jungle.

Then it occurred to me for the first time; perhaps Bill was right, and, after all, I was wrong. But there was no backing down now. I had chosen my course. Man, devil or beast, could not force me to sleep elsewhere.

Thus, without further thought on the subject, I blew out the candle, wrapped my blanket about me, and, Colt in hand, was soon lost to the world.

I do not know how long I slept. But it must have been after midnight when I awakened. Not suddenly, as one is usually aroused in moments of danger, but gradually, a degree at a time.

So natural was my awakening, that for several moments I lay listening to the muffled ticking of the timepiece in the pocket of my trousers.

There is something soothing, mesmeric, about the ticking of the delicate works of a watch in the dead hours of night. And often, in the wilderness, have I returned to conscious life under the hypnotic, metallic voice of man's most timely friend. So it did not occur to me that my awakening was unusual, or that everything was not as it should be.

But as I lay there, restful, perfectly at peace with the world, dozing, lingering in a semi-conscious state, it suddenly dawned upon me that I was not alone. I sensed inwardly, rather than felt outwardly, that there was some living thing in the room besides myself. Instantly I was awake and in perfect control of my senses, tense and alert.

A velvety soft, with now and then a grating, sound came to me from out of the Egyptian darkness, like the scaly body of a huge snake crawling through dry grass. A tense moment passed. Then a strong, acrid odor assailed me, equally as revolting as that of the voodoo sack about my neck.

Cautiously, I came to a semi-sitting posture, revolver in hand and finger crooked for action. I was not to be taken by surprise. Breathlessly, I awaited the intruder's attack.

In the dense darkness I could see nothing, save now and then the phosphorescent glimmer of a vagrant lightning beetle that had flown into the hut.

I peered about the room, seeking to discern what living thing, man, beast or devil, confronted me. I stared until my eyeballs ached, but no object could I make out. Then my attention was suddenly attracted to the floor where something was lightly rocking the loose logs.

For some time I listened to this cradling of the planking, exerting my wits to fathom the cause of so peculiar a phenomenon.

At first, the thought had occurred to me that it might be some one of our party who had worked his way into the place to test my nerve. But I immediately dismissed this from my mind. The risk would be too great for a sane man to take. But then, what was it?

There was only one answer. I would have to find out!

I rose to my feet and gingerly stepped into the center of the room, listening for the faintest sound. But nothing was audible, save the stifled gasps of my breathing. The noise had suddenly ceased.

A flood of thoughts went skittering through my mind. Then it suddenly dawned upon me. This "thing" had deliberately

moved away as I approached it. It had passed along the planking as quickly and noiselessly as a gliding reptile. I felt certain that it was neither human nor animal.

But what could it be?

However, it did not matter. There was but one remedy!

I leveled my revolver in the direction of the "thing" that must be somewhere before me. But before I had completed the movement, I was conscious that it had vanished—seemingly into space.

For the first time in my life, I felt a sense of terror tugging at my throat. Here was an enemy that had me helplessly at its mercy. There was no way of determining to where the thing had vanished. It might at that very second be crouched directly behind me, preparing to spring!

A cold sweat crept over me. I instantly wheeled about, tense for the attack.

In the black void before me, I instantly wheeled about, tense Now over here—now over there —behind me—in front of me—! Then I caught the heavy breath of the thing directly above my head.

I gasped and looked up.

TWO red eyes, piercing as balls of fire, stared into my face. The warmth of its breath was upon my cheek and its odor was revolting!

Without thought, I sprang back and began discharging my revolver at this devil that was closing in on me from all sides.

A series of blood-curdling screams, human in their fierceness, filled the quietness of the room as if a thousand infuriated demons had sprung into the place, dancing to the staccato of my revolver.

There was a rush, a mad scramble. Something dashed over my head and out through the window with the swish of a monster bat. The rickety cabin shook as if in a tempest. Huge forms lurched about me and against the walls, tearing and rocking the logs of the floor in frantic desperation to escape the zipping fire of hot lead.

From outside came the reverberating roar of a living thing, and I knew something was leaving a trail of blood.

I sprang to the window to see if I could discern what I had hit. But in the blackness I could see nothing—except Bill, rifle in hand, revealed in the glare of the camp-fire, running towards me. The mozo, with a lighted pitch-pine knot, was following closely at his heels. Rodriquez was nowhere to be seen.

With the aid of the flaring torch, I saw a huge form lying

near the foot of the bunk. I had stopped to examine the thing more closely, when the mozo caught me by the arm.

"Ay! Ay!" he shrieked. "Come away! Come away! Jalingo! Jalingo!"

I LOOKED at the native sharply. There was in the tone of his voice all the evidence of extreme fright. But in the man's face I was not so easily deceived. There was a crafty, cunning expression in every feature.

But before I could express the thought that occurred to me, he crossed himself and stepped back into the darker portion of the room.

In the meantime, with the barrel of his Winchester, Bill had turned over the thing that lay in a hairy mass at our feet.

We had never seen such a monster before. It stood about four feet high, resembling a Gibbon ape more than anything else I could recall. It was of a brownish color, except for its face, which was white. Among the natives, it is known as the "Jalingo," a thing to be dreaded when encountered in the jungle. The male possesses a long, white beard, not unlike the Great Wanderoo, and walks erect most of the time. The female fondles and nurses the young in her arms. They are seldom seen in the daytime, but roam the forest at night and are very ferocious in combat.

The mystery of the log-adobe was solved There was no devil in the cabin, after all.

I had moved back to examine the Jalingo more carefully, when I felt something soft under my stockinged foot, like the body of a snake. I quickly looked down and found that I had stepped upon the arm of a man. The upper portion was red and bloody. The fingers were crooked and distorted in a convulsive grip that clutched several tufts of coarse hair. There was nothing

else in sight as I glanced about for the body.

Bill and I looked at each other in horror.

"I'll say there was a devil in here, all right!" he gasped. Then suddenly:

"Look out, man! What's that behind you?"

I wheeled about, instantly.

"Where?" I gulped, a sickening sensation quivering within me.

"There," he said, pointing at a large rent in the floor. "Wait! I'll turn this log over."

As he did so, the crouching form of a huge male Jalingo was revealed beneath the flooring. A prodding with the rifle convinced us that he was quite dead.

"Turn it over if you can," I suggested, leaning closer. "We'll—"

"Look!" suddenly exclaimed Bill drawing back. "The half-breed—the beast! Great God!"

I peered eagerly into the dark cavity beneath the flooring. The sight that met my eyes recalled scenes I had witnessed in the bloody trenches of France.

I never want to see such a sight again. Before me lay La Fiera and one of the Jalingos, both devils that they were, locked in the grim embrace of death's struggle. The long, yellow fangs of the fierce ape had bitten clear through the neck of the half-breed and all but severed the head from the body. Through the chest of each, a bullet from my revolver, had put an end to the struggle!

I shuddered in horror at the thought of what might have happened to me, and turned away.

"How do you suppose Rodriquez came to be in here?" I finally asked, wiping the moisture from my face. "I didn't see him in the room."

"Don't ask me," replied my partner. "I'm no detective. The last I saw the beast, he and the mozo were talking near the camp-fire. I heard the native accuse the peon of being a coward and dared him to enter the cabin and give you a scare. They were still arguing when I fell asleep. How about it, Alamondo?"

WE BOTH turned to the mozo for an explanation. The little fellow stepped forward as straight as an Indian and as steady in eye and nerve. There was not the slightest indication of fear in the man.

"Alamondo is avenged!" he spoke in the vernacular, hissing the words through clenched teeth. "La Fiera was big and strong, while Alamondo is little and not so strong as the beast. But I kill him, carrion in the mud beneath my feet! Kill him with my mind!"

"How do you mean, Alamondo?" I asked, greatly interested.

"Sì, Senor! I kill him with my mind. Alamondo knows much of the ways of the jungle. Jalingo does not like the smell of roasted monkey meat. Jalingo becomes a devil—gran diablo!—goes mad and tears the flesh of those who eat it.

"See, senores, the scar on Alamondo's arm—shoulder—neck—Caramba! Ay, yi! When La Fiera ate the monkey meat Alamondo all the time smiled to himself.

"And, senores, once when the beast did not see, Alamondo filled his pocket with the odor of roasted monkey. Aha-a! Sì, all the time Alamondo knew the Jalingo devils haunted the jackal. And—and—

"De veras! Sì, senores," he grated, glaring at the gruesome sight that lay before us. "He who lives as a beast shall die like a beast! Sabe, senores? Sangre de Cristo! La Fiera is dead! Alamondo is avenged! The beast is dead!"

"Bueno! Bueno!" approved Bill, who was never known to be serious long. "Clever you are, Alamondo. But I'm thinking it's mighty queer those Jalingo devils didn't make it hot for this fat-headed side-kick of mine. How about that?"

"Ah! Nombre de Dios!" muttered the mozo, crossing himself and bending to his knees at my feet. "Si, senor. Dios! Dios!" he continued, indicating that the Jalingo could not harm me so long as I wore the little red sack he had placed about my neck. "Alamondo knows much in his brain. See, senores? I will show you."

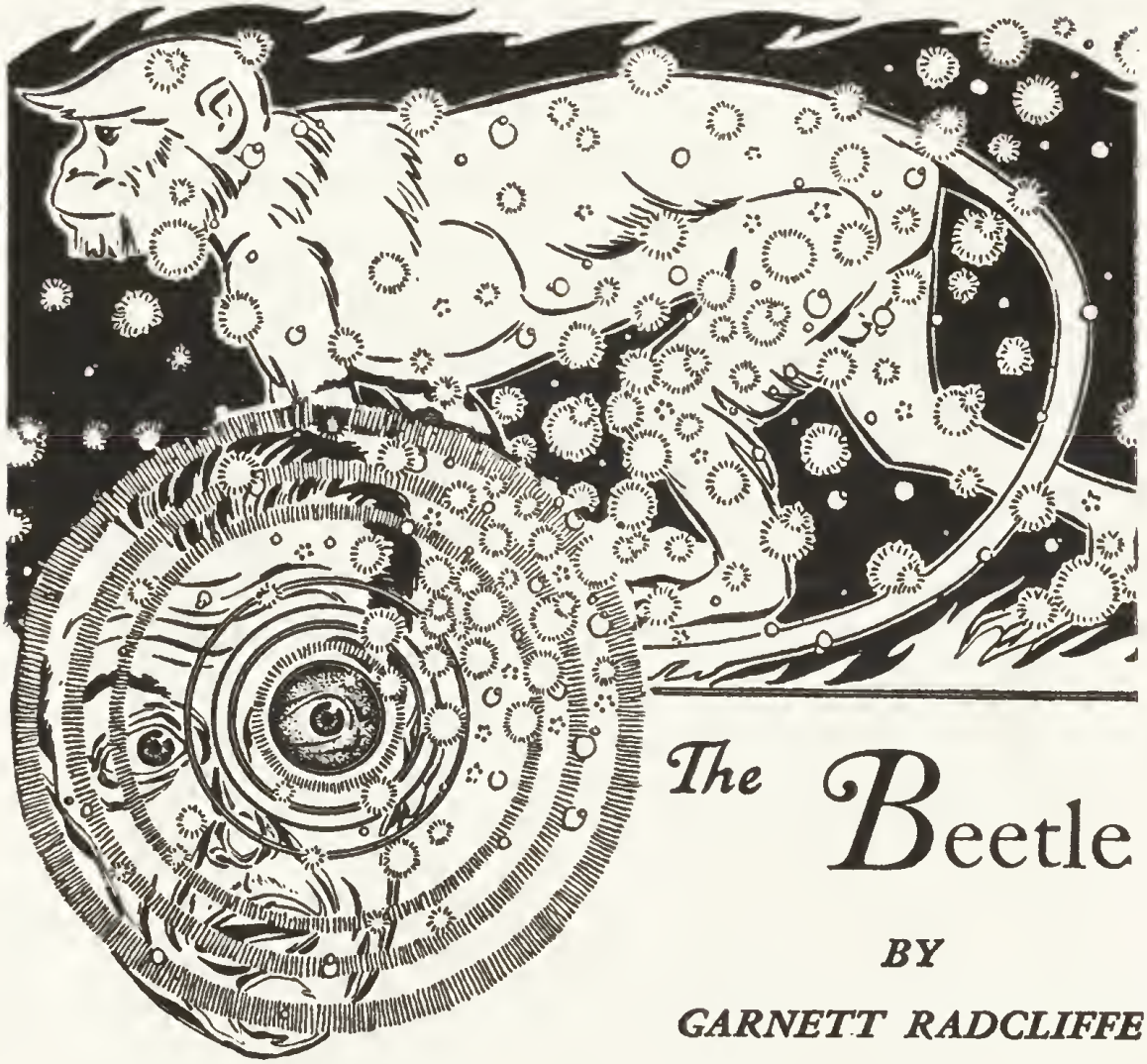
So saying, he took from his neck a little red sack, similar to the one he had given me. He tore it open, exposing its contents; a light-yellow powder, made from the leaves of some jungle plant.

"See! Cayamuela! Smell! Ugh! Jalingo fears the odor. Cayamuela makes his teeth fall out when he eats it and he will die. Sì, senores. Alamondo knows much. Perfectamente!"

Bill and I stood staring at each other, marveling at the strategy of the tropical mind in wreaking its vengeance.

The score between La Fiera, the beast, and Alamondo, the mozo, was settled!

Some very grim feats of imagination were missing from the detective's report; after all, the inspector only wanted facts.



The Beetle

BY

GARNETT RADCLIFFE

ANY moment the trap that had taken months to set might be expected to snap. Inspector Knowles had his watch on the blotting pad as he waited for news of the arrest of the sadistic strangler they called Captain "Y."

Instead of the expected ring Detective Scott walked into the office. The look on his face brought the Inspector to his feet. He spoke hoarsely.

"What happened?"

"He slipped us," Scott said. "Vanished like a puff of smoke. My fault, I'm afraid."

He seated himself wearily op-

Heading by Jon Arfstrom

posite the Inspector's desk. He was looking white, and haggard. After a pause he spoke.

"I've alerted all squads; they are certain to pick him up before long. I shouldn't worry too much."

"I do worry. Suppose another woman is found strangled tomorrow?"

"Captain 'Y' won't strangle another woman. He's dodged us for the moment, but he's still in the net. It's just a question of waiting."

"But how on earth did he give you the slip?"

"Put it down to a moment of mental aberration on my part which coincided with an unfortunate disturbance in the Roebuck Arms, of which he took advantage. He's cleverer than I gave him credit for. I was flattering myself he had not the faintest idea he was being shadowed."

The Inspector sighed.

"You've lost him, that's all I can think, about. Anyway, tell me exactly what happened."

Scott smiled. He was thinking that that was just what he *couldn't* do. Captain "Y's" disappearance from the Roebuck Arms had been as inexplicable as a clever conjuring trick.

One could make a fantastic surmise, but not aloud to a man like Inspector Knowles. Knowles was a practical man and was concerned only with plain facts.

He could have his plain facts. Scott proceeded to lay them before his superior as if he was dealing a hand of cards.

"We worked on Plan 'S,' sir. When Nesbitt phoned me that Captain 'Y' had gone into the saloon bar of the Roebuck Arms in Crewe Street I went there at once. Nesbitt, Brown and Simmons met me outside. I told Simmons to keep an eye on Captain 'Y's' Mercedes which he'd parked in Cotton Mews. Nesbitt and Brown I told to wait outside the entrance to the saloon bar in case he gave trouble when I arrested him. There's only the one door to that bar so I knew they couldn't miss him.

"I went inside alone. It was known he was meeting Mrs. Banbury and the idea was I should try to overhear what he said to her before arresting him. We thought if we could get a line on his methods it might help us to work out how he murdered Nina Mason and Mrs. Sorelli.

"It was seven thirty-five when I went into the Roebuck. Mrs. Banbury hadn't arrived and Captain 'Y' was at the bar talking to the barmaid. He was wearing a duffle coat over a blue blazer with gold buttons, gray flannels and suede shoes. Very smart indeed, Inspector. No one

would have suspected he was—well, what we know he was."

HAD Knowles been a different type he would have liked to enlarge about how he had felt at that moment. The cosy bar with its glittering shelves and bright fire had seemed like a jungle glade; Captain "Y" like the tiger he was stalking.

As he'd stood beside the tall, well-groomed man with the brushed-back hair and curiously cold eyes he'd felt like a hunter leveling his sights on an unsuspecting quarry.

"The question is," the Inspector snapped, "did he suspect who *you* were?"

Scott smiled.

"One for me, Inspector! No, I honestly don't think he had the least idea he was being shadowed. He was in a self-satisfied, boastful mood. As I stood beside him he was actually talking to the barmaid about the Sorelli murder. 'The police are a lot of numbskulls,' I heard him say. 'I'll lay a fiver they'll never catch the fellow who strangled her'."

"Bravado?" suggested the Inspector. "He knew who you were and he was pulling your leg."

Scott shook his head.

"I'll stake my experience he hadn't the least idea. If he had known anything he wouldn't have walked into the trap at the Roebuck Arms."

"He seems to have walked out again," the Inspector commented.

Scott ignored the remark and went on dealing out the plain facts.

"At ten to eight Mrs. Banbury arrived. She was dressed to kill—or be killed, perhaps, I should say. Mink coat, pearl necklace and diamond rings. . . . I saw a glint in the eye of the tiger when he kissed her plump, white hand."

"What?"

"Sorry, Inspector, I was only repeating what crossed my mind at the time. You want just the bare facts. Well, after salutations Captain 'Y' ordered a pink gin for the lady and a double whiskey for himself—she paid, incidentally—and then they took their drinks to a small table on the left of the fireplace. And I took my humble glass of stout to a settee just behind where I could both see and hear.

"I was hoping to learn something of the methods by which our tiger decoyed his victims to their death. Well, I didn't. Circumstances decreed their conversation should take quite a different turn.

"What *did* they talk about? You'd never guess so I'll tell you. They talked of monkeys. It appeared that when Mrs. Ban-

bury was getting out of her car outside the pub she had seen a monkey in the street outside. The poor little thing had looked so cold and lonely and lost crouching on the pavement! She hoped its owner would find it before some nasty dog came along. . . .

"That was her opening gambit, and Captain 'Y' followed it up. Apparently, he'd also seen a monkey when he was coming into the Roebuck. But he was used to seeing monkeys lost in London. He'd seen several during the last couple of months or so. His theory was that someone had forgotten to shut the doors of one of the cages at the Zoo, but the authorities were keeping it dark. That made Mrs. B. giggle and say, 'You are funny, Colonel Fitzgerald!' "

"Colonel Fitzgerald?" the Inspector repeated. "When he killed Nina Mason he was calling himself Major Robinson!"

"He'd promoted himself for Mrs. Banbury. A couple of customers were going out and as the chap was holding the door for his wife Mr. Monkey himself came hopping in. I suppose he'd got fed up sitting on the cold pavement. So we'd quite a menagerie in the Roebuck Arms that evening! A human tiger, a mink-coated lamb and a real live monkey! Talk of the jungle!"

"What?"

"Nothing, Inspector. I'll get on with the facts. The monkey was quite tame. He hopped on the counter and when the barmaid, greatly daring, picked him up he put his arms round her neck like a baby. He was a jolly little chap, one of the ordinary brown *sangu* variety. I've seen thousands of them in Southern India."

INSPECTOR Knowles made an impatient movement.

"Damn the monkey! What I want to hear is how Captain 'Y' gave you the slip."

Scott sighed.

"I don't know, Inspector, I can only give you the facts as they happened. The sight of the monkey started Captain 'Y' reminiscing. He went back to his days in India. Incidentally, he really was in India during the war, wasn't he?"

"He was until he was cashiered from the Poona Cavalry for pinching the mess funds."

"He didn't tell that to Mrs. B. What he told her was how he used to shoot monkeys when he was stationed at Ferozepore. I've been at Ferozepore myself, and I think he was telling the truth. The place is overrun with sacred monkeys, as tame as London sparrows. *Sacred* monkeys, Inspector. . . . Monkeys under the

special protection of the great Monkey God Harathi Ram . . ."

"You mean it's forbidden to shoot them?"

"One doesn't shoot monkeys unless one happens to be a sadist like Captain 'Y.' He told Mrs. Banbury it was great fun potting the little beggars. She asked if he'd ever eaten one and he said he had and it had tasted like chicken."

"What about it?"

Inspector, your knowledge of Hindu mythology is nil, Scott thought. Have you never heard of the black magic of Harathi Ram, the terrible Monkey God? Have you never heard how Harathi Ram wreaks vengeance on those who harm his children?

When he'd been in India he had visited a temple of the Monkey God. There had been a monstrous statue of the most fearsome of all the Hindu deities. Half monkey, half human with upraised arms and horrible snarling face it had filled him with a sense of dread as he stood dwarfed by its shadow in the dim temple. A priest had whispered to him that if you offended Harathi Ram his magic would find you and punish you though you fled to the utmost parts of the earth.

Superstition? The Inspector would have thought him mad had he dared to voice his thoughts.

"Next thing happened," he went on, "was that the monkey sprang off the counter, hopped across the bar and climbed into the fireplace. It wanted to get warm, I suppose. Everyone crowded round to watch. A monkey in a London bar is quite a novelty.

"Captain 'Y' knelt down to stroke it. I think he wanted to

show off his familiarity with monkeys. I heard him speak to it in Urdu, 'Barra jao, chota souer ki butcha.' That means in English, 'Get out, you little son of a pig', and is a most insulting thing to say."

HAD the Inspector been a different sort of man he might have enlarged. Captain "Y's" expression hadn't been the expression of a man who loved animals. His lurking smile, the slow caressing movements of his manicured hands and the way the monkey seemed to shrink from his touch—somehow all those things had made him think of little Nina Mason, the girl who had been found strangled in a Mayfair flat.

He had noticed the monkey's eyes had suddenly gone red. They looked hypnotic and baleful as it lifted its little head to stare at the man. Then it put its paws on his beautiful white hand and made as if it were trying to draw him down towards the fire. . . .

A monkey pulling a man's hand playfully like a kitten! What had there been in that to give him such a sense of intangible horror? Other customers had laughed.

He continued speaking to the Inspector.

"Then the disturbance happened. A beetle of some sort fell with a flop into the fireplace. It began to run round and round inside the curb. The monkey began playing with it, letting it get almost to safety and then scooping it back with its paw like a cat playing with a mouse."

While he spoke his mind was asking questions. *Had* it been a beetle, that frantic inch-high thing that ran upright on two legs, its wings flapping behind like a brown coat? *Had* it been a beetle that jumped over cinders, fell into hot ash, made wild leaps for the top of the curb and even tried to dash into the fire in its mad fear of the monkey?

Its terror had been most unpleasant to watch. The other customers had stopped laughing. Scott could remember their ejaculations of disgust: "It's a mouse. . . . No, it's a young bat. . . . I tell you it's a moth . . ." Then a woman had begun to scream. *"The monkey's torturing it. . . . Get it away from the monkey. . . . It's like a little man!"*

A barman had come running with a coal shovel. He tried to scoop up the—well, whatever the thing was. It had jumped on to the shovel and for a second the firelight glow had shown it to him like the tiny figure of a running man seen through the wrong end of a telescope. Its an-

tennae had looked like arms raised above its head, its wings had been like a duffle coat flapping round its legs, and it had left drops of blood on the shovel.

It hadn't buzzed. It had uttered tiny sounds like the echoes of screams from Hell.

Scott wiped a face that had suddenly gone wet. The Inspector was staring at him.

"Are you ill?"

"I felt a bit faint, overwork I suppose. I was talking about the—the beetle. Someone tried to scoop it out of the fireplace with a shovel. But the monkey was too quick. It grabbed it off the shovel and stuffed it struggling into its mouth. Then before you could say 'Jack Robinson' it leapt on to the mantlepiece and then to a shelf and from there out through an upper window that was open."

Again he wiped his forehead. He had seen the monkey's shadow on the wall and ceiling as it leapt for the window. Some trick of lighting had made it look like a monstrous, crouching, simian nightmare, as if the shadow of the Monkey God himself had fallen on that London bar. He had seen the legs of the beetle, two twitching threads protruding from the great pouched-up mouth. . . .

Aware of the Inspector's curious stare he forced himself to go on.

"It was then I noticed that Captain 'Y' had disappeared. He must have taken advantage of the confusion to slip away."

"You never saw him go?"

"No. The men I'd posted outside didn't see him either."

"Is there any other exit?"

"None that I could discover. Mrs. Banbury was as mystified as we were. She said she shut her eyes because the monkey gave her the horrors, and when she opened them Captain 'Y' had disappeared."

The telephone on the desk rang. The Inspector snatched up the receiver. After a minute he turned to his subordinate. His face wore a grim smile as he spoke.

"They've found him! A burned and mangled body that has been identified as his has been found in the Crewe Street tube. I gather a couple of trains had gone over him. My idea is that he knew the game was up. While you were goggling at a beetle he made his get-away from the Roebuck, ran down to the tube and jumped on the line. Any better explanation?"

Scott had one, but he preferred to keep it to himself. After all, it *might* have been only his own morbid imagination!

SIX MERRY FARMERS
(a Kentucky Tale)
by LEAH BODINE DRAKE

SIX merry farmers
Lurching from a tavern,
Swaying down a village street
At midnight, arm in arm;
One tried to kiss the moon
Shining in a puddle,
Went to sleep and snored there
Miles from his farm.

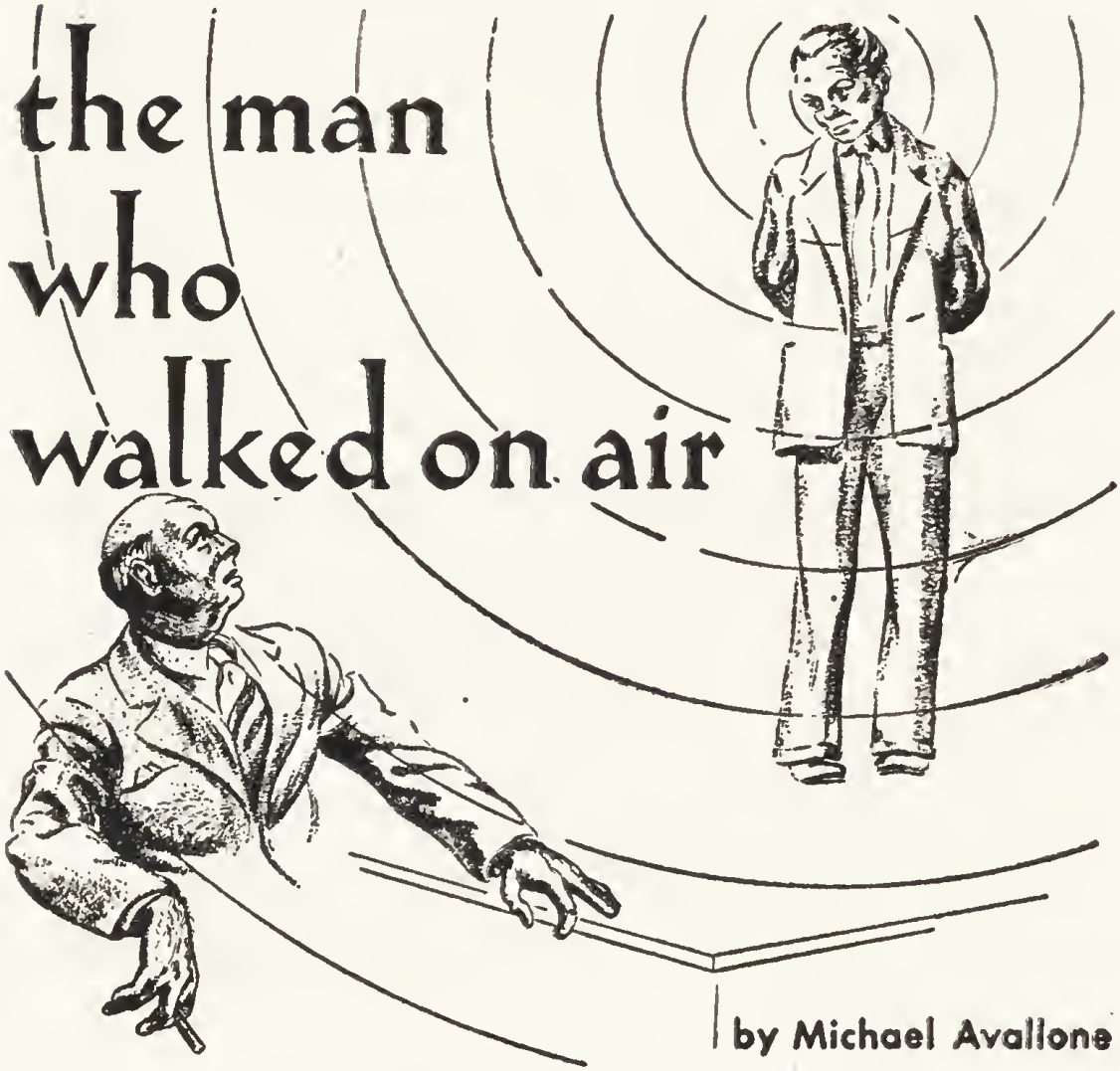
Five merry farmers!
Two got to fighting,
The Sheriff came by
And hauled them off to jail.
The fourth roared a gospel-hymn
And went to look for women;
The fifth thought of little lambs
And sat down to wail.

The last merry farmer
Weaving up the hill-road
Met an old witch-woman
Who was anything but fair.
When he gravely cursed her
She up and be-spelled him,
And what had been a farmer
Was a wild buck hare!

Two merry farmers
Riding home in dawn-light,
One sees a wild buck hare
And lets off his gun:
Five merry farmers
Sleeping off their merriment,
And one not so merry
Lying dead in the sun.

Pinkerton Fly, standing on nothing and looking down on me as he asked for a job. . . .

the man who walked on air



by Michael Avallone

LET me tell you about the man who walked on air. John Henry could have told you but John Henry is dead. That leaves just me. You've heard of me. Lester Borne, the great American showman. Of course, someone else could have told you too. The man who walked on air had a wife—

But I'm getting ahead of a story that really began one day in my office. Tomlin's Three-Ring Circus was in town and I, Lester Borne, its manager and sole owner, was thinking rather regretfully of how little I had to offer a public that ate peanuts and adored death-defying thrills.

Certainly, I had clowns, bare-

Heading by W. H. Silvey

back riders and a whole ring full of wild animal acts. Even the Benzo Brothers who gleefully and fearlessly submitted to being shot from the cannon's mouth once every performance at quite a chunk of dough per season. But nothing really new. Or different. Possibly, this explains my willingness to see the man whose card preceded him into my Fifth Avenue office.

It was quite a strange card:

PINKERTON FLY
THE MAN WHO WALKS ON AIR
NO ROPES NO NETS NO WIRES

When my secretary ushered him in, I was skeptical. He was a small, undersized man. A sallow complexion, skimpy build, and a curious attitude of listening in the way he cocked his angular, almost bald head. He didn't look anything at all the way a Big Tent performer should look.

I wasted no time with the usual preambles. I'd been consoling myself with Martinis and wondered later if this had anything to do with what I was about to see.

"Show me," I scoffed.

He did.

Without comment, he performed one of those things Nijinsky was so famous for. I don't know what they call it, but Pinkerton Fly sprang high into the air, crossed his feet about fifteen times with small, scissor-kicks—and here he went the great Russian ballet artist one better. He *stayed* up there. He didn't come *down*. Just stood there and stared down at me intently, looking for all the world as if he were standing on the floor.

I blinked at him. He regarded me with that odd, listening expression. Then I stared at the half-empty glass near my outstretched hand. I am a practical man. I buzzed Miss Evans on the office inter-com. "Miss Evans, come in for a moment, please."

Miss Evans appeared, took one look at my suspended visitor, gave a low moan and stood stock-still, clutching her steno pad and pencil as if they were weapons.

"Tell me what you see," I barked, conscious of tiny pin-pricks at the base of my scalp. Miss Evans didn't answer. Her mouth was a thin, pinched line. Her eyes were glued on my visitor.

"Well?" I rasped harshly. "Is he standing up there or isn't he?"

All this time, Pinkerton Fly just remained where he was, regarding us with that peculiar listening air about him.

Miss Evans lowered her gaze. Her secretarial calm was in ruins. I could see that. Her voice forced its way out of her tightly locked lips.

"I see it—but it's a trick—Mr. Borne—it can't be—it's not possible—"

"That will be all, Miss Evans. Go out and draw up a contract. I'll call you when I need you."

SHE flung a last look at Pinkerton Fly but his great height from the floor only seemed to mock her reason and sanity still more. With a low scream, she fled through the door, leaving it ajar. I came around the desk, closed the portal softly and went back to my chair. I took a great deal of time lighting up a cigar, taking an elaborate delay stoking it up properly. I leaned back in my swivel and brought my eyes slowly up from room level to Pinkerton Fly. He was still *there*. Standing serenely, defying the law of gravity, waiting expectantly for me to say something.

"Well—" I got my courage up. "Walk on *air*. Go ahead. That's what your card says. Show me. The Showman is asking you to show him something."

Wordlessly, Pinkerton Fly *walked* around the room. Somewhere about four feet above my head. Normally, naturally, as if he were taking a stroll about any room in the whole wide world. My wall paintings were at his foot level; his waspish bald head was nearly scraping the ceiling. Then he threw the topper in. He did a handstand in mid-air. Until you've seen a man do a handstand in mid-air with his two hands braced against nothingness as though it were the most substantial of hand-holds, you haven't seen anything.

I had another drink. A tall, stiff one. I waved my free hand at him feebly. "Turn it off," I hoarsed. "Whatever it is. Come on down. Fast. That's enough."

He did. It was as if a fast elevator brought him down to the floor. He landed with a light thud, softly and deftly on his toes. Then he spoke for the first time. I was a little surprised to find he had one of the most normal, nasal voices in the world.

"Then you believe I can do it, Mister Borne? You are convinced?"

I was past argument. "I'm convinced it will be one of the greatest stunts ever seen in any circus, anywhere." My mind was flying. "The house is packed, high above the crowd, in the lighted arena—you walking across the air. No tight-wire, no ropes, no nets. No nothing. People will refuse to believe. They'll claim I've run some invisible wire across the space between the two poles. But—they'll pay to see it. Pay plenty."

Suddenly, he sighed. "That is good. Zelma will be pleased."

"Zelma? What does she do—

the same thing? Say, a double would be even better—

"You don't understand." He smiled at me. His smile was like a weak candle lighting up his yellow face. "Zelma is my wife. She has taught me how to walk on air."

We were back to that again. My reasoning mind had been giving me a bad time about it.

"You really did it, didn't you? You didn't trick me—you didn't hypnotize me or anything like that? No, of course not. I did see you do it. I'm not blind but—"

As if in answer, he Nijinsky-ed up into the air again, scissored his legs and stood on solid nothing for a full minute, then came down again. I noticed the listening business once more. He'd cock his head forward as if to catch something that was being said. His head remained in that position all the time he was aloft.

I shook myself dumbly. It was unbelievable. Anyway you look at it.

"You sure you didn't escape from the Moon or something? Are you a citizen?"

The candle lighted his sallow complexion. "I am a native New Yorker, Mister Borne."

I fiddled with my cigar. "How do you do it?"

The candle went out in his face. "I can't tell you. Zelma wouldn't like it. John Henry could have told you. But John Henry is dead. He was Zelma's first husband."

This of course was pure Greek to me. But handling circus people for thirty years has convinced me they have to talk a little differently from other people. Anybody that risks their necks every day for a couple of bucks is entitled to talk different, don't you think? What the hell—if Pinkerton Fly had developed a method to walk on air without any visible aids—it was his secret and his business. I never argue with a sure-fire act.

"Okay, that's it. You'll start immediately. Tomorrow's performance. Center ring. I'll squeeze you in between the bareback rider and the animal act of Dan Burley." I let out a big laugh. "Are you going to open a lot of eyes and fill that old box office with the coin of the realm! This will be the biggest act since Barnum was a pup. THE MAN WHO WALKS ON AIR—THE GREATEST SHOW *off* EARTH!"

IT WAS.

The audience was stunned into unthinking silence. I didn't even give Pinkerton Fly an eye-catching costume. Just threw a terrific spotlight on him, standing

on the small scaffold shelving off from the thin, towering pole. It had the effect I had hoped for. A small, undernourished figure in a shabby, meaningless gray suit ambling off the platform high above the ground and strolling serenely across space to the opposite pole.

Just like I said. Lights all over the place to show them there were no ropes, pulleys or trick wiring to suspend him as he walked. If anything, the very naturalness of his ambling gait precluded any idea of wiring of some kind. You just had to believe your own eyes. Here was a skinny little guy walking on air. Walking on nothing.

I had some qualms though. Maybe, I had been drunk in the office. So as a part of that first time he went on, I had a standby crew of roustabouts at convenient positions with a net in case he needed it. But, if anything, it lent something rather than detracted from the performance. It was a little funny to watch the big, burly crew circle warily beneath him, high up in the air, moving steadily with him on the trip across utter space.

The audience reaction was electric. The Great Fly, The Man Who Walked On Air captured the imagination. I wish I could show you the attendance receipts from the first month of business. Capacity every performance. The Benzo Brothers had been my star act and Dan Burley's sensational act with the lions had always been reliable crowd-getters. But they couldn't compare with the Great Fly. He was unbeatable.

Funny thing though. I kept wondering when the Great Fly was going to come down. An act that's always up in the air has to come down sometime. It was sooner than I expected.

I was coming back to go over an added clause in Pinkerton Fly's contract when I heard a big argument going on inside Lola's dressing room. Lola is the best bareback rider Tomlin's Three Ring ever had. Also, the loveliest.

I pushed into the little room to find Lola, still in her skimpy costume, pushing between a very belligerent Dan Burley and a very frightened Pinkerton Fly. Dan looked plenty sore about something and besides being a terrific animal trainer, he was one of the brawniest customers you'd ever want to see. Bad blood among the performers can kill any circus, so I cut in.

"What's going on here—a rodeo or something? The show's been over a full fifteen minutes!"

"Oh, yeah?" Burley's expression was ugly. "Fly doesn't think so. Fly thinks Lola needs some help changing her dress."

"That's a lie!" Pinkerton Fly, for his size, way actually standing up to the giant.

Lola's sensuous face told me plenty the way she smiled at Pinkerton and glowered at Burley.

"Mr. Borne," she appealed to me, "I've had about all I can stand of this muscle-bound cat trainer! I asked the Fly in here. Burley has no right to dictate to me."

"Haven't I?" The animal trainer seized her wrist in a vise. "You forget a lot of things, Lola. Like—"

She flung away from him, picked up one of her riding crops that was dangling from a strap-rack and before any of us could stop her, slashed him full across the mouth with it. Dan stopped, the sudden welt across his strong face making his expression even uglier.

With that, he pushed past me out of the dressing room.

"Lola, you shouldn't have done that!" I stormed.

Her glance was contemptuous of my opinion. "There's nothing in my contract that says I have to cater to Dan Burley. If I like Pinkerton, that's my business."

Pinkerton Fly's sallow face smiled at her words. I put my oar in, playing what I thought was a trump card.

"But he's a married man, Lola. Aren't you, Pinkerton?"

He leered at me. "What Zelma doesn't know won't hurt her."

I was dumbfounded. First, because I couldn't see what Lola saw in him. Secondly, because I had thought he wasn't the type. But I guess with someone as breathtaking as Lola anyone was the type. As for her, men were just toys who were discarded after she tired of them. I threw up my hands.

"I hope you two know what you're doing," I concluded meekly.

Lola winked. It made her dazzling. "We'll be all right, Mr. Borne. Won't we, Pinky?"

Well, that finished any arguments I might have had. When Lola started calling him Pinky, I could see he was finished.

IT WENT on being "Pinky" for four weeks.

It was something like the 65th day of capacity business. The receipts were as high as Mount Everest. The Man Who Walked On Air—Who Didn't Need A Net—Who Never Fell—was packing them in. Tomlin's Three Ring was having its biggest season under my direction. But I wasn't kidding myself. Without Fly, it wouldn't have been a case of There'$ No Bu$ine$$ Like $how Bu$ine$$.

So I was feeling pretty good when word came that Pinkerton

Fly wanted to see me. The Lola business was out of my hands anyway and Dan Burley had restricted himself to his tigers so everything had been pretty calm.

But the Fly certainly got into my ointment in a hurry.

"It's too little, Mister Borne," he said, ignoring my outstretched hand.

"What is, Pinkerton?" I *was* feeling too good to notice his breach of etiquette.

"My salary."

"Your salary?" I echoed. "Two thousand a week isn't sawdust, Pinkerton. For a First-of-May in the circus game, it's unheard of. Not that you don't deserve it, of course—"

"That's just it, Mister Borne." His tiny skull shone under the overheads. His small eyes held a new glint of avarice. Something that didn't quite jibe with his undersized build. "I do deserve it. I do deserve more.

I took a long time lighting one of my favorite cigars. After all, he *was* my biggest act on the card.

"Ten thousand dollars," he said.

My teeth came down hard on the end of the cigar.

"You're crazy, Pinkerton!"

"Am I?" His eyes gleamed brighter. "It's either that or the Man Who Walks On Air—"

"—doesn't walk," I concluded wearily. "Pinkerton, this is pretty close to blackmail. I could hold you to your contract."

"You could," he admitted, surprisingly enough, "but I'd still be on the ground. Doing nothing. Even a court of law couldn't make me walk on air."

I could see his point. I shook my head.

"Pinkerton, Lola put you up to this. It figures. She wants a fur coat, or a Cadillac. That's it, isn't it?"

He ignored my question and asked one of his own. The same one.

"Ten thousand, Mister Borne?"

Suddenly, I hated his nasal voice, his utter blindness to the ways of man-eaters like Lola.

"All right. Ten thousand. We're agreed. I'll have a new contract drawn up tomorrow."

He licked his lips, abruptly looking surprised at himself for pulling it off. He gave a nervous little giggle, whirled and left the tent.

I stared after him for a long time before I went back to my office, cursing Fly and the circus business in general.

I HAD company. Company I had never expected. Zelma Fly. Mrs. Zelma Fly.

I was amazed at her appearance. She was—well, beautiful. An exotic woman, tall, well-made

with the oddest eyes I have ever seen. They were deep blue, striking, and you found yourself slightly overcome with their overpowering levelness of direction. It seemed an eternity before she blinked. An eon before she got down to the reason for her visit.

She seemed troubled. There had been rumors, some talk about Pinkerton and Lola. Naturally, she scarcely credited them but—

Getting control of a queer feeling of uncertainty, I explained the whole thing as well as I could, going as easy as possible on Pinkerton Fly. In a way, I was glad she had come. I was just curious enough to find out more about this walking-on-air business.

"So that's the whole thing, Mrs. Fly. Harmless enough, I guess. It's just that Lola is bad for any man. You'll understand what I mean when I say she could lead a thirsty horse away from water."

She stirred slightly. It was as if a soft wind had wafted over her. Her eyes were fathomless.

"Thank you, Mr. Borne. It is well that you told me. I am glad."

Suddenly, I thought less of the idea. Something about Zelma Fly said it wasn't all right, shouted to the rooftops that Pinkerton Fly had been very, very stupid to trifle with her affections.

I tried to laugh.

"So that's it—all I can suggest is that you pay more attention to your husband. Come and see him work. Maybe he'd straighten out if you came to see him perform. Say, that's an idea. I'll reserve a seat for you. Might make all the difference in the world."

She waited a long time before answering. In the interim, I mixed myself a drink. There was an air about Zelma Fly that made me extremely uneasy. I felt like I was giving a baby a lighted match to play with.

"Yes, Mr. Borne," she purred in a manner that was more cat than woman. "It is a fine idea. Tonight I will come at your kind invitation. As you say, Pinkerton has been dazzled by this Lola person. Yes, perhaps you are right. It is settled. I'll be there."

I saw her to the door, still sensing the monumental proportions of an error that hadn't matured yet.

"Tell me, Mrs. Fly." I couldn't resist the question. "You are responsible for your husband's fantastic ability to walk on air. At least, that's what he told me. Tell me—how does he do it?"

She turned as if I had uttered an improper remark. Then her stiffened back relaxed and her

smile was a slow, somehow deadly thing.

"It is so very easy, Mr. Borne. I simply tell him that he *can* walk on air. That is the simple truth of it. Pinkerton walks on air because I told him that I *believe* he can."

I laughed, partly to appreciate a joke I didn't understand, more so to relieve a tension that was clutching my insides like a wet, clammy hand.

As soon as the door closed behind her, I had another drink. And another one.

I suddenly felt that I had pulled a lid off a garbage can that I should never have gone near. I opened the windows wide and thought for a long time.

All day it bothered me and when Tomlin's Three Ring band beat up its first sounds of overture that night, I was as confused as ever.

The whole thing was so curious. Now I was thinking of Pinkerton Fly walking on air and how fantastic it really was. Hell, a man just couldn't do that when you got right down to it. It was a trick. It had to be. Mass hypnosis or the power of suggestion. I remembered the letters I had received wanting explanations. The University, the Magician's Union—

Well, before I knew it, the Benzo Brothers had cannoned into space, the Ringmaster had put Lola through her paces on beautiful white Nellie and Dan Burley had tamed lions and tigers for a solid half hour. And then—the Great Fly was on.

I hurried to the grandstand. I wanted to watch the Fly walk on air with his wife as company.

She seemed pleased to see me. Cold and distant but still pleased.

"Mr. Borne. I'm glad you joined me."

"Pleasure," I lied. "You'll get a good view from here."

"So will you, Mr. Borne. An eyeful as you Americans say." I had somehow always known there was a touch of European in her.

A fanfare skied to the tent-top with a burst of musical noise.

"Well, here he is—the Great Fly."

"Yes," she echoed, sounding like the knell of doom. "Here he is."

The fanfare died and the spotlight picked him out, standing idly on the tiny shelf that jutted from the towering thinness of the big pole. Still in his shabby, meaningless gray suit, his sickly build. Even from where I sat, I could see the curious, cocked position of his head. Still in that listening attitude.

The crowd hushed as the drum roll started up, waited in that heart beat of eternity for Fly's

feet to step off the shelf onto nothing. The drummers came down on a loud bassoon that always made everybody jump with its unexpected interruption . . . and the Great Fly walked casually off his tiny platform.

It was amazing really. Some seventy-five feet separated one towering shaft from another and until you've seen a man bridge that distance by walking on nothing but air, you haven't seen a thing. You could have heard a watch being wound as Fly's feet struck forth and gobbled up yards of airy ground.

Slowly, carefully, yet completely naturally, he ambled across a thousand memories.

I BROKE my eyes away from Pinkerton's brand of magic and looked at Zelma Fly.

I was hardly prepared for what I saw.

Her head was flung back, her mouth distended and the muscles in her throat had leaped into focus. Alarmed, I reached for her. Thousands of eyes were levelled skyward on the Great Fly.

But abruptly, sound rushed from her throat, blending into a leaping, sarcastic burst of laughter that reverberated across the hushed arena with the volume of a cannonade.

That laugh lingers in my ears to this day. And its effect. The peal of rippling sarcasm filled the vast amphitheatre, hung poised like a deadly python.

I forced my eyes upward, to where Pinkerton Fly was.

It was uncanny. He had halted, was standing stock-still up there on his floor of air.

He stared down at us, toward the source of the condemning laughter and I could see the utter surprise and consternation written in every line of him. His meaningless form had taken on meaning now. New, terrible meaning with the accent on terror.

Suddenly, he clawed convulsively at walls that weren't there,

pawed frantically for hand-holds that didn't exist. A hoarse shout escaped him. And still Zelma Fly laughed. Long, loud, incessantly.

Then it happened. A mammoth roar of fear went up. Shock ripped from ten thousand throats.

A long scream trailed off into the night and Pinkerton Fly plummeted to earth like a heavy rock dropped into a well. Down he came, his terror welling out of him, sirening his way deathward. The thud of his body against the hard-packed floor of the arena was a crunch of sound no one who was there will ever forget.

Dan Burley and the clowns reached him first and wisely threw a spangled robe over him. The crowd was rooted to their seats as the band, snapping out of its trance, struck up a cover-up medley that was louder than music from hell. And Zelma Fly's long laugh had broken into fitful sobbing. Lola fainted and Burley slung her over his shoulder and pushed through the mob that had gathered.

There was nothing I could do really. The show was far from over—it was going on. I turned to Zelma Fly. She had relaxed in her chair, suddenly limp and spent.

I had a hard time finding my voice, finding the right words with which to condemn her.

"You—did it," I panted. "As if you'd shot him in cold blood, as if you'd run him over—that laugh—."

The face she turned towards me was no longer beautiful. Just naked and terrible. Just deep, hidden emotion suddenly exposed to the light.

"No, Mr. Borne," she barely breathed the words. "He knew I no longer believed he *could* walk on air. My laugh merely told him that."

"But it's murder!" I shouted. "You killed him. Just as you—" I found myself saying it as if I'd known it all the time—"killed John Henry, your first husband."

"Yes," she hissed. "Exactly like that. Only that was the Paris Circus. And her name was Yvonne."

I got away from her fast. Back to my office, back to reality.

That's all there is to the story. Except one thing more.

Dan Burley quit the show, quit cold. Quit Lola, quit everything. I still have his telegram somewhere in my drawer:

GETTING MARRIED TO ZELMA FLY — NO MORE ANIMALS FOR ME — WISH ME LUCK

Stop. . . .

It was his tree; he left it only to carry its messages to the townsfolk

The Tree-Man

BY HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

MY FIRST sight of Silvio Fabricius, the tree-man, was within a week of my first arrival on the island of Santa Cruz not long after the United States had purchased the Danish West Indies and officially renamed its new colony "The Virgin Islands of the United States."

On that occasion, which is a number of years ago, the ship on which I was traveling down to the islands came into Frederiksted Harbor, on the west coast of the island, just at dusk. I saw a half-moon of white sand-beach with the charming little town in its middle, and I was entranced. I had the feeling of "coming home," which was strange enough because it was my first sight of the island whereon my residence has been ever since except when I come north summers or spend the winter on St. Thomas, the chief island of the group where the capital town and the U. S. Naval Station are located.

In the midst of the bustle aboard ship incident to anchoring in the roadstead there came over the side an upstanding gentleman in a glistening white drill uniform with shining brass buttons.

This gentleman walked briskly up to me, bowed in a manner to

commend himself to kings, and said:

"I am honored to welcome you to Santa Cruz, Mr. Canevin. I am Director Despard of the police department. It is my privilege to place the police boat at your disposal when you are ready to go ashore. May I be of any assistance in seeing that your luggage is cared for?"

This was a welcome indeed, and decidedly unexpected. Beyond the fact that I was to live here for perhaps a year, had engaged a house by long-distance communication, and had notified the persons with whom I transacted this neccesary business of the date of my arrival, no one, I supposed, had ever heard of me, Gerald Canevin, a young fellow quite obscure and without in those days even that evanescent recognition which comes—and goes—in the case of a writer of fiction and informative articles.

I was, as you can imagine, surprised. To put it mildly, I was simply knocked off my feet by such a reception on the part of this magnificent official whose courtesy was easily matched by his aristocratic appearance.

I thanked Director Despard in carefully chosen phrases, and before many minutes, and wholly because of his solicitous kindness, my four trucks were overside, my various articles of hand-luggage were bestowed in the policeboat waiting at the ladder gangway, and I was seated beside him in the boat's stern-sheets, he holding the tiller ropes, while four coalblack convicts rowed us ashore with tremendous pulls at their long sweeps.

Through the dusk I observed that the landing-wharf was crowded with Black people. Behind these there stood half-a-dozen knots of White people, conversing together. Along the background of waterfront buildings stood, parked, some thirty or forty cars. I remarked to the Police Director:

"Is it usual for so many persons to be on the docks at the landing of a vessel, Mr. Director?"

"It is not usual," replied the dignified gentleman beside me. "It is for you, Mr. Canevin."

"For me?" said I, and again, stultified, feeling that I was like a person playing without notice a strange part in some gorgeous comedy, "What—my dear sir—certainly not for me. Why—"

"Yes, it is for you, Mr. Canevin," Mr. Despard's beautifully modulated voice reassured me. "You are Captain McMillin's great-nephew, you know, my dear sir."

So that was it: my great-uncle, who had "been a planter" on Santa Cruz, and who had been, at that moment, before Mr. Des-

pard had enlightened me, about the last person in my mind.

ARRIVING smartly at the concrete jetty, Mr. Despard and I landed and in what was left of the daylight I perceived that confronting us and massed together in orderly fashion enough, were perhaps a thousand Negroes. Back of these stood the various groups of white people which I have mentioned, and which were made up, as I was to learn, of practically all the island's landed gentry.

We started along the jetty toward the thronged Negroes and I perceived that their interest—the African is usually quite naive in such affairs—was entirely genuine. I began to get some glimmerings of the quality of the community which I was now seeing for the first time. . . .

After being received by the people who had come to meet me, I was installed in a small private hotel pending the preparations to my own hired residence. I found every house on Santa Cruz open to me. Hospitalities were showered upon me to the point of embarrassment. Kindness galore, considerate bits of information, help of every imaginable kind, ushered my quasi-permanent residence as a transplanted Santa Crucian to a delightfully successful culmination as a member of the inner circle of Santa Crucian society.

I had come because our government had entrusted me with a minor mission—lying wholly outside the scope of this narrative—and I had been advised that its successful prosecution should occupy, normally, about a year. Because of the doors opening before me, the silent cooperation here, the expert, whole-hearted guidance there, this mission of mine was fulfilled at the end of precisely nine weeks from the date of my arrival on Santa Cruz.

I learned, almost at once, many details about my great-uncle, Captain the Honorable William McMillin, which information was almost entirely new to me.

It was, naturally, not long after I had arrived on the island that I went to visit his estate, Great Fountain. I went with Hans Grumbach, in his Ford, a bumpy journey occupying more than three hours, because this took us not only up hills and through ravines and along precipitous trails, but because the roads were incredibly roundabout.

All the way Hans Grumbach talked about this section of the island, now almost never visited. Hans, in his younger days, had lived up here as the last of the long line of resident managers

which the old estate had known since the day, in 1879, when my relatives had sold their land. It was now, after several changes of hands, the property of the largest of local sugar-growing corporations, known as the Copenhagen Concern, and, because of its inaccessibility, cultivation there had finally been abandoned. Then Hans Grumbach had come to live in Frederiksted; where, having married one of Mrs. Heidenklang's daughters, and so allied himself to a most respectable creole family, he had settled down to the keeping of a store in the town.

But, it appeared, Hans had wanted, for ten years, to go back. This trip toward the old place stimulated him, and he sang its praises, a process which I spare my readers. It was, according to this panegyrist, incredibly fertile at Great Fountain. One needed, according to Hans, merely "to stick some seed in the ground, anywhere," and it would "grow and flourish there" like the shamrock on old Ireland's sod!

We arrived at last. I had never, of course, seen the estate land before, but it required no sympathetic assurances on the part of my voluble guide to realize its amazing fertility.

We walked over the nearer and more accessible portions of the old estate, and, as it lay in a great cup of table-land here in the north-central hills of the island, we also looked out over its domain from various angles.

The ancient estate was in a sad state of rack and ruin. The village was about half tumbled down, and even the cabins that remained were out of repair. The characteristic tropical inroads upon land "turned out," that is, out of organized cultivation, were apparent everywhere. Everything except the sporadic cultivation of occasional vegetable patches and one good-sized grove of banana trees were overrun and choked with rank weeds. The ancient farm buildings, although soundly constructed of stone and brick, were likewise terribly dilapidated, and there was only the word of Hans and of the caretaker to account for the site of my great-uncle's Great House, the very foundations of which had disappeared.

I had on this visit to Great Fountain, my first experience with what has come to be known as the "grapevine" method of communication among Africans. I had been perhaps four days on the island, and it is reasonably certain that few of its people had ever so much as heard of me before; certainly none of these obscure village Negroes cut off here in the hills from others the near-

est of whom lived miles away. Yet we had hardly come within a stone's long throw of the remains of the village before we were surrounded by the total population, of perhaps twenty adults, and at least as many children of all ages.

AS ONE would expect, these Blacks were of very crude appearance; not only "country Negroes" but that in exaggerated form. Negroes in the West Indies have some tendency to live on the land where they originated, and, as it happened, most of these Negroes had been born up here and several generations of their forebears before them.

All the adult Negroes knew Grumbach from his long residence here up to ten years or so previously as manager, but to him they paid scant attention. They crowded about me in much the same way as the people at the wharf at the time of my arrival, only, somehow, in a cruder, more outspoken fashion. "English" though it is, I was at that period of my residence quite unable to understand their speech. The Black people talked to me and at me in the friendliest fashion imaginable, and Hans Grumbach, when it seemed desirable for me to speak, prompted me.

I had come prepared with a big double handful of small-change. This I handed over to the oldest man of the villagers, requesting him to distribute it among them all, and I was gravely blessed for this largesse. Translating the comments of the group on this present which my instinct as a member of the old Captain's family prompted me to make to the descendants of his estate-people, later, on the way home, Grumbach told me that they had compared me to my collateral ancestor!

After lunch, Grumbach took me to see the "fountain" from which the old estate had originally derived its title.

We walked up a ravine toward it, along a sandy stream-bed which, this being an exceptionally dry season near the end of a three-years' drought, was now a mere trickle.

The "fountain" itself was a delicate, natural waterfall, coming thinly over the edge of a high rock, source of the one unfailing stream on an otherwise very "dry" island.

It was when we were coming back, by a slightly different route, for Grumbach wanted me to see everything possible, that I saw the tree-man. He stood, a youngish, coal-black Negro, of about twenty-five years, scantily dressed in a tattered shirt and a sketchy pair of trousers, about ten yards away from the fieldpath we were

following and from which a very clear view of a portion of the estate was obtained, and beside him, towering over him, was a magnificent coconut palm. The Negro stood, motionless. I thought, in fact, that he had gone asleep standing there, both arms clasped about the tree's smooth, elegant trunk, the right side of his face pressed against it.

He was not, however, asleep, because I looked back at him and his eyes—rather intelligent eyes, they seemed to me—were wide open, although to my surprise he had not changed his position, nor even the direction of his gaze, to glance at us; and, I was quite sure, he had not been in that village group when we had stood among them just before our lunch.

Grumbach did not speak to him, as he had done to every other Negro we had seen. Indeed, as I turned to him for some possible comment, I saw that his face looked a trifle—well, apprehensive; and, I thought, he very slightly quickened his pace. I stepped nearer to him as we walked past the man and the tree, and then I noticed that his lips were moving, and when I came closer I observed that he was muttering to himself. I said, very quietly, almost in his ear:

"What's the matter with that fellow, Grumbach?"

Grumbach glanced at me out of the corner of his eye, and my impression that he was disturbed grew upon me.

"He's listening!" was all that I got out of Grumbach. I supposed, of course, that there was something odd about the fellow; perhaps he was slightly demented and might be an annoyance; and I supposed that Grumbach meant to convey that the young fellow was "listening" for our possible comment upon him and his strange behavior. Later, after we had said good-bye to the courteous caretaker and he had seen us off down the first hillside road with its many ruts, I brought up the subject of the young Black fellow at the tree.

"You mentioned that he was listening," said I, "so I dropped the matter; but, why does he do that, Mr. Grumbach—I mean, why does he stand against the tree in that unusual manner? Why, he didn't even get his eyes to look at us, and that surprised me. They don't have visitors up here every day, I understand!"

"He was listening—to his tree!" said Hans Grumbach, as though reluctantly. "That was what I meant, Mr. Canevin." And he drew my attention to an extraordinarily picturesque ruined windmill, the kind once used for the grinding of cane in the old days of "muscovado" sugar,

which dominated a cone-like hillside off to our left as we bumped over the road.

BETWEEN getting settled in my house, attending to the preliminary work of my mission, and fulfilling the almost numberless social engagements which crowded upon me, I can not say that I forgot about the tree-man, but, certainly, he and his queer behavior were anything but prominent in my mind. It was not until months later, when I had gained the confidence of Hans Grumbach, that the individual gave me any further enlightenment.

Then I learned that, along with his nostalgia for the life of an agriculturist, there was mixed in with his feelings about the Great Fountain estate a kind of inconsistent thankfulness that he was no longer stationed there! This intrigued me. I saw something of Grumbach and got rather well acquainted with him as the months passed that first year of my residence. Bit by bit, in his reluctant manner of speech, it came out.

To put the whole picture of his mind on this subject together, I got the idea that Grumbach, while always suffering from a faint nostalgia for his deep-country residence and the joys of tilling the soil, felt, somehow, safe, here in the town. If he chafed, mildly, at the restrictions of town life and his storekeeping, there was yet the certainty that "something"—a vague matter at first, as it came out—was not always hanging over him; something connected with a lingering fear.

The Negroes, up there, at Great Fountain, were not, it seemed, quite like the rest of the island's Black population. No—the Great Fountain village was, somehow, at least in Hans Grumbach's dark hints, different; sui generis, "a peculiar people" as the biblical phrase runs.

They were, to begin with, almost purely of Dahomeyan stock. These Dahomeyans had drifted "down the islands"—in the general southerly direction; that is, from Haiti, beginning soon after the revolt from France in the early Nineteenth Century. They were tall, very dark-skinned, extremely clannish Blacks. And, just as the Koromantyn slaves in British Jamaica had brought to the West Indies their Obay-i (obeah) or herb-magic, so, it seemed, and the Dahomeyans carried with them their voodu, which, properly defined, means the practices accompanying the vague Guinea worship of "The Snake."

This worship, grown into a vast localized cult in unimpeded

Haiti and in the Guinea hinterlands down in South America, is a vastly intriguing matter, very perfectly understood even to this present day. But, its accompaniments; all the charms, ouangas, philtres, potions, talismans, amulets, "doctoring" and whatnot, have spread all through the islands and are thoroughly established in widely variant forms. Haiti is its West Indian home, of course. But down in French Martinique its extent and intensity is a fair rival to the Haitian supremacy. It is rife on Dominica, Guadeloupe, even on British Montserrat. Indeed, one might name every island from Cuba to Trinidad, and, allowing for the variations, the local preferences, and all such matters, one might say, and truly, that the voodu, generically described by the Blacks themselves as "obi," is very thoroughly established.

According to Grumbach, the handful of villagers at Great Fountain was very deeply involved in this sort of thing. Left to themselves as they had been for many years, forming a little, self-sustaining community of nearly pure-blooded Dahomeyans, they had, it seemed, reverted very nearly to their African type, and this, Grumbach alleged, was the fact despite their easy kindliness, their use of "English," and the various other outward appearances which caused them to seem not greatly different from other "country Negroes" on this island of Santa Cruz.

ON THE subject of Silvio Fabricius—for that was the tree-man's rather fanciful name—my information was derived directly from Grumbach. He had known the young Negro since he had been a pick'ny on the estate. He knew, so far as his limited understanding of Black People's magic extended, all about Silvio. He had been manager at the time the boy had begun his attentions to the great coconut palm. He had heard the to him "stupidness" which had attended the setting apart of this neophyte; in other words, there had been three days—and nights; particularly the nights—when not a single plantation-hand would do a piece of work for any consideration. It was, as he bitterly remembered it all, "the crop season." His employers, not sensing, businessmen as they were, any underlying reason for no work done when they needed the cane from Great Fountain for their grinding-mill, had been hard on him. They had, in Santa Crucian phraseology, "pressed him" for cane deliveries. And there, in his village, quite utterly ignoring his authority as estate-

manager, those Blacks had danced and pounded drums, had burned flares, and weaved back and forth in their interminable ceremonies for three strategic days and nights, over something which had Silvio Fabricius, then rising twelve or thirteen, as its apparent center and underlying cause. It was no wonder that Hans Grumbach raved and probably swore mightily and threatened the estate-hands.

But—the expression of his anger and annoyance, the threats and cajolings, the offers of bonuses, "snaps" of rum, and pay for piece-work; all these efforts to get his ripe cane cut and delivered had come to nothing. The carts stood empty. The mules gravely ate the long guinea-grass. The cane-tops waved in the soft breath of the northeast trade wind, while those three days stretched themselves out to their conclusion.

THIS conclusion took place in the daytime, about ten o'clock in the morning of the fourth day, and after that, which was a very brief and apparently meaningless matter indeed, the hands sheepishly resumed the driving of their mule-carts and the plying of their canebills, and the Fountain cane traveled slowly down the rutted hill road toward the factory below. On that morning, before resuming their work, the whole village had accompanied young Silvio Fabricius as he walked ahead of them up toward the source of the perennial stream, stepped out into the field, and clasped his arms about a young, but tall and promising coconut palm which stood there as though accidentally, in solitary towering grandeur. There the villagers had left the little black boy when they turned away and filed slowly and silently back to the village and to their interrupted labor.

There, beside his tree, Grumbach said, Silvio Fabricius had stood ever since, only occasionally coming in to the village and then at any hour of the day or night, apparently "reporting" something to that same oldest inhabitant, a gnarled, ancient grandfather with pure white wool; after which brief visit he would at once, and with an unshaken gravity, return to his tree. Food, said Grumbach, was always carried out to him from the village. He toiled not, neither spun! There, day and night, under the blazing sun, through showers and drenching downpours, erect, apparently unsleeping—unless he slept up against his tree as Grumbach suspected—stood Silvio Fabricius; and there he had stood, except when he climbed the tree to trim out the

"cloth" or chase out a rat intent on nesting up there, or to gather the coconuts, for eleven years.

The coconuts, it seemed, were his perquisite. They were, Grumbach said, absolutely tabu to anybody else!

Grumbach's attitude toward Silvio Fabricius was, it came out, one of fear! That his fear of this young Negro went deep I sensed. I was, later, to see my suspicion justified!

FOR a long time I had no occasion to revisit Great Fountain. But six years later, while in the States during the summer, I made the acquaintance of a man named Carrington who wanted to know "all about the Virgin Islands" with a view to investing some money there in a proposal to grow pineapples on a somewhat large scale. I talked with Mr. Carrington at some length, and in the course of our discussion it occurred to me that Great Fountain estate would be virtually ideal for his purpose. Here was a very considerable acreage; the land, as I well knew, was very rich; the Copenhagen Company would probably rent it out for a period of years for a very reasonable price, since it was bringing them in nothing.

I spread before Carrington these advantages, and he travelled down on the ship with me that autumn to make an investigation in person.

Carrington, a trained fruit-grower, spent a day with me on the estate, and thereafter with characteristic American energy started in to put his plan into practice. A lease was easily secured on terms mutually advantageous, the village was repaired and the fallen stone cabins rebuilt, and within a few weeks cultivating-machinery of the most modern type began to arrive on the Frederiksted wharf.

After a considerable consultation with Hans Grumbach, to whose lamentations over the restrictions of town life I had been listening for years, I recommended him to Mr. Carrington as manager of the laborers, and Hans, after going over the matter with his good wife and coming to an amicable arrangement, went back to Great Fountain, where a manager's house had been thrown up for him on the foundation of one of the ruined buildings. At Carrington's direction, Grumbach set the estate laborers at work on the job of repairing the roads, and, as the village cabins went up one after another, other laborers, enticed by the prospect of good wages, filled them up and ancient Great Fountain became once more a busy scene of simple industry.

During these preparatory

works on the estate I was up there several times, because I was naturally interested in Joseph Carrington's venture being a success. I had, indeed, put several thousand dollars into it myself, not solely because it looked like a good investment, but in part for sentimental reasons connected with my great-uncle. On these occasions, being by then thoroughly familiar with the odd native speech, I made it a point to visit the village and talk at length with the "people." They were courteous to me, markedly so; deferential, would be a better word to describe their attitude. This, of course, was wholly due to the family connection. Only a very few of them, and those the oldest, had any personal recollection of Captain McMillin, but his memory, aided by folksongs, was decidedly green among them.

In the course of my studies of Negro matters, especially African manners and customs, which had included a wide course of reading, for I wished to master that abstruse subject, I had to run across the peculiar affair of a "treeman." I understood, therefore, the status of Silvio Fabricius in that queer little Black community; why he had been "devoted" to the tree, what were the underlying reasons for that strange sacrifice.

It was, on the part of that handful of nearly pure-blooded Dahomeyan villagers there at my great-uncle's old place, an attempt, a recrudescence perhaps—a revival, certainly—of a custom probably as old as African civilization. For the African has a civilization. He is at a vast disadvantage when among Caucasions, competing as he necessarily must with Caucasian "cultures." His native problems are utterly different, utterly diverse, from the White Man's. The African's whole history among us Caucasians is a history of more or less successful adaptation. Place an average American businessman in the heart of "uncivilized" Africa, in the Liberian hinterland, for example, and what will he do—how survive? The answer is simple. He will perish miserably, confronted with the black jungle night, the venomous insect-life, the attacks of wild beasts, the basic problem of how to feed and warm himself; for even this last is an African problem. African nights chill to the very bone. I know. I have been on safari in Uganda, in British East Africa, and in Somaliland, and I speak from experience.

AFRICANS, supposedly static in cultural matters, have solved all these problems. And, very prominent among these, es-

pecially as it concerns the agricultural nations—for there are, perhaps, as many Black nations, kindred, peoples, tongues, as there are Caucasian—is, of course, the question of weather.

Hence, the "tree-man."

Introduced with the ceremonies which were ancient when Hammurabi sat on his throne in Babylon, a young boy is dedicated to a forest tree. Thereafter he spends his life beside that tree, cares for it, loves it, "listens" to it, becomes "the-brother-of-the-tree" in time. He is "set apart." To the tree he devotes his entire life, dying at last beside it, in its shade. And—this is African culture, if you will; a culture of which we Caucasians get, perhaps, the faint reactions in the, to us, meaningless jumble of Negro superstition which we sense all about us; the "stupidness" of the West Indies; faint, incomprehensible reflections of a system which, in itself, is practical, dogmatic, and utilitarian.

THESE Negroes at Great Fountain were, primarily, agriculturists. They had the use of the soil bred deeply in their blood and bones. That, indeed, is why the canny French brought their Hispaniola slaves from Dahomey. Left to themselves at the old estate in the north central hills of Santa Cruz, the little community rapidly reverted to their African ways. They tilled the soil; sporadically, it is true; yet, they tilled it. They needed a weather prognosticator. There are sudden storms in summer throughout the vast sweep of the West India Islands, devastating storms, hurricanes indeed; long, wasting periods of drought. They needed a tree-man up there. They set apart Silvio Fabricius.

That fact made the young fellow what a white man would call "sacred." Not for nothing had they danced and performed their "stupid" rites those three days and nights to the detriment of Hans Grumbach's sugar-cane. No. Silvio Fabricius from the moment he had clasped his arms about the growing coconut palm was as much a person "set apart," dedicated, as any white man's pundit, priest, or yogi. Hence the various tabus which, like the case of the green coconuts, had puzzled Hans Grumbach. He must never take his attention away from the tree. There, beside it, he was consecrated to live and to die. When he departed from his "brother the tree," it was only for the purpose of reporting something which the tribe should know, something, that is, which his brother the tree had told him! There would be drenching rain the second day following. A plague of small

green flies would, the third day later, come to annoy the animals. The banana grove must be propped forthwith; otherwise, a high wind, two days hence, would nullify all the work of its planting and care.

Such were the messages that Silvio Fabricius, austere, introspective, unnoticing, his mind fully preoccupied with his brotherhood to the tree, brought to his tribe; proceeded, the message delivered, austerely back to his station beside the magnificent palm.

All this, because of my status as the great-nephew of an old Bukra (White Lord) whom here remembered with love and reverence, and because he discovered that I knew about tree-men and many other matters usually sealed books to Bukras, the old fellow who was the village patriarch, who, by right of his seniority, received and passed on from Silvio the messages from Silvio's brother the tree, amply substantiated. There was nothing secretive about him, once he knew my interest in these things. Such procedure as the securing of a tree-man for his tribe seemed to the old man entirely logical; there was no necessary secret about it, certainly not from sympathetic me, the "young marster" of Great Fountain Estate.

And Hans Grumbach, once he had finished with his road-work, not being aware of all this, but sensing something out of the ordinary and hence to be feared about Silvio Fabricius and his palm tree, decided to end the stupidness out there. Grumbach decided to cutdown the tree.

If I had had any inkling of this intention I could have saved Grumbach. It would have been a comparatively simple matter for me to have said enough to Carrington to have him forbid it; or, indeed, as a partner in the control of the estate, to forbid it myself. But I knew nothing about it, and have in my statement of his intention to destroy the tree supplied my own conception of his motives.

GRUMBACH, although virtually Caucasian in appearance, was of mixed blood, and quite without the Caucasian background of superior quality which makes the educated West Indian mestizo the splendid citizen he is. Grumbach was quite devoid of the Caucasian aristocrat's tolerance for the preoccupations of the Blacks. To him such affairs were stupidity, merely. Like others of his kind he held the Black People in a kind of contempt; was wholly, I imagine, without sympathy for them, though a worthy fellow enough in his limited way. And, perhaps,

he had not enough Negro in him to understand instinctively what Silvio Fabricius, the tree-man, stood for in his community.

He chose, cannily, one of the periods when Fabricius was away from his tree, reporting to the village.

It was early in the afternoon, and Grumbach, having finished his road-work several days before, was directing a group of laborers who were grubbing ancient "bush—heavy undergrowth, brush, rank weeds, small trees—from along the winding road which led from the village to the fountain or waterfall, now feeding, for the drought was no longer plaguing the island, a tumbling stream which Carrington intended to dam, lower down, for a central reserve reservoir.

The majority, if not all, of these laborers under his eye at the moment were new to the village, members of the increasing group which were coming into the restored stone cabins as fast as these became habitable. They were cutting out the brush with machetes, canebills, and knives, and, for the small trees, a couple of axes were being used from time to time. This work was being done quite near the tree, and from his position in the roadway overlooking his gang, Grumbach must have seen the tree-man leave his station and start toward the village with one of his "messages."

This opportunity—he had, unquestionably, made up his mind about it all—was too good to be lost. As I learned from the two men whom he detached from his grubbing-gang and took with him, Silvio Fabricius was hardly out of sight over the sweep of the lower portion of the great field near the upper edge of which the coconut palm towered, when Grumbach called the two axmen to follow him, and, with a word to the rest of the gang, led the way across the field's edge to the tree.

ABOUT this time Carrington and I were returning from one of our inspections of the fountain. We had been up there several times of late, since the scheme for the dam had been working in our minds. We were returning toward the village and the construction work progressing there along that same pathway through the big field from which, years before, I had had my first sight of the tree-man.

As we came in sight of the tree, toward which I invariably looked when I was near it, I saw, of course, that Fabricius was not there. Grumbach and his two laborers stood under it, Grumbach talking to the men. One of them as we approached—we were

still perhaps a hundred yards distant—shook his head emphatically. He told me later that Grumbach had led them straight to the tree and commanded them to chop it down directly, one working on either side, opposite, each other, the ax-strokes to alternate with each other.

Completely detailed instructions such as these are invariably given to such laborers in the West Indies.

Both men had demurred. They were not of the village, it is true, not, certainly, Dahomeyans. But —they had some idea, even after generations away from "Guinea," that here was something strange: something over which the suitable course was to "go stupid." Both men, therefore, "went stupid" forthwith.

Grumbach, as was usual with him, poor fellow, was vastly annoyed by this process. I could hear him barge out at the laborers, see him gesticulate. Then from the nearest, he seized the ax and attacked the tree himself. He struck a savage blow at it; then, gathering himself together, for he was stout like the middle-aged of all his class, and unused to such work, he struck again, somewhat above the place where the first ax-blow had landed on the tree.

"You'd better stop him, Carrington," said I, "and I will explain my reasons to you afterward."

Carrington cupped his hands and shouted, and both Negroes looked toward us. But Grumbach, apparently, had not heard, or, if he had, supposed that the words were directed to somebody other than himself. Thus, everybody within view was occupied, you will note—Carrington looking at Grumbach, the two laborers looking toward us, Grumbach intent upon making an impression on the rough coconut wood. I alone, for some instictive reason, thought suddenly of Silvio Fabricius, and directed my gaze toward the point, down the long field, over which horizon he would appear when returning.

Perhaps it was the sound of the ax's impact against his brother the tree, apprehended by a set of senses for seventeen years attuned to the tree's moods and rustlings, to the "messages" which his brother the tree imparted to him; perhaps some uncanny instinct merely, that arrested him in his course toward the village down there, carrying the current "message" from the tree about tomorrow's weather.

As I looked, Silvio Fabricius, running lightly, erect, came over the distant horizon of the lower field's bosomed slope. He stopped there, a distant figure, but clearly within my view. Without

taking my eyes off him I spoke again to Carrington:

"You must stop him, Carrington—there's more in this than you know. Stop him—at once!"

And, as Carrington shouted a second time, Grumbach raised the ax for the third blow at the tree, the blow which did not land.

AS THE axe came up, Silvio Fabricius reached for the small, sharp canebill which hung beside him from his trouserbelt, a cutting tool with which he smoothed the bark of his brother the tree on occasion; cut out annually the choking mass of "cloth" from its top; removed fading fronds as soon as their decay reached the stage where they were no longer benefitting the tree; cut his coconuts. I could see that hot sunlight flash against the wide blade of the canebill as though it had been a small heliograph-mirror. Fabricius was about a thousand yards away. He raised the canebill in the air and with it made a sudden, cutting, pulling motion downward.

Fascinated, I watched him return the canebill to its place, on its hook, fastened to the belt at the left side.

But, abruptly, my attention was distracted to what was going on nearer at hand. Carrington's shout died, half uttered. Simultaneously I heard the yells of uncontrollable, sudden terror from the two laborers at the tree's foot. My eyes, snatched away from the distant tree-man, turned to Carrington beside me, glimpsing a look of terrified apprehension; then, with the speed of thought, toward the tree where one laborer was in the act of falling face-downward on the ground—I caught the terrified white gleam of his rolled eyes—the other, twisting himself away from the tree toward us, the very epitome of crude horror, his hands over his eyes. And my glance was turned just in time to see the great coconut which, detached from its heavy fibrous cordage up there, sixty feet above the ground, struck Grumbach full and true on the wide pith helmet which he affected, planter-wise, against the sun.

He seemed almost to be driven into the ground by the impact; the axe flew off at an angle, past the tree.

He never moved. And when, with the help of the two laborers, Carrington and I, having summoned a cart from the near-by road-gang cutting bushes, lifted the body, the head which had been that poor devil Grumbach's, was merely a mass of sodden pulp.

We took the body down the road in the cart, toward his newly erected manager's house. And

a few yards along our way Silvio Fabricius passed us, running erectly, his somber face expressionless, his stride a kind of dignified lope, glancing not to right or left, speeding straight to his brother the tree which had been injured in his absence.

LOOKING back, where the road took a turn, I saw him, leaning now close beside the tree, his long fingers probing the two gashes which Hans Grumbach, who would never swing another ax, had made there, about two feet above the ground; while aloft the glorious fronds of the massive tree burgeoned like great sails in the afternoon trade wind.

Later that afternoon we sent the mortal remains of Hans Grumbach down the long hill road to Frederiksted in a cart, decently disposed, after telephoning his wife's relatives to break the sorrowful news to her. It was Carrington who telephoned. He explained that it was an accident, gave the particulars as he had seen them with his own eyes—Grumbach had been working under a tall coconut palm and a heavy coconut, falling, had struck him and killed him instantly. It had been a quite merciful death. . . .

The next morning—we were at that time sleeping at Great Fountain as we oversaw in person the carrying out of the basic works there—I walked up toward the fountain again, alone, going straight up to the tree-man, stood beside him. He paid no attention to me whatever. I spoke to him.

"Fabricius," said I, "it is necessary that I should speak to you."

The tree-man turned his gaze upon me, bowing gravely, as though assuring me of his attention.

I said: "I was looking at you yesterday afternoon when you came back to your tree, over the lower end of the field—down there." I indicated where he had stood with a gesture. Again he bowed, without any change of expression.

"I wish to have you know," I continued, "that I understand; that no one else besides me saw you, saw what you did—with the canebill, I mean. I wish you to know that what I saw I am keeping to myself. That is all."

Silvio Fabricius the tree-man continued to look into my face, without any visible change whatever in his expression. For the third time he nodded, presumably to indicate that he understood what I had said, but utterly without any emotion whatever.

Then, in a deep, resonant voice, he spoke to me; the first,

and last, time I have ever heard him utter a word.

"Yo' loike to know, yoong marster," said he, with an impressive gravity, "me brudda" —he placed a hand against the tree's smooth trunk—"t'ink hoighly 'bout yo', sar. Ahlso 'bout de enterprise fo' pineopples. Him please', sar, young marster; him indicate-me yo' course be serene an' ahlso of a profit." The tree-man bowed again, and without another word or so much as a glance in my direction, detaching his attention from me as deliberately as he had given it when I first spoke to him, he turned toward his brother the tree, laid his face against the trunk, and slowly encircled the massive trunk with his two great muscular black arms. . . .

I ARRIVED on the island the middle of October, 1928, coming down as usual from New York after my summer in the States. Our property at Great Fountain had suffered severely in the hurricane of the previous month, and when I arrived there I found Carrington well along with the processes of restoration. Many precautions had been taken beforehand and our property had suffered because of these much less than the other estates. I had told Carrington, who had a certain respect for my familiarity with "native manners and customs," enough about the tree-man and his functions tribally to cause him to heed the warning, transmitted by the now nearly helpless old patriarch of the village, and brought in by the tree-man four days before the hurricane broke—and two days before the government cable-advice had reached the island.

Silvio Fabricius had stayed beside his tree. On the third day, when it was possible for the villagers to get as far as the upper end of the great field near the fountain; he had been found, Carrington reported to me, lying in the field, dead, his face composed inscrutably, the great trunk of his brother the tree across his chest, which had been crushed by its great weight, when, uprooted by the wind, it had fallen.

And until they wore off there had been smears of earth, Carrington said, on the heads and faces of all the original Dahomeyan villagers and upon the heads and faces of several of the newer laborers' families as well.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza,
New York 20, New York

For as long as I can remember, my favorite reading has been the works of H. P. Lovecraft. To my mind, Lovecraft's place in American literature lies not only alongside the superb achievements of Poe, as many have pointed out; I believe he is there beside Walt Whitman, Melville, Longfellow, Henry James, Carl Sandburg, Thomas Wolfe, and Hemingway, too!

Unusual though it may seem, although I had long known that WEIRD TALES *was Lovecraft's "own" magazine, I had never seen a copy of it until I purchased the May issue. May I say that I certainly was not disappointed! Every story was on an exceedingly artistic level, and was an absolute delight to me. You are really carrying on in the traditions of your late, great contributor.*

It would give me my greatest thrill to correspond with someone who had known H. P. L. during his lifetime. If any of your readers would care to do so with me, I should appreciate it very much.

Again, I enjoyed every part of your magazine.

Robert L. Stilwell
Marr Road,
Columbus, Indiana

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza,
New York 20, New York

I have of recent months become a steady reader of WEIRD TALES. *The magazine comes forth with some real classics.*

The plant world certainly gets lively and malignant in the May

issue: Mandrakes scream and sneak around, willow trees slap the daylights out of people, watermelons gallop over the landscape and crack their owners in the shins, apple trees throw apples—wow! I have a house plant—a creeping vine. I had always taken its tractability for granted, but now, hmmm. . . .

I allude, of course, to Mandrake, Whisper Water, *and* Strange Harvest—*all good yarns.*

And Joe Eberle's illustrations are just what is needed to enhance the stories in WT—hang onto him!

I agree with those who maintain that WT should be kept essentially a fantasy magazine. But I think that Mrs. Brown (May Eyrie) is being rather intolerant when she expresses an antipathy toward "that horrid science fiction." It sounds like a case of "Better the Devil we know than the Devil we don't."

Those who adhere strictly to fantasy, and those who prefer straight science fiction, often take issue and throw verbal (usually) bricks at one another. I suppose that one side offends the other's sense of reality. What fantasy reader, for instance, wants all his ghosts, ghouls and vampires explained away, or interpreted "scientifically?!"

Actually, I enjoy both science fiction and fantasy—each, I believe, has its place in speculative literature. In fact each might be considered as a different aspect of the same thing. Both, aside from their artistic and amusement value, represent mankind's continual efforts to probe and explore the Unknown.

The arbitrary line we draw between the two "fields" often wavers, and even vanishes sometimes. I have read some splendid stories where fantasy and science fiction were skillfully and logically blended. Strange Harvest *furnishes a pretty good example of this.*

But, I repeat, let's keep WT essentially a fantasy magazine.

Hal J. Martin
745 Chapman St.
San Jose, Calif.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza,
New York 20, New York

I wish to point out that although I am a disbeliever of fantasy and "ghosts," I am inclined to believe in the supernatural, that is, to a certain extent, and the various tales published on this subject in your magazine, although generally fantastic, are able to keep me in suspense for hours, even though I have never been a "bookworm," so to speak.

I would, therefore, like to ex-

press my utmost appreciation to the authors concerned for their keen sense of imagination and duty to us, your readers.

Douglas Howell
Glamorgan,
South Wales, G. B.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza,
New York 20, New York

I've been a faithful WT reader for a long time now and have always considered it the best such magazine available. But now, in my opinion, it is perfect—because of Mr. Finlay! He is just the one for WT—his drawings live and breathe, and make your stories come alive. I'm an art student, and hope someday to be a tenth of a fraction as good as he.

Claire Garceau
West Acton, Mass.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza,
New York 20, New York

So far as I am aware there has always been a demand for back-numbers of WEIRD TALES *and I believe there are at least two ways in which you can help to ameliorate that demand. The simplest thing to do would be to announce either in The Eyrie or in the WT Club column the names of those of your readers who care to obtain, sell, or trade old copies of your magazine. The second thing would be to use more reprints.*

I know there are some readers who object to reprints and so the best thing to do so far as second- and even third-run stories are concerned would be to publish a companion magazine devoted exclusively to the undeservedly forgotten phantasies of yesterday. Most scientifictional magazines have such companions and I see no reason why WT, which is so much better than those quasi scientific nonsense periodicals, shouldn't have a sibling of its own. Such a magazine would help to fill the gap that exists between bi-monthly issues of The Unique Magazine.

I hope my suggestions are practicable. And if you decide to print the names of readers desiring back-issues of your magazine, I would like to announce that I am in the market for Volume I, Number 1 of WEIRD TALES *(dated March, 1923). I would like a fairly good copy with both front and rear covers intact. And if anyone has such a copy for sale, please remember that I'm not a millionaire although I would be willing to pay a good price for that issue.*

Irving Glassman,
3115 Brighton Fourth St.,
Brooklyn 35, N. Y.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza,
New York 20, New York

I read with a great deal of interest, the last paragraph of the "Eyrie" concerning the possibility of instituting a column wherein readers interested in securing back issues of your magazine could list their "wants"; or, conversely, list issues they wished to trade or sell at a reasonable figure.

I don't know whether or not you are fully aware of the fantastic prices being asked for the really old issues of the book, but they range all the way from $20.00 for Vol. I No. 1 to $3.00 and $4.00 for the early issues (circa 1924-29). Even issues as recent as the early forties are being sold for as much as $1.00 to $1.50.

In the Eyrie, I would suggest you list merely the names and addresses of interested persons—in one section those interested in buying; in the other those interested in selling. Such a listing of names and addresses would save space. It would then be up to the "buyers" to contact the "sellers" listing what issues they desired, or what issues were available.

I sincerely hope you will be able to initiate this department—so long needed—with you next issue.

J. T. Crackel,
3141 Boulevard Place
Indianapolis, Indiana

From among the ideas contained in various letters we received on the subject of an exchange mart idea for issues of WEIRD TALES, this one from Mr. Crackel seems to us the most practical. We couldn't undertake to list wants and offers, so it seems the best way to have two separate lists—those who want to sell and those who want to buy. Then they can get in touch with each other—and just count us out after that. One other word of caution—please concentrate on WEIRDS only. We aren't going to develop into any sort of fantasy exchange in general; we have troubles enough as it is now!

We made an exception to our decision not to list particular wants in using Mr. Glassman's letter; he was so short and so specific. We hope he gets his first issue of WEIRD TALES in good condition; that will be more than ours is. The Editor, WEIRD TALES.