

Strange

STORIES

15¢

DEC.

13

COMPLETE
STORIES
IN THIS
ISSUE!



FEATURING
THE CRAWLING CORPSE
A Novel of Bizarre Sorcery
By ELLI COLTER

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

If This Were You—
Laid Up By
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OR ACCIDENT.

What Would It Mean
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A MONTH?



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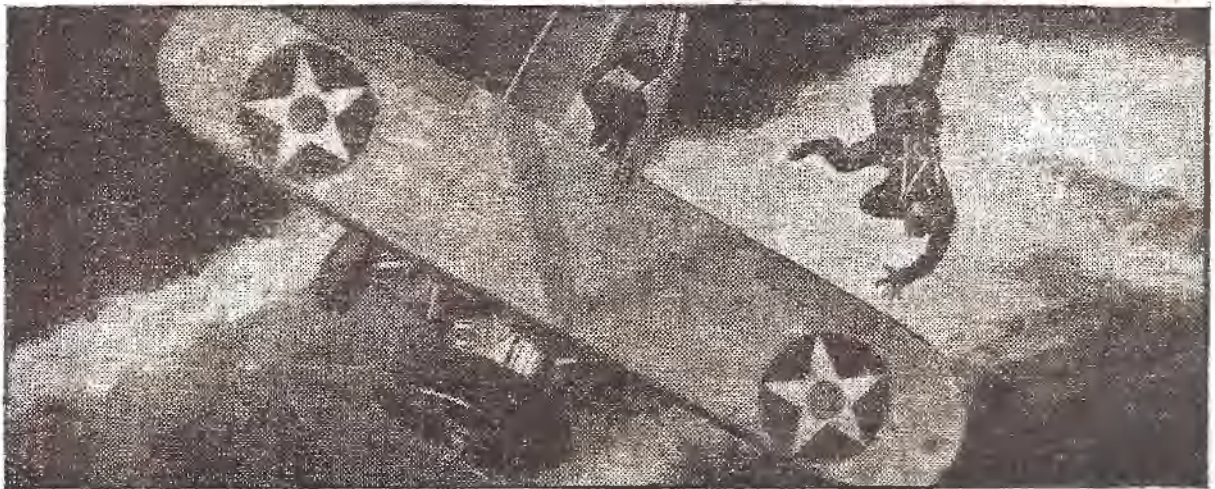
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on Policy**



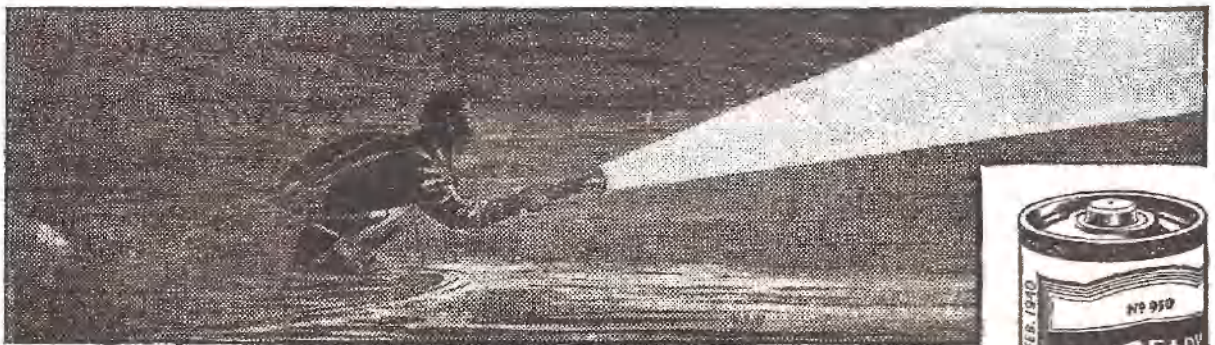
"I HAD TO BAIL OUT IN A PEA SOUP FOG!"

C. W. HARBERT
Aviation Cadet
Bristol, W. Va.

① "I took off from Pensacola on a night training flight in my single-seater fighting plane," writes Cadet Harbert. "Later, as I started home-ward, a heavy fog rolled in. The landing field was blotted out!



② "It was too dangerous—for myself and those below—to attempt a landing. I had to bail out in that pea soup fog! Heading for open country, I circled at 5,000 feet until the gasoline gauge showed empty, then jammed the stick forward and catapulted into space!



③ "I landed waist-deep in the wide mouth of a river. Marooned by deep water on all sides, I grabbed my flashlight, and—despite the soaking—it worked! Guided by its beam, two fishermen eventually found and rescued me—thanks to 'Eveready' fresh DATED batteries—which you can depend on in emergencies! (Signed) *C. W. Harbert*"



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Strange STORIES

VOL. II, NO. 3

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\$3,000
a Year**



"Before taking your course I earned about 17¢ cents per hour as a truck driver. When I had completed 20 lessons I started service work. During the next year I have made about \$2,000 in Radio. I now own my own shop."—**KARL KELLY, 308 W. Calhoun St., Magnolia, Ark.**



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a Week in
Spare Time**

"I repaired many Radio sets when I was on my tenth lesson and I have made enough money to pay for my Radio course and also my instruments. I really don't see how you can give so much for such a small amount of money. I made \$100 in a year had a ball, and I have made an average of \$20 to \$25 a week—just spare time."—**JOHN JERRY, 1529 Arapahoe St., Denver, Colo.**

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to BETTER PAY**

Clip the coupon and mail it. I'm certain I can train you at home in your spare time to be a Radio Technician. I will send you my first lesson free. Examine it, read it, see how clear and easy it is to understand. Judge for yourself whether my course is planned to help you get a good job in Radio, a young growing field with a future. You don't need to give up your present job, or spend a lot of money to become a Radio Technician. I train you at home in your spare time.

Jobs Like These Go to Men Who Know Radio

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay well for trained men. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good pay jobs with opportunities for advancement. Radio jobbers and dealers employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio; loudspeaker systems, electronic devices, are never fields offering good opportunities to qualified men. And my Course includes Television, which promises to open many good jobs soon.

Why Many Radio Technicians Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

Radio is already one of the country's large industries even though it is still young and growing. The arrival of Television, the use of Radio principles in industry, are but a few of many recent Radio developments. More than 28,000,000 homes have one or more Radios. There are more Radios than telephones. Every year millions of Radios get out of date and are replaced. Millions more need new tubes, repairs, etc. Over 5,000,000 auto Radios are in use and thousands more are being sold every day. In every branch Radio is offering more opportunities—opportunities for which I give you the required knowledge of Radio at home in your spare time. Yes, the few hundred \$10, \$40, \$50 a week jobs of 30 years ago have grown to thousands.

Many Make \$5 to \$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll, in addition to my regular course, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start showing you how to do actual Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training, I send plans and directions which have helped many make from \$200 to \$500 a year in spare time while learning.

You Get Practical Experience While Learning

I send you special Radio equipment, show you how to conduct experiments, build circuits illustrating important principles used in modern Radio and Television



receivers, broadcasting station and loudspeaker installations. My 50-50 method of training gives you both printed instruction and actual work with Radio parts—makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PRACTICAL, PROFESSIONAL, ALL-WAVE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make more money fixing Radio sets while learning; and to equip you with a professional instrument for full time work after you graduate.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act today. Mail the coupon for Sample Lesson and my 64-page Book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." They point out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and some coming in Television; tell about my course in Radio and Television; show letters from men I have trained telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

**J. E. SMITH, PRESIDENT, DEPT. 6N09
NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE,
WASHINGTON, D. C.**

**MAIL
COUPON
NOW!**



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SAMPLE LESSON FREE**

**J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 6N09,
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.**

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With the splendid outfit I give you, you can start at once in a fine-paying home-owned business as Local Food Distributor. Don't think you can't, because you positively do not need experience to start. Under my simple, sure-fire plan you distribute coffee, teas, delicious food products and many other fast selling, quick repeating, daily necessities, direct to the home. You make regular calls, take orders, make deliveries and pocket a big profit. In fact, your average gross profit is from 30 to 40 cents on every dollar you take in.

I Send Everything You Need To Start Right Out

With the complete Free Outfit, containing a large assortment of regular full size packages, I also give you a proven, successful plan which anyone can follow. I give you advertising material, trial size samples to give away, and everything else you need to start earning your very first day. And you can save money as well as make money—because you can get any of all of these household necessities for yourself at wholesale prices.

I am certain that you will find this a most fascinating business once you start. You'll be your own boss, free to come and go as you please, free to set your own hours. You'll get to meet interesting people who will become your friends; they'll welcome you into their homes and will give you steady orders. Unless you take advantage of my Free Offer you may be missing the very money-making opportunity you have been looking for!

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I wouldn't want to go into any business handling cheap merchandise, and I don't ask anyone else to do so. We maintain absolute control over the quality of our products. Each and every product in the line is tested and approved, for purity and uniform high quality, in our own pure-food kitchens and laboratories. Every package is backed by our powerful guarantee of satisfaction or money back.

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Another reason why my Plan has proved so successful for hundreds of men and women is that my products are household necessities—fast sellers and quick repeaters. Besides tempting foods, I have over one hundred other daily household necessities—and you can handle them all. Besides this—under my liberal credit plan—you can operate on my capital. You can

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E. J. MILLS, President, 2050 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, O.

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E. J. MILLS, President
2050 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

Without the slightest obligation on my part, please mail me full particulars about your offer of a Complete Free Outfit, and tell me how I can start making money at once as a Local Food Distributor for your nationally famous products.

Name

Address

(Please Print or Write Plainly)



FOOT ITCH

ATHLETE'S FOOT

**Send Coupon
Don't Pay Until Relieved**

According to the Government Health Bulletin No. E-28, at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

HERE'S HOW TO RELIEVE IT

The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to kill the germ; so you can see why Athlete's Foot is so hard to relieve.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's Foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. It peels off the tissue of the skin where the germ breeds.

ITCHING STOPS QUICKLY

When you apply H. F. you may find that the itching is quickly relieved. You should paint the infected parts with H. F. night and morning until your feet are better. Usually this takes from three to ten days, although in severe cases be sure to consult a specialist.

H. F. should leave the skin soft and smooth. You may marvel at the quick way it brings you relief.

H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us \$1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.



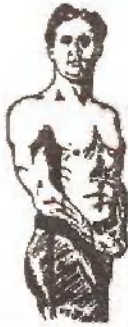
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Please send me immediately a complete supply for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you \$1. If I am **not** entirely satisfied, I will return the **unused** portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

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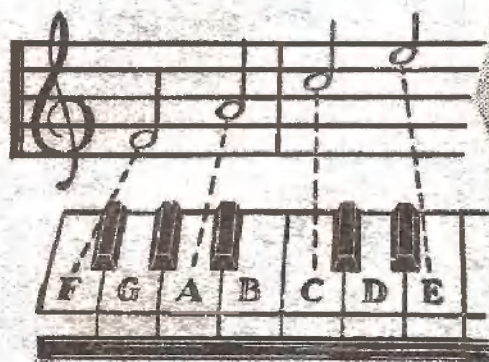
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As far as you're concerned, the old days of long practice hours with their scales and hard-work exercises and expensive personal teacher fees are over and done with.

For, through a method that removes the boredom and extravagance from music lessons, you can now learn to play your favorite instrument entirely at home—without a private teacher—in an amazingly short time—at a fraction of the usual cost.

Just imagine... a method that has made the reading and playing of music so downright simple that you don't have to know one note from another to begin. Do you wonder that this remarkable way of learning music has already been vouched for by over 700,000 people in all parts of the world?

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The lessons come to you by mail from the famous U. S. School of Music. They consist of complete printed instructions, diagrams, and all the music you need. It's actually fun to learn this simple way. One week you are learning a dreamy waltz—the next you are mastering a stirring march. As the lessons continue they prove easier and easier. For instead of just scales you are always learning to play by actual notes the classic favorites and the latest syncopation that formerly you only listened to. And you're never in hot water. First, you are told how a thing is done. Then a picture shows you how, then you do it yourself and hear it. No private teacher could make it clearer or easier.

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Soon, when your friends say "please play something," you can surprise and entertain them with pleasing melodies on your favorite instrument. You'll find yourself in the spotlight—popular everywhere.

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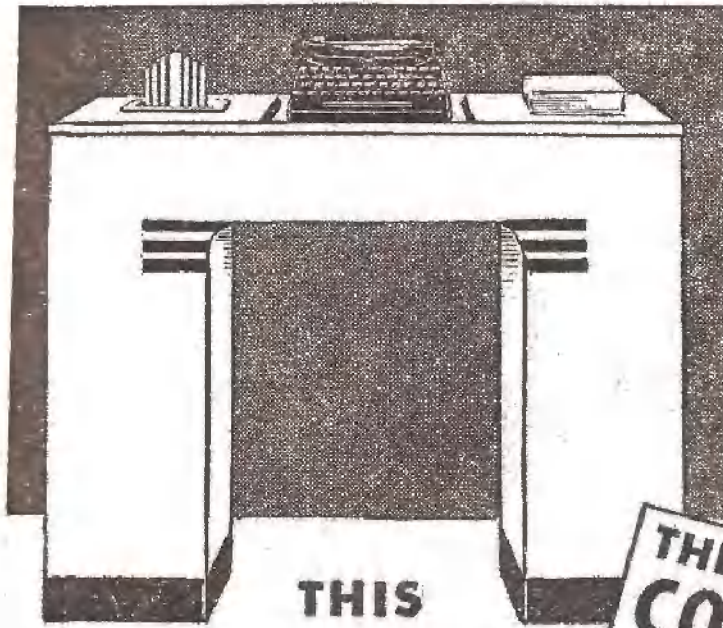
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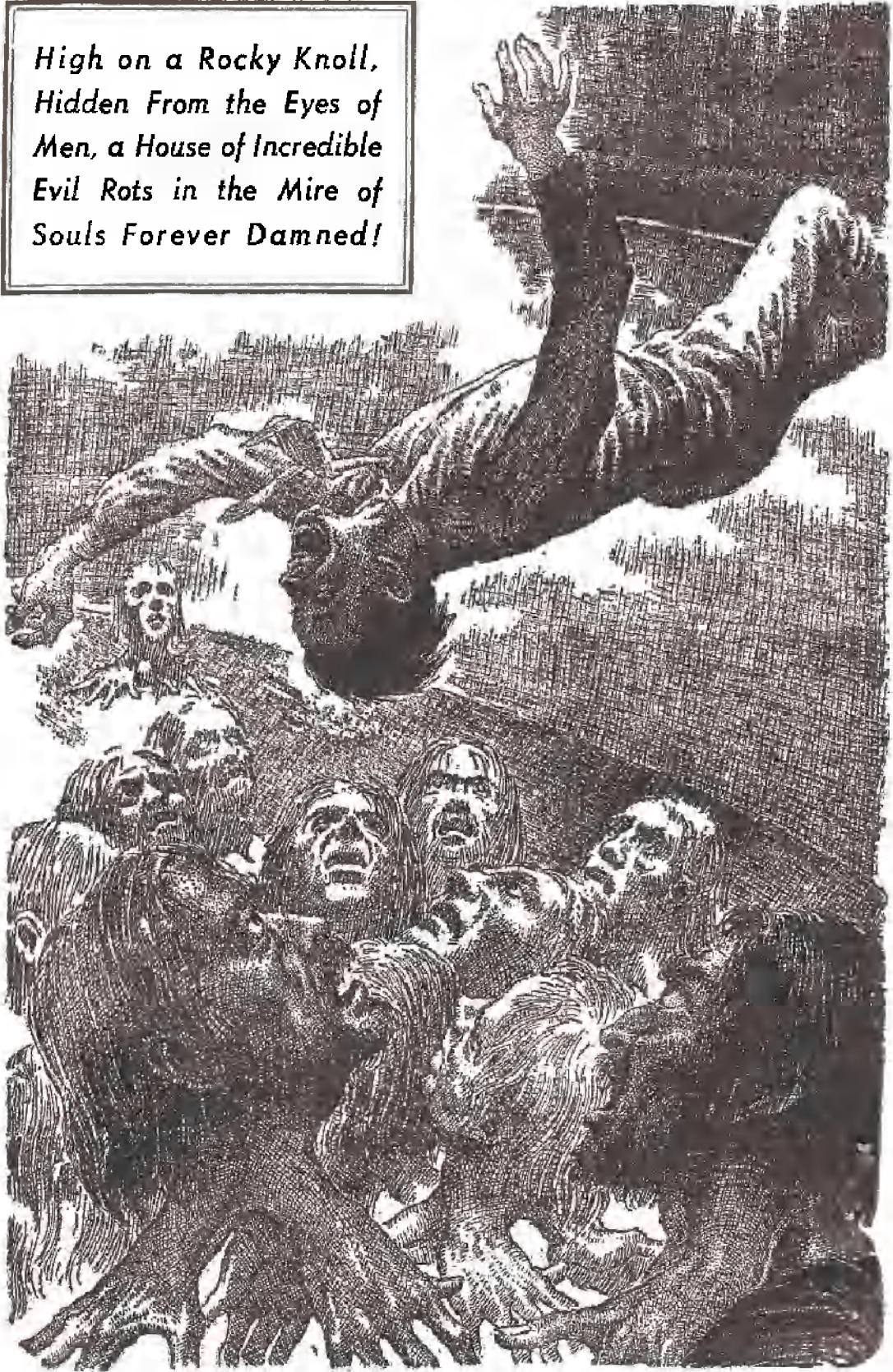
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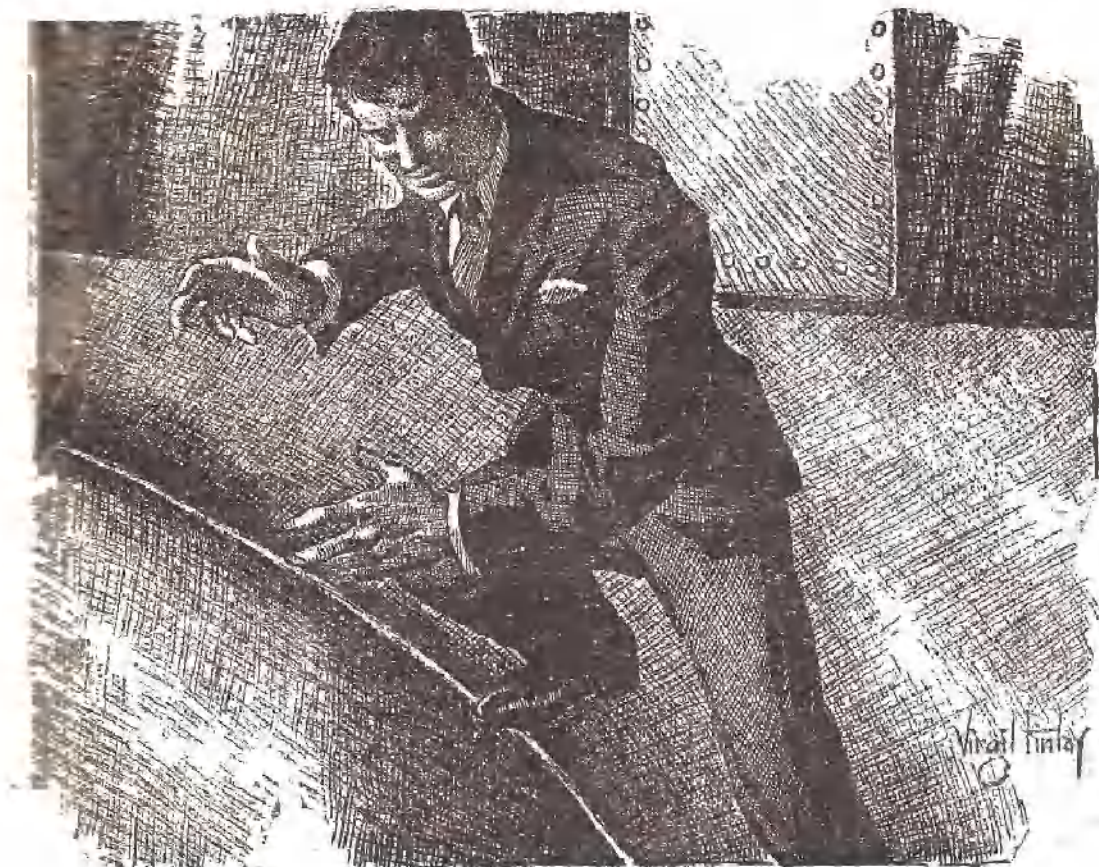
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*High on a Rocky Knoll,
Hidden From the Eyes of
Men, a House of Incredible
Evil Rots in the Mire of
Souls Forever Damned!*



Shrieking in terror, he pitched headlong into that pit!



The Crawling Corpse

By ELI COLTER

Author of "The Pride of Caiagus," "Outcasts of the Lazy S," etc.

CHAPTER I

Island of Dread

I HAD gone into the market to purchase a cut of barracuda, had emerged from the market and had paused by the guard-rail for a moment to stand gazing out over the sea toward the spot beyond the mist-swathed horizon where Drugh Island lay. Drugh Island, obscure and unsung ob-

struction in the waters, which for too long had hidden and withheld Cyril from me, his best friend.

Cyril, my dear dead sister's grieving husband, who had gone off alone to nurse his overpowering sorrow after his wife's tragic riding accident and her sudden death. Cyril—one of the finest men I had ever known.

My uneasiness over his silence had grown to worry. By now I was begin-

A NOVELET OF BIZARRE SORCERY

ning to feel so badly upset that my nerves were ragged. If I heard nothing from him by the next mail boat, I wasn't going to let that silence continue without some action on my part.

I'd take a run out to Drugh Island and look him up, and make certain nothing had happened to him. Because, though he had written me faithfully during the past year, I had heard nothing from him in two months.

Feeling a little better for the resolution, I turned away from the guard-rail, absorbed in my uneasy musing, and started homeward up the wide plank wharf along which all the fish markets were strung. I hadn't gone ten feet before the wild-eyed tourist bumped into me.

I stepped sideward and would have proceeded on my way with a perfunctory murmur of apology, had he not halted in his headlong stride to stand staring at me. I was forced involuntarily to notice his eyes, dazed and dilated—even had I not heard clearly among the jumbled sounds he was muttering to himself the words "Drugh Island" and "police."

He blinked at me and addressed me in embarrassed self-abasement.

"Sorry! Pardon me! Awfully stupid of me to run you down. But I—I'm so beastly upset. I wasn't looking where I was going."

"It's quite all right," I said. "I wasn't looking where I was going, either. There's nothing wrong, I trust? Is there anything I could do for you?"

Relief flashed into his harried face. "I say, that's jolly sporting of you! Are you a resident here?"

"I am."

He blinked again, like a man vainly striving to collect sadly scattered wits.

"Then maybe you'd direct me to the local police station. I'd appreciate it no end, y'know."

I repressed a frown, a little sense of alarm leaping in me.

"Why, yes, I can do that. But—Drugh Island. Weren't you saying something to yourself about Drugh Island?" Drugh Island! Cyril's island! And—police!

The young Englishman answered me almost eagerly. "I've just come from Drugh Island. My uncle and I

were jaunting about a bit among the islands, on his vacation, y'know, and we stopped on Drugh, because a small settlement of islanders lived there and supplies would be handy. And he—I daresay it sounds balmy—but he—he disappeared!"

Swift apprehension chilled me. I heard the sharpness of my instant inquiry.

"Disappeared? What do you mean?"

"Why, why—just that, y'know."

His wild eyes clung to my face, and though he was little more than a boy, I felt a quick certainty that he wasn't erecting bogey mountains from innocuous molehills. Something decidedly dismaying had shocked him into incoherence and a state of frantic bewilderment.

HE WENT on speaking rapidly. "We had a camp back in the trees. We were going to rough it a bit there for a fortnight or so. Five days ago he went for a stroll, and he didn't come back."

"He didn't tell you where he was going?"

"Not a peep. Disturbing business, really. Though I wasn't exactly upset about him till the next morning, when he still hadn't returned."

"Didn't you conduct any sort of inquiry?" I interrupted.

"Oh, to be sure! But I couldn't get a thing out of the islanders. In fact, they were very vague, even frightened. I could see it in their faces. The old chap who keeps the grocery told me rather sharply that I'd better go on about my business quietly and say nothing about what had happened.

"He said that several other men had disappeared on the island, that no trace of them ever could be found, and the people on the island were afraid the place would get a bad name. Bad name, my eye! There's something bloody wrong on that island, y'know!"

Cyril! Was that why I hadn't heard from him? Was that why I had been oppressed lately by the unnerving conviction that all was not well with him? Had he gone out there only to vanish, as this boy's uncle had done? Had something ghastly happened to him, and to those others?

Yet a more terrible thought than that sank its fangs into the nerve tissue inside my skull. *Could Cyril Markheim have had anything to do with the spiriting away of the others?* Men in the sanity-destroying throes of grief go mad enough sometimes to commit incredibly terrible deeds, deeds which they in their right minds could not possibly have been capable of performing. I alone knew how desperately Cyril's grief had seared him to the core.

At all costs I knew that I must prevent the police from intervening! I heard the young Englishman's voice then, earnestly besieging my ears.

"So, if you'd be so kind as to direct me to the police, I'd be jolly well obliged to you."

I fixed intent eyes upon his face. "Listen, fellow—I'd investigate a little further if I were you. You're right, there's something damned wrong out there on Drugh. But you go kicking up a fuss, and you may never set eyes on your uncle again. Take it easy and do some expert snooping. It's bound to achieve results."

He frowned dubiously. "You—you think that would be the wise procedure?"

"I do. I think it's the only smart course to pursue. If discreet investigation didn't have any merit, there wouldn't be such a gang of private detectives running around loose. But we'll do our own detecting. I'll hire a boat and we'll beat it for Drugh Island hot-foot. We'll dig up your uncle—or blast the damned island off the map!"

He shrank, his eyes dilated again, and he bit his lip to prevent its trembling.

"I—I'm not going back there, y'know! I—daren't go back! I daresay it's beastly of me, but I'm afraid—afraid of what I'd find. Something about that ghastly old house at the end of the island— Oh, I can't go back!"

"But my uncle, you'll know him quick enough. He's a strappin' little old chap, with a jolly red face and curly white hair, and he's gotten his name and address tattooed on his right shoulder. Identification, y'know."

"Drey Glasscott. That's his name—

Sir Drey Glasscott. I'm Ken Glasscott. Tell you what—I'll stop in at the Krausmaugh Hotel here and wait for word from you—if I don't go balmy waitin'."

I laid a hand on his arm. "Listen, Ken. You're all shot to hell. You aren't fit to do anything. Leave this to me. I'll take a boat to Drugh Island and see what I can learn. The instant I unearth any clue as to what's going on, I'll communicate with you. Come along, now. This business calls for speed."

CHAPTER II

Evil Old House

SO I accompanied Ken Glasscott to the Krausmaugh Hotel and saw him settled in a room with a substantial lunch and a bottle of stout before him. Then I went back to the wharf and bargained for a grimy old thirty-footer with a sputtering engine to carry me to Drugh Island. It seemed to me that the two hours consumed in reaching the place, twenty miles offshore, were more like two years.

The infernal island looked innocent enough as the old thirty-footer drew up at the dilapidated dock. I paid the boatman off, and hurried away toward the grocery.

I found the grocery store owner a gaunt, tough skeleton of a man with a thin, secretive face. He was waiting on a customer when I entered the store.

Presently the customer went out, and the storekeeper turned to me.

"Somep'n for you, Mister?"

I stepped close to his battered old counter. "Yes. A little information. A friend of mine lives here on the island. I'd be much obliged if you'd direct me to his place of residence. His name is Cyril Markheim."

A startled expression lit the gaunt man's wrinkle-embedded eyes.

"Why—ah—he lives straight down this street. That is, you go to the end of the street and somep'n like a quarter mile beyond into the woods. Little

white cottage. Can't miss it. Only one around there."

"Have you seen him lately?"

His veiled eyes avoided my gaze. "Ain't, no. He don't come in much. Ain't been here in a week or more, I guess."

Something about that entire speech didn't ring just right. Not a great deal of thinking was needed to see what was wrong with it, either.

"You guess?" I said sharply. "Don't you know? There's only a handful of people living here!"

His gaze swung to mine, with evident reluctance, and he answered in a kind of defensive defiance.

"I ain't seen him for nigh onto two month. How do I know what he's been doin' with himself? I can't keep track of everybody on the island."

"There's too many people disappearin' on your damnable island, brother," I replied meaningly.

He started, and his sun-darkened skin lost a little color.

"I didn't say nothin' about anybody disappearin'. Just because you ain't seen a man for a few weeks, ain't no sign he's disappeared."

I leaned closer toward him over his neglect-scarred counter.

"Cut the stalling! I've heard on good authority that people who live here have been doing the vanishing act, and that you seem to know something about it."

"No, sir! Not none of us who lives here! Tourists, it is. Always tourists!"

Then he cut himself short, irate with himself for having unwittingly revealed so much. I gave him no time to concoct glib evasions.

"Oh, so it's tourists who do all the disappearing, is it? And you don't want Drugh Island to get a bad name, so you're trying to keep it quiet! Well, you'd better change your tune and tell me what I want to know."

I WAS getting madder by the minute. "If you refuse, you're going to learn to your discomfort that just one tourist too many has gone into the silence out here, and you'll have the police from the mainland hopping onto your neck.

"I'm not bluffing," I said, "and I haven't any time to waste arguing with you, so open up. What happens to these men who stroll casually into thin air—and forget to come back?"

The storekeeper went quite white, but he abandoned all attempt to dissemble further.

"Honest, Mister, nobody knows a dang thing about it. It's got us runnin' around in circles. Too scared even to talk about it above a whisper. We don't *know* what becomes of 'em! There ain't no way to know. They just go bargin' into that house—and then they never come out again!"

I scowled. "House? What house? For the love of Mike, man, be coherent, will you?"

He talked rapidly then, almost feverishly, as if he couldn't stop. The house in question was situated on the opposite end of the island miles from any other habitation. No one knew who had erected the building. It was simply an ancient, deserted structure standing open to the winds—and to any poor fool rash enough to dare its mute threat.

For it was evil. Unspeakable evil. Men just walked into it and never came out again! Tourists. Always tourists. The uncle of the Glasscott boy, now, and others like him. Was *Cyril Markheim among them?*

"The danged old house don't bother us islanders none," the grocer finished nervously. "We got sense enough to keep out of it. But you investigate all you want to, Mister, but for God's sake don't *you* go bargin' into that house and get disappeared. We've had enough of that!"

Which was in essence his last word. I was to stay out of that house. I wasn't even to go to that end of the island. Cyril wouldn't be hangin' around in that vicinity, the storekeeper said positively. Cyril was an islander and had more sense. No, sir, Cyril was prob'ly back home in his own cottage now, and I was makin' all this fuss for nothin'. I'd better go look and see.

* * * * *

But Cyril certainly wasn't in his cottage, I found when I reached it, and he hadn't been in it for weeks. There

was plenty of evidence to argue that he had gone out of the cottage intending to return shortly. His small dining table was set for a meal. I could write my name in the dust coating the dishes laid on the table.

The mute evidence in that cottage turned my heart to a gelatinous mess. I went out of there like a dust-devil, and started at a running walk toward the opposite end of the island, a pace that ate miles and that I could maintain almost indefinitely. I had nearly ten miles to cover before the *tabu* house would come into sight.

The deserted old abode was oddly situated at the end of a thick forest, located to decided advantage for anyone or any *Thing* desiring to establish seclusion and insure immunity from surprise. The building itself was composed of dull black stone, an imposing structure of three stories, with numerous balconies and gables ornamenting it, and an ornate gazebo and a big cupola thrusting up from its two main roofs. All the roofs were of slate, blackened by age and exposure to the elements.

IN SPITE of its florid ostentation, it was a striking and almost handsome old hulk. It was set squarely atop a knoll at least eighty feet in height. The knoll was completely surrounded by a clearing between four and five hundred yards across, and the clearing was solid marsh, matted with grasses, tangled creepers, moss and reeds. And it stank like the very devil, as most marshes do.

To step into that morass would mean to sink into its polluted slime up to one's neck, or further. The only possible approach to the knoll was a substantial stone walk, raised some six feet or more above the foul waters of the marsh, and about eight feet wide. Cautiously I ascended the steps and paused for an instant, scrutinizing the house.

There was nothing inviting about that devil's dwelling! Even from where I stood it loomed black and sinister. The window embrasures gaped and leered little blacker than the stone of the walls. I stirred myself to motion again, and advanced swiftly

along the walk. As I neared the knoll I discovered that a zigzag flight of steps led up the slope to the house, cut into the solid rock. I lost sight of the house for a few moments when I reached the foot of the knoll and began the ascent to the summit.

There again I paused involuntarily, and glanced uneasily about. The old storekeeper had been right—the house was evil. Evil breathed from its ancient walls, fumed from its blackened roofs in unholy effluvia, permeated the least of its moldy stones and reeked in the air within and without. The instant I passed through the main front doorway, from which the door itself had long been gone, that sense of evil increased a hundredfold.

I could feel it seeping from the dirty cobwebbed walls, I could hear its sibilant taunt assailing my ears, I could taste its acrid contamination on my tongue. And that filthy odor did not emanate solely from the marsh, that dank, revolting rot-scent of carrion. It was stronger here *inside* the house!

Afraid? Certainly I was afraid! I'd like to see the man who wouldn't have been. But I did not allow that fact to intimidate me or stay my feet. All the rooms were littered with dirt, with fragments of stained and yellowed paper most likely left there by other curious wanderers, with moldering plaster fallen from the denuded walls, with shards of shattered panes from the vanished windows.

My heart in my mouth, nevertheless I examined every last room, even to the top of the cupola and the gazebo. Nothing was there—nothing but the heterogeneous litter, the awful revolting odor, the oppressive evil that sank into my flesh and bones. Nowhere could I discover the slightest trace of any secret passageway, any hidden compartment, any concealed door. Nowhere could I find any least trace that other feet than mine had trod there for many weeks. *Nothing!*

Just an evil old windowless house that stank and turned your heart and skin and soul gelid with nameless fear. I was forced finally to reluctant admission of defeat. Sickeningly depressed by the futility of my eager

search, I returned to the ground story and started to leave the building. But—just outside the wry front door frame I stopped in my tracks with a shock of surprise and a sharp breath of relief.

CHAPTER III

The Masquerader

ANOTHER curiosity-seeker had ascended the knoll. He stood on the stone summit in front of the house, gazing quizzically up at me, a faintly humorous smile of understanding on his face. His sports coat and trousers, his open-necked shirt, the Panama hat pulled low over his face against the sun, all shouted "tourist" to the most casual eye. He proffered a genial, friendly greeting.

"Not much to see, is it, after a fellow walks all the way over here expecting something formidable and spooky?"

I laughed nervously, little amused and smartingly disgruntled by my inability to discover anything worth second appraisal.

"Not much. It's plenty dirty, and it smells to high heaven, but there doesn't seem to be anything particularly mysterious about it. The villagers say it's evil, and they're not so far wrong."

He shrugged. "Oh, they tell everybody that. I've been here perhaps a dozen times, always hoping to uncover something which previously had evaded my eyes. Unsuccessfully, I must admit. Even the cellars are nothing more startling than dull dreary holes in the ground."

"Cellars!" I said quickly. "Are there cellars under this house? Some job, to excavate for cellars in this rock! How many rooms are there below? How do you get to them? I didn't see any sign of a stairway leading down into any cellars."

He pursed his lips and shook his head. "Really, I don't know just how many rooms there are in the cellars. I never bothered to make a count of them. But I'd guess there must be a

dozen or more, at the least. And they haven't been hewn out of the solid rick, Mr.—we might as well manifest some identity, by the way. I'm Harry Lavender. To the islanders, I'm just another tourist, but I'm really from the mainland straight across the channel."

I smiled acknowledgment of the self-introduction. "Glad to know you, Lavender. My name's Warfield—Myron Warfield. I'm a mainlander myself."

"Glad to know you, Warfield. As I started to say, the cellars aren't hewn. Evidently this end of the island has at one time been under sea. The salt marsh and the rock itself evidence that. The rock is honeycombed with caverns the sea gouged into it, reached via the highest cavern which is located nearly in the center of the knoll. The fellow who built this house simply erected it over the entrance cavern and used the old sea caves for his cellars.

"There's a flight of stairs going down, back of the house, but they're pretty smartly concealed. You'd never discover them unless you just happened to run onto the entrance, as I did. And you wouldn't see anything after you got down there."

"Nevertheless," I said grimly, "I'd certainly like to explore those cellars, if you'd be kind enough to show me the way into them. Did you ever come across any sign of anybody else being down there?"

"None at all, Warfield. I fancy nobody knows that the caverns are there. I'd been here several times and poked around all over the place before I chanced onto the stairway. Just come around this way and I'll show them to you."

I followed him to the rear of the huge building, where a deep recess in the thick walls was formed by two jutting wings that left an open area between. Lavender gestured toward the recess.

"You see? No indication of any opening is detectable in either walls or floor of the recess, yet it's very simple when you know the trick."

He pointed to the floor of the recess, slabbed stone, seemingly

laid quite as nature had left it. But the point of one slab corner jutted up in one spot a good eight inches above the others. Lavender placed one foot on the jutting slab corner.

"I discovered it this way. I started to step onto this upthrust corner to look at that window opening there. You see what happens."

He pressed down on the jutting corner. The entire huge slab, at least six by eight feet, moved and slid slowly aside on a horizontal pivot, revealing a passageway and stone steps leading steeply downward!

Lavender removed a small but powerful electric torch from his pocket, snapped the button that turned on the battery light, and swept the clear, white ray into the dark passage, bringing into view rough mold-green walls, the descending steps, and the faintly discernible floor of an extending tunnelway some thirty feet below. He gestured with his head toward the pivot slab.

"When you come out, you merely press on the slab again and it swings back into place. Ingenious devil, the builder!"

He started down the stairs, playing his torchlight before him, and I followed. The vile stench was even stronger here, and now there was mingled with it another odor constantly growing more noticeable as we descended, a heavy, sickish-sweet odor that reminded me of decayed lilies.

About halfway down the stairs I was suddenly conscious of some indefinable change in the illumination, and turned to glance back. The daylight was gone from overhead. The stone slab had swung shut. I stopped short, with an exclamation of dismay, and Lavender turned his head and looked up at me.

"Don't be startled, Warfield. I was, terrifically so, the first time I saw that. I ran back with the frantic idea of battering at the slab, only to discover that I had not the slightest cause for alarm. Some additional mechanism, manipulated by placing one's weight on the eighth step, shuts the slab as one comes down the stairs. But the same mechanism automatically swings the slab open again as you reascend.

Try it. Go on back and stand on the release step. I'll wait for you."

I hesitated only for an instant, then turned and sprang back up the stairs. Mechanical contrivances can fall into disorder. But this one hadn't done so. The instant my weight bore on the eighth step, the slab over the opening swung slowly aside, letting in the day and revealing a patch of far blue sky. I turned and again descended to rejoin Lavender, apologizing for being unduly fussy.

He gave me a good-natured grin. "That's quite all right, Warfield. This place is enough to give anybody the creeps. I expect it was just as well to make sure that the thing is in working order."

We reached the foot of the stairs and advanced through the tunnel passage, into and through three fair-sized caverns, which were exactly as Lavender had described them, damp dull old sea caves containing nothing to excite any man's interest. As we stepped into the fourth cavern his torch went out for an instant, but he immediately snapped it back on again, apologizing for carelessly plunging us into darkness.

We passed through the fourth cavern, down another short tunnel passage, and arrived at the fifth cavern. Here there was a heavy oaken door closing the passage. Lavender swung it aside, stepped back for me to precede him into the fifth cavern, which I did.

THEN I halted, staring, rigid, suspicion and alarm rousing within me.

This cavern was inhabited! It was furnished, very comfortably, with tables and chairs and a stove, with the numerous and sundry articles commonly deemed necessary for human comfort and convenience. A large electric chandelier hung from the ceiling, and Lavender snapped a switch and flooded the interior of the big recess with light. He swept off his hat and tossed it onto the nearest table.

And, as if with the same motion, he swept off the genial, commonplace expression on his face, as though it had been a mask he had worn with discom-

fort and discarded with relief. I saw his features clearly for the first time, heavy features now that the mask of assumed cordiality and casual pleasantness was removed. Humped nose, deep-set gray eyes, cold and calculating, thin, straight mouth—a hard face, a brutal face, a face that was the incarnation of all evil. He laughed, a leering, mocking sound that chilled me to the marrow.

"Yes, I live here, Warfield. You know now how men have disappeared on Drugh Island. They disappeared into these caverns—just as you have disappeared into them! Don't make any attempt to run for it. You couldn't get out. I reclosed and locked the slab when I switched off my torch."

He chuckled horribly. "There is no possible escape. And don't commit the folly of assaying any assault upon me. I have very efficient and slightly unpleasant means of stopping you. You have—shall we say—disappeared, Mr. Warfield."

CHAPTER IV

Hands of Horror

I SIMPLY stood and stared at him, the awful, sickening stench of his habitation in my nostrils, hate and horror in my brain, and the thought of Cyril Markheim welling and crying through my conscious and subconscious minds.

Cyril! And old Drey Glasscott! This was where they had come, had gone. I bit back the flood of excoriation and invective that surged to my tongue and looked at Lavender, driving my stunned brain to connected and orderly reasoning.

The man was not mad. That fact was entirely manifest. The light in his ice-gray eyes was quite sane, but it was evil as nothing else ever was evil in all this world. That he could so completely veil his true character behind that deceptive mask of pleasant affability; that he could successfully wear that utterly disarming manner as naturally as he wore his skin, was

proof enough of his consummate cunning.

Any attempt at physical combat would be foolishly wasted effort on my part. I'm not a pigmy, but this Harry Lavender towered above me. Neither am I any weakling, but he could have broken me in two with one arm.

I knew no arts of jiu-jitsu, no niceties of boxing skill, nothing but rough and tumble fighting. Even leaping on him when his back was turned could avail me little.

The sole hope of escape left me was to outwit him, and that was going to be no easy matter. He stood there looking back at me expectantly, and I realized what he was waiting for. He was waiting for a wild outbreak from me, gibbering terror and frantic appeal or denunciation.

Well, he shouldn't be tendered that gratification to his perverted ego! I set my teeth against the horror that rode within me. I shrugged my shoulders and laughed.

"Nuts!" I said. "What is this? Some new motion picture stunt?"

He started, blinked, and for an instant looked almost blank. Then anger flared in his ice-gray eyes.

"Well, you're a cool one! I was fully expecting you to lunge at me. I was ready and waiting for it. With this."

He drew from his pocket a small gun, peculiarly shaped, with an extraordinarily long barrel.

"It does not expel lead bullets. It shoots a stream of chemical solution that vaporizes and suffocates. It does not kill. It merely renders a victim unconscious and incapacitated for an hour or two, depending upon the amount he inhales before he falls. I am never without it. Most men are so eager to see the caverns that I lure them down as easily as I did you. When they prove uninterested, I—ah—"

He waved the gun suggestively. "I bring them down quite as easily. I always choose men much smaller than myself and consequently conveniently handled."

I yawned and deliberately sat down in a chair. "You're batty, Lavender.

Have you got anything to eat down here? I'm hungry as the devil."

Again he stared, slowly replacing the ugly little gun in his pocket.

"You're *hungry!* You're either un-human or you're completely callous. Have you no fear of these unknown caverns, of your looming hideous fate?"

I grinned at him. "You've been cribbing Bela Lugosi's technique. Naughty, naughty! Why the deuce don't you strive for originality? There should be an ounce or two of that precious commodity left in this cockeyed world. Anyway, I'm still asking whether you've got anything to eat down here."

HE SHOOK his head, and there was no mistaking the fact that he was puzzled and incredulous.

"I'm hanged if I don't think you mean it!"

"Oh, no! I'm merely talking to entertain you, you poor benighted heathen. I dine only on Sundays. Don't you subsist on edible foods? Or do you sport a menu of fossilized limpets and dehydrated sea-foam?"

He opened his mouth, then shut it again. Then he laughed.

"If this is your defensive armor, Warfield, it is of excellent metal. Yes, I have an extensive supply of food-stuffs, dried meats, tinned biscuits, all manner of canned fruits, vegetables and delicacies, supplies I bring from the mainland and that are amenable to long preservation.

"Come along into my dining room and indicate your preference. If you're curious about my lighting system, it is quite complete and it is generated by power from the sea. When I turned on the chandelier in this cavern, I also operated the switch that illuminates the entire establishment. The dining room is down this passage. You may precede me from here on."

"That's right, Lavender," I said. "Keep an eye on little Willie. If you don't he might sock you when you aren't looking."

Lavender shrugged. "That would be just too bad for little Willie."

I got up from the chair, walked past him and along the short tunnel pas-

sage toward which he had gesticulated. From the passage I emerged into another large cavern supplied with tables and chairs. There was also an electric kitchen stove in this room, and cupboards and shelves stocked with enough various and sundry foods to ration a regiment liberally.

I wasn't hungry, naturally. I was too badly nauseated by that disgusting fetor, too deplorably demoralized by the menace and peril of my predicament, too continually harassed by fear over what had happened to Cyril and old Drey Glasscott to be hungry. But food sustains, and I must preserve my strength at all costs.

I laughed casually. "The condemned man ate a hearty breakfast. I'll take a jar of that chicken and noodles, pickles, potato chips, tinned biscuits and crabapple jelly. You needn't bother heating the chicken and noodles. I'll take it all as is. And if you don't get a move on, I'm damned if I won't eat the junk jars, cans and all."

Somehow I sat with feigned calm while he opened jars and cans and dumped their contents onto pottery dishes.

Then he turned to me with mocking courtesy.

"And what will you drink, Mr. Warfield?"

"Whiskey. Neat. And plenty of it."

He screwed the top off a pint flask of rye and set it beside my plate with a small glass about twice the capacity of a jigger. I ignored the glass, tipped up the flask and drank about a third of the liquor without stopping. I ate everything he set before me and emptied the flask, shoved back my chair and gave him a look of approval.

"Swell meal. Thanks. Neat quarters you've got down in this old rock, too—for a man who follows your pursuits."

He frowned, and the grimace rendered his malign features startlingly diabolical.

"I fear I don't understand, Warfield."

"Oh, yeah? The devil you don't! I mean experimenting on human beings."

A wary expression blanked his icy eyes for an instant.

"Are you a doctor?" Lavender asked me.

"I am not. I'm a writer. Do you carry on down here all by your lonesome? Don't you have any loyal henchmen to grovel before your dark, diabolical will, and mop up the dirty work for you?"

"I have upwards of two hundred servants," he answered. "I don't know the exact number. I can't be bothered keeping track of them. If you think you're being smart, Warfield, I'll call your bluff. I will show you a few of my servants. A very few of them. I shall show you how admirable they are as servants, since they have no mind of their own, barely retaining enough intelligence to obey my will and my voice. As to why they obey me—we will go into that later."

The tone of his voice made my flesh creep. He stood there, staring at me with a fiendish leer, and then he called out something that sounded like, "Hans, open the door and come in."

But "Hans" was not the name he uttered. The door opened wide and I went rigid in my chair, feeling my mouth open and my eyes glaze with horror.

He had said—*hands!*

When the door first swung back, for an instant I saw nothing, nothing save a portal giving way to manipulation and a tunnel passage beyond. Then my gaze was jerked to the floor by the sense of movement there.

Hands! Just hands. Yes, that's what I said. Dead hands. *Live hands!* Hands amputated cleanly at the wrist, hands healthily colored, with blood in their veins, healed over smoothly at the area of amputation. Hands that entered the room swiftly, with unbelievable ease and rapidity of motion, crawling over the stone floor on their fingers like small sly beasts of some appallingly fabulous genre.

Lavender was watching me closely, I was subconsciously aware of that, and fiendish gratification warmed him at sight of my stunned revulsion. He laughed aloud.

"Oh, I've accomplished marvels, Warfield! Hands—hold this man, not too tightly. Just secure him where he sits."

CHAPTER V

Savage Surgery

WITH ghastly swiftness, the hands came crawling toward me, and in spite of my setting will and strength to endure with fortitude, I was cold all over, wet with clammy sweat from brow to sole, shaking like a man with palsy as I crouched there, waiting.

Seventeen hands! I counted them. In the next minute they were upon me. They gripped my ankles, clutched my arms, encircled my wrists and entangled the hair of my head. One even closed lightly about my throat. Too lightly. The touch of those murderously caressing fingers was hideous. I was rendered so completely helpless that I couldn't move limb, head, or torso. The mute power in those living-dead fingers was incredible.

Lavender laughed again. "That will do, hands. Release the man, clear the table and wash the dishes."

The hands deserted me, crawled down over me, crossed the floor and went swarming up the table legs. Lavender glanced at me.

"Servants, did you say? I never have to turn a plate. These hands are my willing dumb slaves. They know no will but mine. They will live as long as I can feed them properly. That is why they obey me so eagerly. I—*feed them!*"

He looked at me, patently expecting some remark or insult, waiting for it.

"I wouldn't swear to what I've seen. Maybe that whiskey was too potent," I told him evenly, though my self-control was at the breaking point.

"You're becoming annoying, Warfield. You are well aware that the liquor has nothing to do with what your eyes behold."

His eyes burned with the fanatical glow of the zealot.

"You accused me of experimenting on human beings—and I am guilty of doing just that. But for a purpose, mind you! Long ago my mind became occupied with a most engrossing idea.

Every muscle of the body and every nerve of the flesh acts at the behest of the brain, but nerves and muscles are not limited to that area of command. They can see without eyes, can hear without ears, within themselves.

"I had a blind friend in those days. I used to test him with all manner of things when I had him in my office. I knew he could not deceive me, for he had no eyeballs in his sockets. What seeing he did he *had* to do without eyes.

"I have sat and watched him tensely while he 'looked' at a picture by running his fingertips over it, and I proved that he really saw it. I gave him, for instance, a picture of me, a new picture which no one had yet seen. He had known me years before he had lost his eyes in an explosion accident. He ran his fingers over the picture, and then he frowned.

"You gave me the wrong picture, Harry," he said. "This is a picture of you. It's a good one, too. But my Lord, man—I didn't know you'd gone bald!"

Lavender chuckled harshly. "And I sat and watched him running small tabs of cloth between his fingers, telling me the colors by touch. The only colors that ever gave him a moment's pause were navy blue and black, and dark red and brown. He could not always be sure which was which. But that was close enough for me. I had

sufficient proof that he was *seeing* with the nerves in his fingertips.

"Then my notice was drawn to Helen Keller, and the wonders she has accomplished with her fingers. I traced down, and got into touch with, a totally deaf man who had learned to hear with his fingers, placing them on your chest or your lips to 'listen' as you spoke. He heard clearly and did not miss a word. And that also was enough for me."

■ LAVENDER'S eyes shone.

■ "Nerves could see and hear. That became, let us say, one angle, one facet of my experimenting—to determine to just what extent separate parts of the body could be trained to 'see' and 'hear' when acting independently, severed from the torso to which they had originally been attached, and by the same token separated from the brain in the head sitting on the torso.

"The next angle that interested me was this: Though the nerves and muscles acted at the will of the brain, did they need to be attached even indirectly to that brain to continue to obey it? Why could they not obey the brain when rendered *entirely independent* from it?

"Must they necessarily obey only the brain from which they had been severed, or could they be taught to obey *another* brain as well? These

[Turn Page]

THE AWAKENING OF MR. A.





MR. A.: Whew! I hate the very thought of having to take a cathartic.

MR. B.: You wouldn't if you'd only try Ex-Lax. It tastes swell—just like chocolate.





MR. A.: Why, that's what we give to the youngsters. What I need is dynamite!

MR. B.: Don't kid yourself! Ex-Lax is plenty effective, but it won't upset you.

LATER





The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet *gentle*! No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax the next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family

MR. A.: Boy, I feel like a million this morning! That Ex-Lax sure is great stuff!

MR. B.: You said it, pal! We've been using Ex-Lax in our family for 30 years!

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questions intrigued and absorbed me to such an extent that I determined to find the answer to them. If all I dreamed could be accomplished, think what it would mean!"

I shuddered inwardly at the fanatic light in the man's eyes.

"Think of all the countless bodies embalmed and laid away in the earth to rot, of all the hands and feet so gone to waste, hands and feet that could by my *method* be saved and made into excellent servants for living men? Of course, my stumbling block was to keep them alive after severing them from torsos.

"I had to begin with *living* bodies, and complete my processes with them, before I could hope to revitalize and bring to life limbs taken from dead bodies. To experiment on living bodies, I had to obtain subjects. My fellow surgeon-scientists held up their hands in holy horror at even the expression of such a revolutionary idea.

"When they learned that I was seriously bent upon pursuance of the experimenting, they denounced me, they barred me from my profession and expelled me from my country. That did not deter me. I was wealthy, which counted for much. I converted all my holdings into cash, and started upon a pilgrimage in search of the perfect seclusion in which I could work unmolested and unsuspected. I found it here in these caverns. I could not have asked for more ideal quarters. Even my subjects—such as you, Warfield—come to me instead of my having to go in quest of them."

His voice was actually choked with pride.

"Already I have accomplished much, but I have far to go—so far to go. I have as yet to detach the hands and limbs from the living body so slowly, severing them such a small bit at a time, in order to keep them alive and functioning, you understand—waiting patiently till each severed spot is healed and feeding healthily from my serum—till finally the whole member is freed alive and whole and capable of sustaining itself!"

Lavender paused for a moment, shaken by his zeal.

"But I have no wish to weary you.

Later you shall see my laboratory and surgery, and I will explain more fully to you just how it is all done. Or—am I wrong? Are you uninterested? I suppose every man who ever achieved any great success was eager for at least one opportunity to exhibit what he had gained, to prove to at least one of his fellow beings that he was a miracle worker."

He looked at me almost with understanding.

"Continue to be as sensible as you have been, Warfield, and I will make an exception in your case. I will let you live. That is, I will let your torso live. I always throw the torsos away, because they are of no use to me. But if you really are interested in my progress, after I have removed your hands and feet and legs, I will leave your head in place and you shall be company for me."

I HAD the desperate desire to draw a long, shaky breath, but I repressed it. I had the panic-driven impulse to scream. But I didn't utter a word. I retained in some manner, God alone knows how, my self-control and my sanity.

"You've got the whip hand, you rotten heel!" was all I said. "What can I do about it? I suppose you keep your poor, helpless victims thoroughly anesthetized so that they don't know what it's all about!"

He shook his head. "Much to my regret, that can't be done. As long as the torso remains alive, I have to feed it, and it has to remain alive for so many weeks before the members heal off. If I administered anesthetics for all that period, the torsos would die of the overdose. They suffer a great deal, but so far I have found no way to prevent that."

The fiend shrugged complacently. "Well, I must be about my daily chores, Warfield. It is feeding time for my servants. Come along with me, and I will allow you to watch. Only—don't attempt anything, no matter how you rebel at what you see. Remember, I have these servants of mine guarding my safety at every step. This way, Warfield."

He gestured toward the door

through which the hands had come, and I rose shakily from my chair and preceded him. We passed down another corridor into the adjoining cavern, and from there on nothing existed but a horror of horrors.

In that next cavern a countless number of Lavender's "servants" were crawling about over the floor. Hands and feet, legs amputated at the knee, others at the hip joint. The legs had hands grafted to them, the crawling fingers supplying their mode of locomotion.

In the next cavern, placed upon a long, broad shelf, were perhaps fifty heads, terrible things, with open, unblinking dead eyes that leered and stared at me, with loose, drooling mouths that grinned foolishly, with hands grafted to the necks, so that they, too, had ten little finger-legs on which to crawl. My gaze leaped, seeking Cyril Markheim's face, some face that might be Glasscott's. They were not there.

Lavender addressed me in an undertone. "I haven't been able to advance so far with the heads. They are much more difficult to control." He raised his voice sharply. "Heads, we have a guest. Greet him!"

A grotesque chorus came from the pallid, cadaverous heads, a thready whisper like a gasp, which was yet distinctly intelligible.

"Welcome, stranger. Will you join us?"

Lavender chuckled evilly. "I taught them that. It's about all they know. But I shall grow more expert in handling the heads as my experimenting advances. It is, as I said, difficult to do much with them. They were once capable of thinking for themselves, and some lingering, rebelling impulse renders them slightly obdurate. I do not complain. All great things work slowly. I am grateful that I even manage to keep them alive. But we must get along to the pit. They are all growing restless from hunger."

He waved me ahead of him, and we advanced to a farther cavern. I went through the entrance doorway, intoxicated with loathing, certain I had seen the epitome of all earthly evil. I was to learn. *I was to learn!*

This cavern was about a hundred feet wide and two hundred feet long, vaulting up fifty or sixty feet overhead.

Off to one side was a roughly circular pit about ten feet deep and sixty feet in diameter. But in that pit!

CHAPTER VI

Vile Revenge

MY HEART congealed with horror. In that pit, flat on their backs, spread-eagled to the stone floor, lay Cyril Markheim and Drey Glasscott. They were both quite nude, and Glasscott's identification tattoo was plain to be seen on his shoulder. Their eyes were wide open, and their gaze swung to me. I saw swift recognition, wild joy and hope, leap into Cyril's eyes. I was so sickened at the sight that I slumped to the floor in a half faint, my fascinated gaze glued to those horribly betrayed human beings in anguish.

Above Cyril to his right was a large copper tank. From the tank a long tube ran down to connect with his right wrist. From the tube something was running into an opened vein in his wrist.

At his left lay a great flat bowl, no more than a foot deep but a good six feet in diameter. Suspended above the bowl was a glass tank containing a light blue liquid. Below the tank was a small globe. A tube ran from the glass tank to the globe. Another tube was fastened to Cyril's left wrist, running also to the globe.

Through one tube the blue liquid flowed down slowly into the small globe. Through the other tube blood drained slowly from Cyril's left wrist and flowed also into the globe to mingle with the blue liquid. A third tube extended from the mixing basin into the huge bowl, and from it a bright purple liquid was rilling. The big bowl was about half full of the purple stuff.

Glasscott was, of course, laid out in the same exact fashion.

Lavender's voice beat on my dazed senses. "These men I call my 'blood cows.' They are fully conscious, but completely paralyzed. They must remain conscious for the formula to work efficiently. It is contained in the copper tanks. It flows steadily into their veins, keeps them alive, maintains their state of paralysis, and feeds their blood-making functions.

"From the glass tanks, a chemical solution flows down to join the blood continually being drawn forth, a solution that breaks down the haemoglobin and liquefies the blood sufficiently for absorption. You shall see how my servants live."

He emitted a shrill low whistle. I had to crouch there at the edge of that cruel pit and watch—watch—watch while hands and feet and legs came crawling in wild eagerness from their caverns, crawling on their little finger-legs, even the heads, till the pit was fairly seething with them.

There was in the air that foul odor of carrion, that sickish-sweet smell from the chemicals, till my throat was closed and stiff and my stomach a ton weight in my body. Carrion! Dead things! Dead things alive and crawling. Crawling to their grisly feast!

A slanting runway led down into the pit, and they swarmed down it, went rushing across the floor to the big flat bowl, and plunged into the purple liquid.

Lavender sighed. "My pets! They absorb the fluid through their pores, you see. My 'blood cows' do not live long. They become emaciated, react no more to the serum, can supply no more blood, and I am forced to procure others.

"I throw them in the marsh when I am through with them, along with the useless discarded torsos, as well as into another deep pit at the end of the string of caverns. Which accounts for the odor you may have detected. I have long since grown so used to it that I am not aware of it any more."

I COULD only stare down into that pit, my eyes filled with horror. That was Cyril down there! His face was ravaged and drawn by the continual agony that racked his helpless

body. Both he and Glasscott were staring back at me, with an anguish-strained gaze which begged and pleaded for aid, for death, for life, for anything that could end their intolerable misery. Then I started. In Cyril's wide intent gaze there was a frantic attempt to convey some intelligence to me!

I crouched motionless, striving to read his eyes. Something was in that desperate stare of his far beyond the silent cry for aid, something vital and urgent. His gaze darted sideward, then back to me meaningly. I followed the direction of that swift glance.

Two of the disembodied heads were close to him, held on their perch atop the huge bowl's edge by their grasping finger-legs. And both heads were glaring straight at me, their features writhing in murderous hate. I looked back at Cyril. The suspense in his concentrated gaze cut through me like a stab. What was it he wanted me to divine? I hadn't grasped it yet. My own gaze jerked back to the heads, and with a violent start I realized that I had mistaken the direction of their malignant glare.

They were *not* looking at me. *They were looking at Lavender!*

He stood above me as I crouched there, and slightly to my right, close to the edge of the pit. Sudden understanding swept through me, making my heart pound and leap. Those pitiful heads obeyed him and fawned upon him because he fed them, but oh! how they hated him! They hated him for what he had done to them, with a consuming and undying detestation that knew no limit, that would know no restraint were it ever given sufficient opportunity to vent itself!

They retained at all times enough fear of him, that they would not dare to attack him when he was on his feet and alert to the first sign of danger. But—if he were to be pitched prone and helpless into their midst!

Like a flash the thought leaped between Cyril and me, as articulate as spoken words. Cyril's eyes widened, then blazed with triumph at having succeeded in conveying that thought to me.

I glanced up at Lavender. He was gazing down into the pit, at the heads, and he was quite aware that most of them were now turned toward him, malign hatred of him flaming in their dead eyes, writhing on their dead lips. Patently, he was fully aware of their hatred for him, but he knew his power over them, and was coolly confident of his ability to keep them firmly and continually under control. And he leered back at them, and he laughed. Oh, how horribly he laughed!

In that instant I moved. I knew that it was now or never. For one moment

was Cyril down there! The one human being I was fond of and honored above all others. And Lavender couldn't know that.

We can exert superhuman strength and will and intelligence when those we love are in danger and agony, when we would be helpless under all other impulse to action. And I looked down into Cyril's suspense-mad eyes—and acted!

FRANTICALLY I hurled myself headlong at Lavender's shins with all the fury-born strength of a wild

Eerie Magic Bestrides a Carnival
when a Midget and a Puppet
Make a Mystic Marriage of Evil

IN

The Mask of the Marionette

A Complete Novelet

By DON ALVISO

—Coming in the Next Issue



PLUS TWELVE OTHER STORIES

his attention was quite dissevered from me. I was, in his reckoning, a most negligible factor right then. I was too thoroughly stupefied, dulled, dumb and paralyzed by horror, too completely demoralized and sick to the soul, to be capable of any connected thought, let alone physical violence.

So he thought! Under any other circumstances I might have been, I am certain I would have been. But—that

man. He had no chance to defend himself. He had no warning that could grant him time to set himself against my onslaught. He was as he would not again be were I fool enough to let this opportunity pass—he was totally off guard.

My hurtling weight caught him full on, like a football tackle perfectly executed, bowling him over like a ninepin. He reeled, clawing and fighting desperately for balance. Then,

shrieking in utter terror, he pitched headlong into that pit!

Like a foul and noisesome sea, those living-dead things crawled to wreak vengeance upon him. Like an inexorable tidal wave they engulfed him, biting, kicking, clawing, tearing, hiding him completely from my sight. For an instant his shriek of horror rose to screams of agony that shattered the air.

Then Harry Lavender gulped hideously, and died. And even as he died, in an orgy of frenetic destruction the crawling dead tore him apart, battered his bones and shredded his flesh.

I knew that once they had finished with him, they might turn on Cyril and Glasscott and me. Again it was now or never. I struggled to my feet, dashed around the pit and raced down the runway. I bent over Cyril and Glasscott, loosed the hellish tubes from their wrists, and with a strength I had never known before dragged them up the runway, out of that vile, cavern, through the connecting tunnel and into the next recess.

I slammed shut and bolted the heavy oaken door. I clawed my shirt from my body, ripped it into strips, bound their wounds to stop the bleeding. Then I sank down beside Cyril, panting and wet with the sweat of exertion and weakness. I heard the bodiless hands and feet approach and assault the oaken door, pounding and tugging, the heads mouthing obscene gibberish. But all their combined efforts were not enough to jar the massive portal. Lavender had protected himself well against untoward eventualities.

Within a few moments my momentary spell of weakness passed. I got to my feet and looked about. With little searching I found the cavern Lavender had fitted as laboratory and surgery. In short time I had Cyril's and Glasscott's wounds cleansed and thoroughly dressed.

The crawling dead were still battering at the door, and their frantic clawings to escape made my flesh writhe. I managed to get Cyril and Glasscott into the dining room where Lavender had installed his food sup-

ply, and bolted all the heavy doors behind me as I went. I knew we weren't out of danger yet.

I had to bring Cyril and Glasscott back to some kind of normal state. I remembered then that Lavender had locked the entrance slab. We had to find the working mechanism and release it before we could effect our escape.

The next three days are a shadowed haze in my memory. I know I worked over Cyril and Glasscott, feeding them with soups and strength-renewing liquids, virtually praying the life back into them. I know that Glasscott recovered hours sooner than Cyril did, as he had been in the pit only three days. I know that both Cyril and Glasscott explained how they had come there to have a look at the old house out of sheer curiosity, and how Lavender had lured them down as he had done to me.

I realize now that both Cyril Markheim and Drey Glasscott really recovered bodily movement and speech quickly, once they were freed of the influence of that dread formula. Though in looking back, it seems that an eternity passed before the last of that evil drug was dissipated, and the revivifying stream of life flowed through their veins.

WE HAD no trouble in getting out after all. We simply went to that spot where Lavender had switched out his electric torch when he was bringing me in. We looked about till we found the lever that manipulated the entrance slab. And the three of us went out of that fetid den, and closed the slab behind us, and descended the knoll together, and not one of us looked back at the evil old house as we advanced along the wide stone wall that crossed the marsh.

"I—I wonder what, how—those crawling dead things down there—" And my voice died on my tongue.

Cyril looked at me with haunted eyes. "They are quite dead by now. They had to be fed every day. They are grateful that you brought them the release of death, Myron. They wanted to die. It was all they asked."

He shrugged a little bitterly. "Come along, old son. Think of other things. Think of seeing Drey here back safe with his nephew. Think of some plausible excuse to make to Ken. Think—oh, think of something to make us laugh, anything—no matter how foolish it is! The sillier the better. We have to learn to forget."

I suppose that has practically become our law of life. Something to make us laugh, anything—no matter

how foolish it is, the sillier the better. We travel a great deal, Cyril and I, seeking new scenes, new surroundings and new faces.

If we seem consistently exuberant and hilarious, it is because we must keep our minds rigidly occupied with the trivial, the nonsensical and the ludicrous, allowing ourselves no moment of retrospection and serious thought—lest we go mad of remembering.

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

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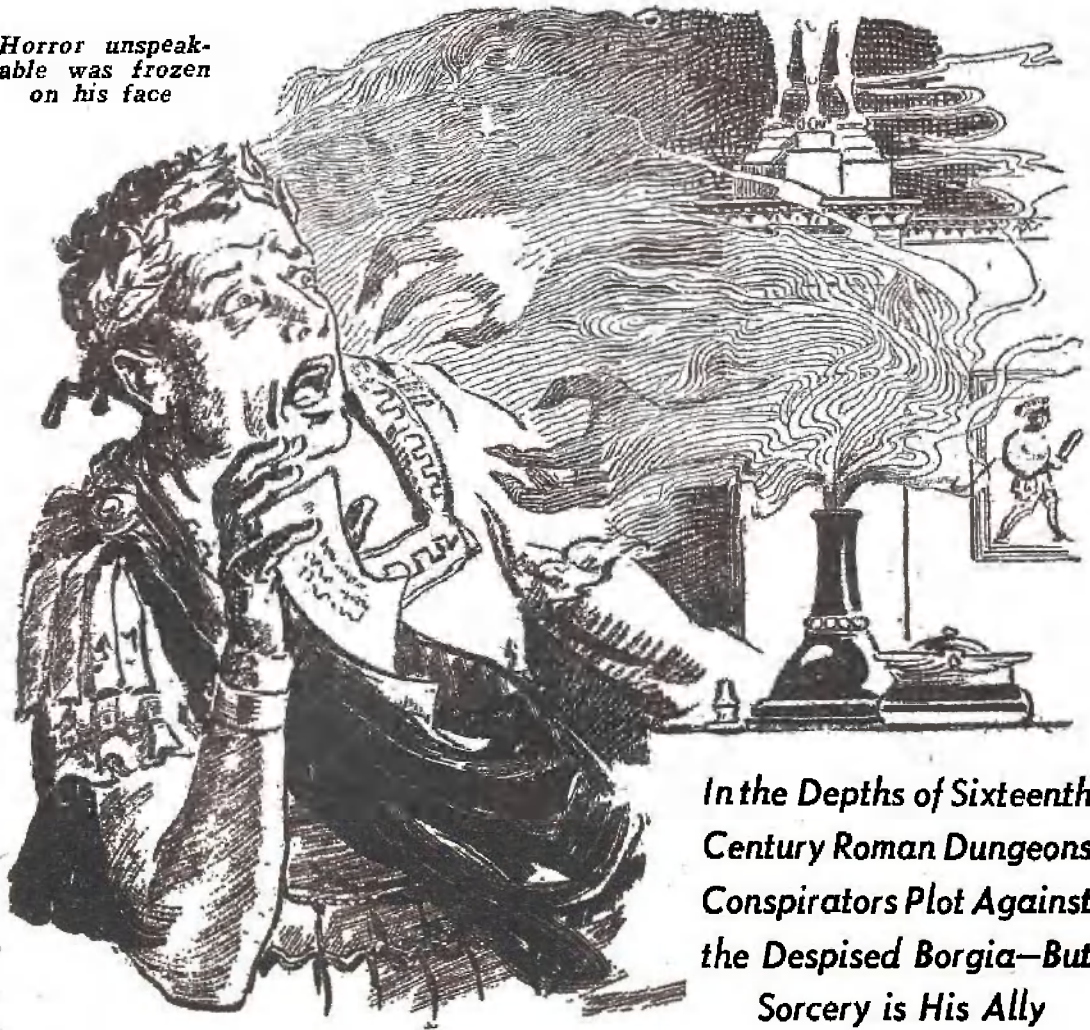
BREATH SWEETENER... DELIGHTFUL CONFECTION

A Bottle from Corezzi

By MARK SCHORER

Author of "Vengeance of Ai," "Portrait of Ladies," etc.

Horror unspeakable was frozen on his face



In the Depths of Sixteenth Century Roman Dungeons Conspirators Plot Against the Despised Borgia—But Sorcery is His Ally

A GIBBOUS moon hung low over Rome on a night in December in the year 1502. Down the forbidding and shunned Walk of Sighs, dark, hooded figures had been slinking one by one.

The night was far gone when the last of them came, swinging proudly and unafraid into the sinister street.

He went down its length, coming to a pause before the low, silent house standing at its end. He looked for an instant behind him, then pushed open a door and entered.

A face rose suddenly out of the blackness before him.

"Your entrance, Messer?" a voice demanded.

A paper changed hands, and the guard shuffled off down the dank corridor, followed closely by the late arrival. They came presently to a large sunken room, damp with the moisture that rises from under the earth. Here the guard left the man he had guided, and for a moment the man stood still, to accustom himself to the wavering flame of a flambeau which gave off the only light.

He saw five men in close conversation in a far corner. All were masked as he was, their heads heavily and carefully hooded, their bodies cloaked in black, though the wavering light from the flambeau gleamed occasionally on carelessly exposed metal beneath the cloaks.

One of the group in the corner came toward the man standing alone, took his admittance paper from him, and opened it. He read aloud:

Give admittance to Ramiro di Lorqua by order of Paolo di Orsini.

Then he looked up, nodding.

"Ah, di Lorqua, welcome. We thought you weren't coming. Delayed, perchance?"

"Delayed by a lackey who had wittlessly misplaced my boot, Paolo. It should be my pleasure to impale him, but I have always been too soft at heart." His voice was hushed, low, as if he did not wish to be overheard.

"You've guarded yourself closely, Ramiro? The Borgia may suspect, and his suspicion now would be fatal, our plans being so near completion."

"I've taken all precaution, assure yourself, Paolo."

"It is well." Paolo di Orsini shrugged his thin shoulders. "Until now none of us has been known to the other, yet all have been of my choosing—a plan I deem wise."

THE four other men now clustered around the two, and in voices still hushed, continued their conversation where it had been interrupted by the coming of the last of their number. They laid careful plans for the death of the arrogant Cesare, the obnoxious Prince Borgia. Each time one of the men spoke, Ramiro di Lorqua marked his voice, saying mentally, with well

concealed satisfaction, "Ah, Andrea Doria," or "Gianpaolo Baglioni," or, "Francesco—another of the Orsini."

Discussion died at last, and Paolo di Orsini, Duke of Gravina and leader of the conspiracy, drew slightly away from the others and addressed them.

"These, then, are the plans," he said. "On the last day of the year, my messenger shall go to Cesare at Fano, where the Prince Borgia spends the week to end his campaign to settle the revolt in the provinces. Cesare shall be invited to Sinigaglia under the pretense that Andrea Doria, in respect for the Prince, wishes himself to give over the citadel, which shall have been taken by me. When Borgia enters the gate, a crossbowman chosen with great care shall shoot him from his horse. With the death of Cesare, the true sons of the city-states shall have won their greatest victory."

Murmurs and signs of approval came from the other five, and Paolo spoke again.

"Let us part now, to meet again at Sinigaglia on the thirtieth. Go from here with sealed lips, for an incautious word may well mean death to us."

A few more words were exchanged, then one by one the conspirators slunk from the room and scattered in the streets of Rome. Last to leave were Paolo di Orsini and Ramiro di Lorqua. They stood for a moment conversing in low voices in the street, marking the fast disappearing lanterns carried by those who had gone before.

"You have no lantern, di Lorqua," said Paolo.

"I need none, for I know the streets of Rome as well by night as by day."

They laughed and parted, each going separately away. The man who had been called di Lorqua walked slowly, musingly, in a direction none of the others had taken. He threaded his way carefully through a network of byways, avoiding the moonlit streets as much as possible, and came finally to a dark alley, where a covered chair, guarded by two liveried lackeys rested in deep shadow. He hesitated a moment, seeking to assure himself that all was as he had left it. Then, satisfied, he approached the chair,

making only a barely perceptible sign to the lackeys as he entered.

As the chair moved away, he leaned back and threw up his hood. His face was lit by a smile of serenity and satisfaction. He rubbed his hands together.

"Vitelli, Andrea Doria, Oliverotto, Baglioni, Francesco di Orsini," he murmured.

Suddenly his face was transformed into a hard mask of anger.

"And Paolo di Orsini at their head! Paolo, whom I once pardoned for an attempted treachery because his name served me well. It is rare that Borgia pardons once, but never does Borgia pardon twice."

He allowed his anger to dissipate, and thought well of his cunning. He chuckled with pleasure at the thought of the newly dead body of Ramiro di Lorqua, now lying cold and stiff in the cellars of the Vatican, with poison standing still in veins through which blood coursed no more. . . .

CESARE, Prince Borgia, moved quickly. The next night his hooded figure was again abroad in the streets and alleys of Rome, and once more Cesare found himself before another dark door, a stone door not unlike that other from which he had emerged in the face of death the previous night.

A lackey with a lantern retreated up the alley at the Borgia's command, and Cesare stepped forward to knock smartly on the heavy door with the hilt of his rapier.

The shuffling footsteps of someone approaching sounded from within. Abruptly a face was pressed against the iron grating centering the door, and the cracked voice of an old woman greeted him.

"Whom seek you?"

"Open for the Borgia, Madonna. I seek audience with Messer Corezzi."

The door swung back. The old woman stepped aside and bent her crooked spine obsequiously.

"Enter, Magnificence," she murmured, but it was not without fear.

Cesare stepped into the shadowed corridor, holding a perfumed cloth to his nostrils.

"Tell your master I desire his presence," he ordered.

The old woman bowed again and scuttled away through another door. The Prince Borgia eyed her frightened movements with irritation on his handsome features.

"All is fear," he muttered. "I am feared by those who have no need of fear for me, and those who stand against me are fools, for they know not fear of me." He shrugged his shoulders.

The old woman returned abruptly and swung wide the inner door. Cesare passed her with sure steps and found himself in the anteroom of the mage's laboratory, a room well remembered from previous visits.

The door closed behind him at the same moment that heavy black curtains facing him were separated, and the wrinkled droll face of Messer Corezzi appeared between them. He bowed, so that the upper portion of his body, clad in a robe of black velvet, could be seen between the parted draperies.

"Magnificence," he murmured.

He swept the curtains apart with his chalk-white hands and invited the Borgia to enter the laboratory, the small dimly-lit room in which many of the strangest and most evil deeds in Rome had been planned. The Prince Borgia walked past him into the inner room.

They stood silent for a moment in the half-light, the weird flames from the dancing fire in the open grate casting grotesque reflections, the red light playing over the phials of colored liquid, the retorts, the bottles on the tables and shelves about the walls. Cesare looked into Messer Corezzi's eyes.

A secret bond existed between the two, for they were acquainted more than intimately.

"Will Magnificence sit?" asked the mage presently.

Cesare seated himself before the fire. He looked casually about the room, though its every cranny was familiar to him, let his finger stray along the line of his lips, caressing his mustache gently, then looked lingeringly at his nails. He permitted him-

self to smile lightly, and the mage bent expectantly forward.

"Messer Corezzi," said Cesare, "I have an enemy."

The mage spread his hands eloquently.

"The enemy annoys?"

CESARE looked into the fire. He nodded almost imperceptibly.

The magician smiled cunningly and looked about him. He hummed a gay tune for a second, then raised his hands in a gesture of solicitation.

"Poison is good, Magnificence."

Cesare brushed the suggestion away.

"No, I wish for none of that. I have much poison, strange poisons of which even you have not heard, Messer Corezzi. And then there is always the white power of the Borgia."

The magician picked up the thread of his tune again. He walked to one side of the room, drew back the black curtains that fell from the ceiling, and revealed a set of shelves laden with phials and bottles of many sizes and colors. Slowly, with elaborate care, the magician put his fingers on the slender neck of a delicately blown bottle of green glass.

"An excellent bit of Venetian glass, Magnificence."

The Prince Borgia looked up. "Venetian glass?"

Messer Corezzi brought the bottle to the table near the fire. Carefully he set it down.

"Would Magnificence be interested in fine glassware, perhaps?"

"'Tis not unlikely. Tell me of the bottle."

"Blown by Morelli himself, the most worthy glass-blower in all Venice. Prepared especially for me. Note, Magnificence, how the fire plays on the neck. Is it not fine?"

"Very fine, Messer Corezzi. And what could such a bottle contain?"

"Ah, Magnificence, this bottle could not be opened by one for whose life you have care."

"And what of one for whose life I have no care?" said the Prince Borgia suddenly, sharply.

"For such it is planned. Magnificence," said the mage, his wrinkled white face disfigured by his cunning

leer. He repeated, chuckling: "For such is it planned."

"Good! Could this bottle be opened? It is my desire to send a message, to be placed within the bottle, thus to stir the curiosity of him who is to receive it."

Messer Corezzi hesitated.

"It is a difficult task, Highness."

Cesare drew a bag of ducats slowly from his pocket, and threw it carelessly to the table at his side. It clinked heavily as it struck the wood. Again the Prince Borgia spoke.

"Think you it can be opened, Messer Corezzi?"

The magician bowed low. "It can be done, Magnificence. If Highness will write the message, I will look to it."

Messer Corezzi brought forth a sheet of parchment, quill, and sand, putting them on the table.

The Prince Borgia drew his stool to the table. He sat there for a moment, his eyes staring before him, then he picked up the quill and wrote hurriedly on the parchment. With a flourish he put his name beneath what he had written. Then he dusted sand over the writing, and blew it away into the fire. With great exactitude, he matched the sides of the parchment, then folded the sheet into a size small enough to fit the thin neck of the Venetian bottle.

"'Tis done!" he said, and handed it to Messer Corezzi, who had stood waiting for him to finish.

"Now will Highness draw back?" asked the magician.

BORGIA did as he was told. Messer Corezzi came toward him with a long stick of chalk in his hand. Bending close to the floor, he drew a circle around the stool on which the Prince Borgia sat. From a shelf he drew three long tapers and, having lighted them in the grate, came again to the Prince and placed them carefully equidistant on the circle he had drawn. He stepped back a moment and mumbled an incantation over the head of Cesare.

"This is necessary for Magnificence. For myself, there need be nothing. My own art will protect me,"

His voice trailed off into nothing, then he walked quickly to the table, turning again to the Borgia from there.

"One is rarely harmed by one's own child, is it not so, Highness?" he cackled.

The Prince Borgia smiled his approval.

With another incantation mumbled over the green bottle on the table, Messer Corezzi proceeded to remove its tight stopper. He held it in his hand for only a second, and there was a sudden inexplicable movement, a gentle rippling of the curtains that lined the room.

It was as if a wind were passing through the room, a wind that had arisen from nowhere.

The mage quickly dropped the folded parchment into the bottle, still mumbling in a language strange to the Prince Borgia, who sat quietly, wondering why he could feel none of this weird wind that rustled about the room. Messer Corezzi began a low persuasive chant, addressing himself seemingly to space. Then suddenly all movement in the room ceased, the strange wind died. Messer Corezzi replaced the stopper.

Messer Corezzi came to the Prince Borgia, took up the tapers, blew them out with a breath, and bade the Prince rise, holding the sealed bottle toward him.

"You must make certain, Highness, that this bottle reaches only your enemy," he abjured. "It must be seen to that none but he opens it."

"It shall be looked to."

"And Magnificence must take all care that the bottle is not opened when others are present."

"The note will take care of that, excellent Messer Corezzi."

"And when Highness seeks to know what has happened to his enemy, it will be well to carry a crucifix to assure that the force imprisoned here has spent itself, to drive it into space by its potency."

The Prince Borgia nodded, concealing the bottle beneath his cloak.

"I am always sure of Messer Morelli's imps," Messer Corezzi went on. "They have more force than my own,

more power, and they have been in the bottles long."

He bowed low before the Prince Borgia, and Cesare nodded shortly.

The Prince Borgia parted the curtains and disappeared in the passage. The magician, hearing the door close, and the crone shuffling along the passage toward her quarters, bent to the table and spilled the gold out before him. There he sat in silent reverie, the gold yellow in the dancing firelight, while Cesare, the Prince Borgia made his way homeward.

AT dawn of the last day of the year 1502 a messenger from Paolo di Orsini, Duke of Gravina, rode into Fano seeking Cesare, Prince Borgia, Duke of Valentinois. The Prince Borgia was expecting him. The news he brought was of the surrender of Sinigaglia.

The citadel itself was still being held by Andrea Doria, but this, it was stated, was solely because Doria desired to make surrender to the Prince himself. Giovanna da Montefletre, the prefectress, who had been ruling the city as regent for her small son, had already departed by sea to Venice, having been allowed to leave by the Duke of Gravina who was temporary overlord of the city following a short skirmish the day before. Paolo di Orsini would look for the Prince Borgia to meet him at the Palazzo di Monfredo.

The Prince Borgia was exceedingly gracious. He bade the messenger carry a casket containing an important message to his master, the Duke of Gravina, exhorting him to lose no time in delivering it, and to assure his master that it was a matter for private perusal.

On a fresh horse, the messenger of di Orsini departed from Fano, and the Prince Borgia did not wait to see him disappear on the Sinigaglia road before he turned to the captains of his forces and bade them order four thousand horses into formation, ready to make forced march upon the city of Sinigaglia, and to prepare for battle, should the city offer resistance.

Within the hour Cesare, the Prince Borgia, was riding out of Fano at the

head of four thousand horses. Behind him were to follow many of his men on foot. He was garbed in full armor, resplendent at the head of his lances. The plume in his helmet blew back in the breeze of the crisp morning as he patted the neck of his charger with his gauntleted hand.

The Prince Borgia was smiling. Somewhere ahead galloped the messenger of Paolo, the treacherous one, bearing to his faithless master a silver casket which held a message in a bottle from Corezzi, best of all Roman sorcerers.

At noon that day, the Prince Borgia drew up before the gates of Sinigaglia. Francesco, the brother of Paolo di Orsini, and Vitellozo di Vitelli advanced to meet him. The Borgia's reception of them was invested with that gracious friendliness of which none knew the art better than he.

They turned and rode with him through the gates of Sinigaglia, and behind them came the host of four thousand. The *condottieri* of Sinigaglia, a thousand at the most, and all on foot, were given an abrupt dismissal as the party approached the citadel.

Francesco di Orsini fidgeted on his horse. Where, he wondered, was Paolo? Had he seen that things were wrong!

Why had the Borgia brought all his horses? What did the Borgia know? Truly, something was wrong.

The Prince Borgia, however, intent on keeping from them his real knowledge, gleaned from their own lips that night in Rome, rode on to the citadel in amiable conversation with them all. There, he invited not only Vitelli and the younger Orsini, but also Doria, Bagioni, and Oliverotto, who were awaiting them at the citadel, into his chambers.

Cesare was not for parting with them yet. They must accept his invitation. Besides, his mood was so agreeable that surely, despite his army, there could be nothing to fear. But scarcely were they inside than his manner changed in a twinkling, and at a sign from him, they were instantly taken by the captains of his

own forces, who had entered at his side.

"TAKE them into the court," he ordered. "Tie them back to back, and strangle them with your thinnest and stoutest cords. For such as they, there can be only a common, ugly death."

Then the Prince Borgia descended quickly to the street, heedless of the cries of his prisoners. Once there, he turned his steps toward the Palazzo di Monfredo.

At the palazzo, all was in uproar. Apparently something had happened. Cesare smiled, touching his incipient mustache with his long thin fingers. At the door he encountered two of di Orsini's lackeys, crying excitedly to each other. Upon one of them he seized.

"What happens here?" he demanded loudly. "Where is the Duke of Gravina?"

"Magnificence, Highness, Magnificence—" The lackey trembled under the hand of the Prince Borgia.

"Speak!"

"Master—Master di Orsini—something has befallen him. We saw through the great lock on his chamber door. He had gone there with a message, a message from Magnificence himself. There evil found him—we saw him struggling with nothing, flailing the air. We saw him fall—dead to the floor!"

The Prince Borgia looked concerned.

"Paolo di Orsini dead," he mused. "Ah, no, that cannot be—surely not the good Paolo."

He lifted his head sternly.

"Take me there!" he ordered. His mouth was hard, but his eyes smiled.

Three lackeys ran before him, halting at last before a great door. One lackey put his hand on the knob.

"This is the room, Highness," he said, starting to open it.

"A moment," called Cesare.

He strode forward, seized a heavy brass candelabrum that stood near the door, and turned the knob, flinging open the door. Abruptly the Prince Borgia flung the candelabrum across the room, sending it crashing through

a window at the far end. In the same instant, he whipped the crucifix out before him, thrusting it into the room.

"Depart, Thing, into space from whence you came!" he murmured.

The curtains of the broken window moved slightly, as if the open door had created a strong draft. Then only did the Prince Borgia go forward into the room, halting abruptly near the body of Paolo di Orsini, Duke of Gravina, lying on the floor, horror unspeakable frozen on his dead face.

The Borgia bent over him.

"Ah!" he murmured. "The good Paolo is indeed dead."

The lackeys, overcome with terror,

hovered in the background. Borgia studied the peculiar marks on the throat of his late enemy.

"What small fingers the strangler had," he mused. "Indeed, the Venetian, Morelli, knows his calling well. And Corezzi shall be further rewarded."

His hand closed over the opened note that lay near the body not far from the fragments of a green bottle. He looked at it reminiscently, smiling as he read:

Paolo: Sinigaglia shall see me later in the day, though you shall not. Meanwhile, my compliments in this fine glass.
Cesare.

NEXT ISSUE

THE MAN WHO KNEW EVERYTHING

A Story of Uncanny Mind-Reading

By RAY CUMMINGS

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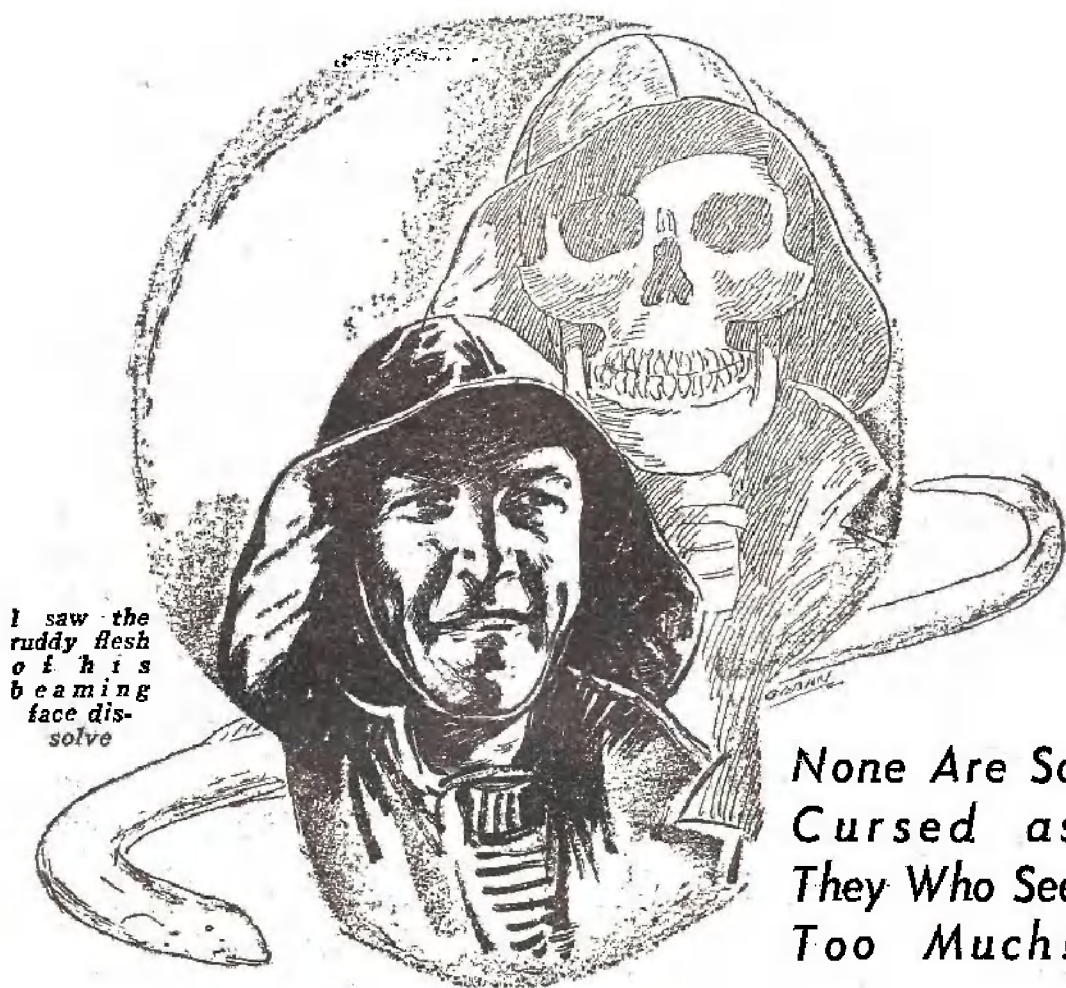
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The Man Who Looked Beyond

By CAROL BOYD

Author of "Lost Skeleton," "The Terror of Night," etc.



I saw the ruddy flesh of his beaming face dissolve

None Are So Cursed as They Who See Too Much!

WITH his deep black glasses and his ravaged face, the man was the most interesting person in the room. He sat at a corner table in Casey's, nursing a tall drink and smiling now and then at some particularly clever piece of

repartee that reached him from the clever bar.

There usually was a crowded bar at Casey's, and there was plenty of clever repartee. It was a newspaperman's hangout—both the *Globe* and the *Times-Courier* had their antiquated

plants in the immediate vicinity—and after a day of pounding out “who-when-where-and-whys” all days, your reporter and your rewrite man like to range up alongside a convenient bar and be cynically clever. They generally become more cynical and less clever as the drinks pile up, but the man in black glasses never seemed to be annoyed, even when the hour grew late and the talk grew more or less maudlin.

I was new to the town and working special assignment, and because I was new and wanted to hold this job, I was a hound for special stories. Human interest stuff. Exclusives. Stuff that would be remembered when the Brass Hats sent down word to cut the staff to fit the budget.

That’s why I got interested in the man with black glasses. I got a story all right. But it was the kind of story I couldn’t write for fear I’d be tossed out on my ear as a rum-dum, or a nut.

I asked Jake, the bartender, who the bird in the dark glasses was. The man’s face had interested me. Below those circles of black glass were lines, deep lines that one finds on two types of faces—the faces of men who have seen everything in life and those who have seen the bottoms of bottles all their lives.

“Who is he, Jake?” I asked. “I see him in here nearly every night. He never talks to anybody and he never seems to get tight. Do you know him?”

Jake gave me a curious look and went on polishing glasses. He glanced back at the man in the corner table and lowered his voice.

“His name,” he half whispered, “is Harms. I don’t know his first name. I don’t know nothin’ about him and don’t let nobody tell you I do. He don’t bother nobody and I don’t bother him. He pays cash for his likker, which is more than I can say about most of you newspaper guys, and he behaves himself, which also is more than I—”

“Okay, okay,” I said. “I just asked. That’s all.”

But that gaunt, lined face, under the black glasses, interested me. And there might be a story there. I decided

to try to brace the guy. If he gave me a freeze, what the hell! I’ve been frozen by experts.

I carried my glass back toward the corner table. The tables at Casey’s were crowded and I had sort of an excuse to drop into a chair opposite the guy with the black glasses, this fellow Harms.

“Crowded tonight,” I said, brightly. “Hope you don’t mind my sitting here with you.”

HE SHOOK his head slowly. And when he spoke, the hair at the back of my neck started to crawl, like the time in Cleveland when I walked into a dark hallway and a guy stuck a gun in my ribs and took my thirty-eight cents.

This Harms had a voice that sounded like it was made of clay that had been buried in an ice bank for a million years. It was hard. It was brittle. And it was cold!

I once interviewed a twenty-time killer, back in the Dillinger era, and he had a cold voice, plenty cold, but it was nothing like this. You’ve heard those automatic speaking machines that the telephone company demonstrates around at different places. Well, Harms’ voice was something like that—but colder. If a skeleton could speak, maybe it would talk something like Harms.

“No,” he said. “I don’t mind—if you don’t.”

“Uh—no, of course not,” I managed. “Why should I mind?”

He half smiled, but there wasn’t a speck of mirth in that smile. I once knew a flyer who sold himself to the Fascists in the early days of the Spanish affair. He was a bomber, and when he came back to the States he smiled something like Harms, remembering, probably, Guernica and the other places.

“Some people might mind,” he said. Then he closed his mouth.

I sipped my drink and talked about the weather, the Brooklyn Dodgers and the latest diary divorce case. No soap. He answered in monosyllables when he answered at all. Finally, I said to myself here goes nothing and I leaned across the table toward him.

"Mr. Harms," I said, "I guess I ought to explain myself. I'm a newspaperman. A reporter. My job depends on me getting stories and I'm stuck for one right now. I saw you sitting here and I—well, I got the idea you might have a story for me. I know I've got a hell of a nerve to bother you, but I'm desperate. But if you haven't got a story or if you want to be left alone, just tell me to scram and I will."

He sat there for quite awhile with his long, bony fingers curled around his highball glass. Somebody at the bar got off a particularly good crack and there was a roar of laughter. I took another sip of my drink, waiting for this Harms guy to tell me to blow. Finally, his mouth curled in that mirthless smile of his, and he said in that frigid voice:

"What makes you think I've got a story?"

Well, he had me there. You can't just tell a fellow that you're interested in the lines of his face or his cold, dead voice or the way he smiles. Maybe he wouldn't like to be told that he looks like a walking corpse.

"I don't know," I floundered. "But I thought—I had the idea—"

I PETERED out and started to collect my drink and go back to the bar. That frozen clay voice stopped me.

"Yes," he said, after a long pause. "I've got a story. I might even tell it to you. But you won't print it."

Well, hell, I thought, here's another one of those guys who's going to tell me he's the real Charlie Ross that was kidnaped so many years ago, or the stepbrother of the world's richest man who was thrown into a nuthouse by unscrupulous lawyers.

"If it's a story," I said, "I'll write it. And if it's a good story, my paper will print it."

He raised his glass to his lips before he answered.

"I don't know what you mean by a good story," he said. "But it's an—unusual—story. You probably won't believe it. Frankly, I'd advise you not to."

"Oh, I'll believe it, Mr. Harms—" I began.

He raised one of those bony hands to stop me.

"You probably won't," he repeated. "Nobody ever has—the few who've heard it. Only one man *did* believe it and he's—he's dead."

He finished his drink and signaled the waiter. I had another and paid for both, against his objections. At least, I thought, he wasn't one of these I'll-give-you-a-story-for-a-drink boys.

He gulped his drink and set down the glass with a hard rap. He leaned toward me, over the table, talking quietly.

"Here's the story," he said. "The only reason I'm giving it to you is the way you braced me for it. Most reporters would have hinted around, or tried to worm the story out of me. You asked me for it, point-blank, so here it is."

He hesitated.

"But," he said, slowly. "You'll never print it in your paper."

MY NAME (he said) is Rudolph Harms. I'm fifty-eight years old. I'm—I'm retired, you might say.

You may wonder why I spend night after night here in this place. I'll tell you. I like to come here because I can sit here at my favorite table and listen to them talk at the bar—listen to them and be sure that, no matter what they might say or do, I have no way of knowing what they will be in three years' time.

Now you're startled. You think, perhaps, that I'm cracked. Perhaps I am. God knows that I have a right to be, seeing what I went through. But hear me out before you decide.

I was born, then, fifty-eight years ago in a little Massachusetts town. The name of it doesn't matter, but it was on Cape Cod. My father was a fisherman. Apparently, I was a normal baby. At least, I never found out that I was abnormal in any way when I was very young, and memory, of course, doesn't go back to the cradle. So those years of my life were—sweet and peaceful.

I was about eighteen months old when it first happened. I was toddling around the floor of our small living room one day when my father came

into the room, returned from one of his week-long fishing trips. He bent down to pick me up as I held up my hands to be lifted. And then it happened!

The memory is still as keen today as it was that day, so many years ago. My father had on oilskins, typical of his trade. His big, kindly hands were stretched down to me and he had stooped, smiling, beneath the sou'wester he wore.

Then, I saw the ruddy flesh of his beaming face dissolve! What had been the handsome, weatherbeaten features of the man I loved best in the world fell away and in their stead was an awful sight. From under the sou'wester peered the empty sockets of a skull. Strings of flesh clung to parts of the grisly bone, but there were not many particles of skin left to cover the unbeautiful bone structure.

And tearing at one of the few remaining shreds of human flesh, under one of the sightless eyes, was a huge crab!

I was only eighteen months old then, remember. At eighteen months, a child remembers little if anything. But he sees what he sees. And the transformation of my father's face filled me with a horror that stamped itself indelibly on my memory.

I gave a wild scream and turned to run from him. His big hands—only now they were the grasping hands of a skeleton—caught me up. I struggled and kicked, trying to free myself from the embrace of this awful monster, but he held me tight, laughing at what he thought was a new game of my invention.

Blackness overcame me. My mother told me later that I was seized by convulsions.

I remained unconscious for several days. The family doctor charged it to indigestion or colic or some such familiar ailment, and laughed away my parents' worries. By the time I was fully myself, my father had left on another fishing voyage; a long one this time.

IT WAS the same when he returned, some three months later. The same horrible half-human skull,

the hands stripped of their flesh. Except this time, an eel was fastened to a point on my father's jawbone, gnawing at the last remaining particles of flesh.

More convulsions then. More doctors were called. It was before the day of child psychology and complexes, but the doctors could see that the sight of my father filled me with horror. To save my mind, they ordered my father—my bewildered, heart-broken father—to keep out of my sight. They could not say why, because my speech at that time was little more than a few lisping words, but they could not help but connect my father with my strange malady.

I learned later—much later—that my father was a broken man from that day on. He left on six-month fishing trips and, when he came home, stayed at the inn rather than come back to a home where he would be greeted by a shrieking, maddened child. His hair grayed. He grew morose and unfriendly.

Then, one day, friends brought my mother the news that father never would be coming home again. His ship had sunk with all hands during a storm off the Grand Banks. That was three years, almost to the day, from the time I had had my first strange seizure.

I grew up without any untoward incident. Of course, I was regarded as a queer child by those few people who knew the story of my father. Then, one day when I was eight years old, I was in school. I was particularly fond of a little girl in my same class, a child with pigtails whose name, as I recall, was Sarah Nickerson.

Sarah sat across the room from me and, as boys will, I spent much of my time peeking at her from behind my school books, admiring those golden brown pigtails.

I was thus engaged one afternoon when it happened again. As Sarah half turned to peek back at me, I saw the right side of her forehead suddenly dissolve into a bloody mass. White edges of bone stuck up through the foamy blood which was flecked with gray. One of Sarah's bright blue eyes dangled on her cheek, held by

one shred of muscle. Her mouth was twisted in a ghastly grin.

I gave a scream and leaped to my feet. The others stared in amazement. I pointed a shaking finger at Sarah and shrieked:

"Look at her! Look at her! What's happened to her face?"

The teacher seized me and hurried me out of the classroom. I was sobbing hysterically by then. I told the teacher what I had seen and he sent for the principal. He, in turn, sent for a doctor—our old family doctor.

"Take him back into the room again," the old doctor said. "Let him see the girl again. Let him get this out of his system by seeing that the girl's all right."

THEY led me back, screaming protests. The class was pop-eyed with excitement. I kept my eyes on the floor until I was led up to Sarah Nickerson's desk. She, poor child, was panic-stricken.

"Look at her, Rudolph," the doctor said, grimly. "Look at her and see what a fool you've been."

It took an effort beyond my years to raise my eyes. There was Sarah Nickerson, the girl I knew, looking back at me with round, blue eyes. And then—the same horrible dissolution of the flesh and features, the same ghastly caricature of the girl who had been there a second before.

The old doctor was shaking me as I stood there, palsied with fright.

"You've got to stop this nonsense," he was telling me, "or first thing you know, you'll find yourself in the insane asylum."

The old doctor was cruelly blunt in his methods, but his words taught me a lesson. I didn't want to go to an insane asylum. To me, at eight years of age, such a place was a hell on earth. I reasoned that if I lied, if I told them I did not see what I saw, I would escape that fate.

I forced myself to look again at the horribly wounded face of Sarah Nickerson. My stomach heaved and churned, but the fear of the doctor's threat was overwhelming.

"It was a joke," I said. "It was all a joke."

For that, I got a caning such as was given only in those old days. But I swallowed my tears and went back to my class, wearing, now, the nickname of "Asylum" Harms.

I stayed in that class with Sarah Nickerson. And each time, during the next three years when I looked at her, there was that hideous sight, that impulse to scream, which I had to overpower.

Three years after my outburst in the classroom, Sarah Nickerson was kicked by a runaway horse. Her skull—the right side of her skull—was shattered. Her eye was gouged out. She died almost instantly.

Nobody connected my hysterics of three years previous with the death of Sarah Nickerson, and you may be sure I never reminded anybody. By that time, I was growing fairly accustomed to the demon in my eyes.

For instance, I would walk down the main street of our little town, eyeing passersby. And every once in awhile, I would see one who, I knew by then, was marked for death within three years. Many of them were white-faced, with placid features and eyes closed as though in calm sleep. Others wore distorted faces, as though their last moments had been spent in a hell of agony. I met the town marshal outside the postoffice one evening and saw a round hole in his forehead from which the blood trickled ceaselessly.

Three years from the evening I saw him, the town marshal was drilled through the forehead by a burglar he had surprised robbing the general store.

I KEPT my own counsel. To talk was to risk commitments to an insane asylum; to revive the nickname of "Asylum" Harms which had fallen into disuse. Besides, the evil thing had become easier for me to bear. At times, God help me, I made a game of it. I'd walk along saying to myself: "There goes a man who will die of smallpox in three years. The spots are on his face. There is a woman who is laughing. She wouldn't laugh if she knew she had only three years to live. There is a baby who will be dead soon."

Horrible? Perhaps, but remember that I was a young boy then. Outside of my father, this thing had not hurt me. I grew rather proud, as a matter of fact, of my ability to see what nobody else could see. The parade of the living dead. But I kept my secret, guarded it well.

Then, when I was fifteen, it struck at me. I was working by then, and I came back from the store where I was employed one evening to be greeted by my mother. I remember it now as though it was tonight. She met me at the front door, as she always did, answering my whistle from the street corner. She held up her face to be kissed—and she wore the white, pallid mask of death.

I forced myself to kiss her, and her lips were cold and lifeless under mine. Her eyes were shut, her cheeks were waxen and from her flesh came the faint, cold odor of the dead.

I turned away from her and her voice came to me, warm, lively, still beautiful despite her years and the sorrow of my father's death. I looked at her again. Her face was the same death mask. I turned away and she lived again.

For three years, I told myself, this must go on! And then, when her three years are up, the voice will be stilled, even when I look away.

Imagine, young man—if you can—what this must mean. I loved my mother as few men do because, afraid of the world that had called me "Asylum" Harms, I was drawn closer to her. I never had told her my secret because this was one person who *must* never have cause to regard me with anything but the all-embracing love she gave me. And now she was a corpse when I looked at her. A peaceful corpse, of that I was thankful, but a corpse, nevertheless. She lived only when my eyes were not upon her. To have her, I must avert my eyes.

For three years, I did just that and those three years were hell. Naturally, I lavished every luxury I could afford on her. I tried to give her in those three years the things she had always wanted. Maybe she was happy, during those last years of her life. I don't know. Certainly she saw the change

in me. She used to question me, gently reproachful, about the increasing sparseness of my kisses. She couldn't know that to kiss her, I must first look at her, and then I would be kissing her cold corpse.

I have often wondered since why I didn't end everything then or, failing that, how I held my reason. Maybe it was the knowledge that my mother was to be with me only a little longer and had had so few things from life that kept me going.

ANYWAY, in those three ghastly years that preceded my mother's death, I worked harder than I ever had worked before. I needed money to give my mother things. My wages went up and up. I became what the town called a successful young business man.

Successful! Ha!

My mother's death, when it came, was a death as gentle as herself. She died in her sleep. Her heart simply stopped beating.

Perhaps someone may have wondered at my attitude, others may have remarked about my Spartan fortitude. They knew how much I had loved my mother and they saw me, dry-eyed, at the funeral and at the grave.

What would they have thought had they known that my mother's death actually came as a blessed relief; a surcease from the days and nights of agony when my own mother had been one of the "living dead"; a corpse which walked about our home; the mere earthly shell of a beautiful spirit each time I looked at her?

After my mother's death, I sold out my holdings in my home town and came here to the city. My affliction—for now I knew it for what it was—came with me. My move had been half motivated by the forlorn hope that perhaps this evil thing was connected somehow with the Cape Cod town where I lived. When, as I emerged from the train in the city and looked about me at the hurrying throngs to see more of the "living dead" than I ever had seen before, I knew that this horrible thing was within me.

I was successful here, after a man-

mer. I made few friends. I stayed by myself, outside of business hours. I could not bring myself to cultivate a friendship that would have to be broken the instant I saw that my friend had joined the procession which my mother had followed for three years, all unknowing that her son shuddered with dread each time she raised her lips for a kiss.

On occasion, I used my affliction to my monetary advantage. For instance one day I happened to meet one of the greatest financial tycoons of his day. He was a tremendous power in the money market. His hands held the guiding reins of a dozen of the most gigantic interests in his field. And he held those reins alone. It was a legend that he allowed himself no subordinates. A young man, he often was quoted as saying there would be time enough when he grew old to pass on his secrets to others.

I met this man several times after that, and on one of those occasions a single glimpse of his face showed me he had but three years to live. His countenance, as I saw it, was a brilliant crimson, with staring eyes and knotted muscles. His face fairly shouted apoplexy.

I marked the date. Three years from that day, I began selling short, with every dollar I could lay my hands on, trading in the interests that were controlled by this man. They called me a fool. The financier's stocks were rising, skyrocketing, soaring.

AND then, one day, the financier dropped dead. As I had foreseen, there was no warning. He was lunching with friends when he was seized and he was dead before a doctor reached his side.

The market collapsed. The great man's stocks hit bottom. I took a tremendous profit.

I'll confess I used more unscrupulous methods. I had in my employ several young men. One day, I saw the look of death on one of them. I evolved a scheme. I called him into my office, gave him a fatherly talk about wanting to see him build for the future and advised he take out a great deal of insurance. When he protested

that he couldn't shoulder that heavy an insurance burden, I played the philanthropist. I said I would pay the premiums until he was in a position to repay me. For security, I asked only that he assign half the value of the policies to me.

Of course he was eager to do that. And, of course, he was killed three years later in a particularly messy accident. With double indemnity, I realized an attractive sum.

Crooked, you say? Why? That young man's widow got a hundred times as much as she would have gotten if I hadn't stepped in. And why should I not be reimbursed for the ghastly things that had happened to me?

I did that insurance trick five times, all told, and in each case but one I took my profit. That one exception was the case of an employee who, eighteen months after he had become insured, learned he had an incurable disease. He shot himself before the two-year suicide clause of the policy had expired. I could anticipate death, but not always its cause.

Am I heartless in speaking of these things this way? Perhaps, but you must remember that, to me, men and women died twice. Once, when I first saw the look of death upon them, and then when they ceased to move and talk.

Things went along. I grew more and more wealthy. And then I fell in love.

She was a beautiful girl, the daughter of an older business acquaintance. Her name was—well, you do not need her name in this story.

I fell deeply, hopelessly in love with—we shall call her Irene, though that was not her name—the first time I met her, and she fell as deeply in love with me. I had allowed myself no friendships with women for just this reason—that I might fall in love with one of them and then, some day, be forced to relive the agony of those last three years with my mother.

But I was helpless with this love for Irene. I told myself that I would die before she—she was quite a bit younger than I—and there would never be that awful day when I would

see her beautiful face dissolve into a death mask. I was made reckless by love; I turned my mind away from the dangers I faced. I asked her to marry me.

WE BECAME engaged and set the date for the following Christmas Eve, her birthday. I was happier than I ever had been in my life.

This fool's paradise continued for about three months—until one night, late in November, shortly after Thanksgiving. I was calling on Irene, to take her to the theater.

She was her usual, charming self as we chatted, waiting for another party to join us. I lit a cigar and went to the fireplace to throw the match into the flames. I turned back to the woman I was going to marry.

I see it now. She was sitting on a divan, looking across the room at me.

I gave a stifled exclamation, and dropped my cigar.

"Clumsy," she laughed, as I stooped to pick it up. "You'll set the house on fire, I'll bet, after we're married."

After we're married! Oh, God! We never could be married!

For, sitting on the divan was one of the most horrible things I ever had seen or dreamed of. Irene—my Irene—was gone! In her place sat a creature whose face was one scarlet blister! Mouth, nose and eyes were indistinguishable in the puffy red mass that now covered her head. The black, thick hair I had loved so was gone—burned away!

I staggered across the room and fell into a chair, my eyes tightly shut. For a moment, I felt that my brain was going to crack at last.

"Rudolph!" she said. "What's the matter? Are you ill?"

I couldn't bring myself to speak. I nodded dumbly. Half hysterical, she called her father. I could look at him, and the sight of his face helped restore sanity.

"It's nothing," I muttered. "Felt faint. Afraid I'm catching a bad cold."

I kept my eyes fixed on the old man's face. I couldn't—God, I *couldn't*—bring myself to look at the creature who knelt beside my chair, sobbing.

I looked at the floor as Irene's father helped me to a cab and took me home. There, I threw myself on the bed and, for the first time since I was a child, wept like a normal human being. I cursed this thing that had afflicted me. I cursed myself for ever showing Irene my love. I cursed everything and everyone. I was virtually a maniac during those first few hours.

Then, when I got control of myself, I swore an oath. I swore that this evil thing that had lodged itself within me could not rob me of this, the one love I had known since three years before my mother died. This curse had taken all happiness from me since the day I was a child, toddling toward my father. It would not take Irene from me!

WE WERE married in January—there was a slight delay because I was in poor health during the holidays. Irene and I were happy, if the word happy can describe it. Really, it was more than that. For the first time in my life, I was free of my curse. I could take Irene in my arms and hold a warm, living human being, a human being who lived to love me.

Then—just a few months short of our third wedding anniversary—there was an accident. A servant was sick and Irene was piling fresh logs into a fireplace. Her dress caught fire. She—she was badly burned. She died the next day.

* * * * *

The guy with the black glasses stopped talking. I looked at my drink and saw the ice had melted. I swished the liquor around in my glass and took a long gulp.

Yeah, it was a story. A story nobody would print, even if it was true, which it couldn't be. But it had passed an hour or so, and had saved me from listening to Whitey Henrich at the bar, telling what a hot-shot he was in the old days.

But, even if it wasn't true, the story had a hell of a big hole in it. I took another swallow and said:

"Look, Mr. Harms. How was it you didn't get the heeby-jeebies—I mean how could you avoid feeling to-

ward Irene after you married her what you did that first night you saw her? You mean this—this second sight of yours just disappeared when you took this oath to beat it?"

He gave that hard smile again and reached behind him. He pulled a cane out of the corner where it had been standing.

"Not exactly," he said. "You see, that night when I came home from Irene's and swore that oath, I had an accident—myself. I was reaching for something—perhaps a sedative—in a high bathroom cabinet. I tipped over a bottle of a very caustic acid."

He smiled that unholy smile again. "The acid struck my eyes. Nothing else, only the eyes. Strange, wasn't it, that such an—an accident should give me the only really happy years of my life?"

I sat there while this guy Harms got up and started slowly down the bar-room, toward the door, his cane just a little ahead of him, tapping gently against the floor.

I sat there as the door closed behind my Mr. Harms. I took another big gulp and then another.

"What the hell," I said to myself. "What the hell."



*Dread are the Wings of Vengeance, but None More So than
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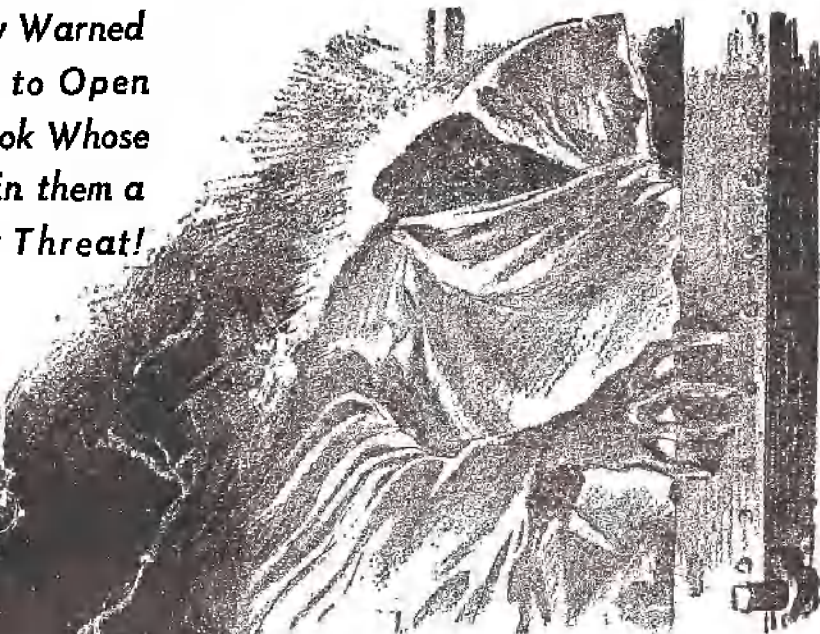
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*Professor Enderby Warned
His Visitor Not to Open
Up that Fatal Book Whose
Pages Held Within them a
Soul-Destroying Threat!*



*The form began to take a
hideous shape*

VIGIL

By
**HAMPTON
WELLS**

*Author of "Fear of the Dark,"
"The Wolf King," etc.*

IF SELF-ASSURANCE is a virtue, then the Junoesque Hermione Simmons was virtue's paragon. No person ever crossed the hewn-hickory threshold of Professor Enderby's cabin on the brink of the Susquehanna with more confidence of personal charm and welcome.

"Professor Enderby!" she accented cordially. "This wonderful old house—you're a dear to let me come!"

Professor Nathan Enderby hoisted his little, linen-clad body from the well hollowed easy chair, a long forefinger between the leaves of a book by John Ashton. He removed a pair of thick-lensed spectacles and smoothed down a curly gray forelock. His

gentle mouth opened, then closed again, in something akin to embarrassment. At a reception in New York the previous winter, he had been so injudicious as to tell Hermione Simmons where he spent his summers; but as for inviting her to visit him—well, it was too late now.

She clasped his small, sinewy hand with her long, over-manicured one. She was large for a woman, as he was small for a man, and smart grooming had given a false svelteness to her body. Only wise eyes, like the professor's mildly peering ones, would notice that her hair was too blatantly auburn, with too exact a wave; that her lips were too berry-red for nature; that her eyelashes flared too long to be real; that just beneath her jeweled ears fine white scars bespoke the face-lifter's attentions.

"Won't you sit down?" Professor Enderby was obliged to invite her.

Miss Simmons would. And she took, of all chairs in the room, that favorite from which he had risen to greet her unexpected arrival. The professor's solemn Chinese servant still lingered after having admitted this overwhelming avalanche of assurance and synthetic pulchritude.

"Fetch some drinks, Quong," ordered Enderby. "Miss Simmons, I can offer you only whiskey and soda, but it's very good."

He sought another chair, not quite as comfortable, near his littered desk. Hermione Simmons was too obviously appraising his sitting room's masculine appointments, undoubtedly scorning the oak-and-leather furniture, the rugless floor-planks, the plethora of books on stands and shelves. And he could see that she deplored the open fireplaces and the carbide lamp, even though it was a bright summer afternoon and neither was alight.

"Did I interrupt your work, or anything?" she inquired, though very patently she did not care.

"I was puzzling over something in this book of Ashton's," he admitted. "It is called, 'The Devil in Britain and America,' and—"

Without waiting for him to finish,

his guest plunged on into fresh whirls of words.

"I was driving to Chicago, and I knew that I mustn't pass by without seeing you, so I took a room at that quaint old tavern in your amazing little town; Marsville—or is it Myersville?" She broke off to stare at a signed photograph on the mantel-piece. "Who's that intriguing looking old man with the bushy hair?"

"A friend. His name is Albert Stainstein."

HERMIONE SIMMONS laughed a thrilling peal, and said that Albert Stainstein reminded her of a sheep dog. To mask Enderby's annoyance, the tactful Quong entered with two highballs on a tray.

The woman accepted one, sipped, then turned toward a shelf. "What a distinctive binding for that book," she crowed. "It's parchment! I must see it."

And she drew it from the chair without so much as a by-your-leave.

"It's bound in human skin," Professor Enderby informed her, as he took the other glass from Quong's tray.

Hermione Simmons squeaked like a large, coy rat, then giggled brightly.

"Why, Professor Enderby!" she reproved him, the book still in her red-tipped fingers. "How can you say such a bizarre thing?"

"Because it's the solemn truth. And I must ask you not to read that book."

Quong departed. Hermione Simmons laid the buff-colored volume on a smoking stand, and sipped more whiskey and soda. Her eyes widened in their collars of false lashes. "Why not?" she demanded.

"I'll try to tell you. About two hundred years ago, in that town of Myersville where you're stopping, a man was hanged."

"Lynched?"

"No, due process of colonial law. He was a witch."

"Witch?" she repeated. "How fantastic! Nobody believes in witches any more."

"But they do. This whole part of

the country believes in hexes and hexcraft, but to get back to my story. The book you see was in this man's possession when he was caught—a manuscript work that was old long before the hanging. The binding is newer, probably the work of the witch himself. And the prosecutors read only a little of the beginning, before they turned it over to a minister. That minister decided it should be buried, with appropriate prayer."

"How fantas—" But Hermione Simmons did not finish the inane repetition.

"The book was dug up a number of years later," the professor went on. "It caused a great deal of trouble. Three years ago it fell into my hands, after an unpleasant adventure."

"An unpleasant adventure?"

"Very," admitted Enderby. "For me, and for the man I got the book from. I keep it here because it would be dangerous in most hands."

"Then why not burn the thing?" she suggested, with a smile she thought superior.

"I tried once," he said. Hermione Simmons' eyes sought the book, but saw no mark of fire. "In any case, I don't think you should dip into it."

"Why, Professor Enderby?"

"Please, I must insist."

She appeared to accept that, and changed the subject at once. She gave her host news of various New Yorkers who, though he could remember them but vaguely, seemed to have sent him warm and even affectionate greeting. She spoke of numerous new dress shops, dance steps and refinements of fashionable card playing, all apparently much in vogue wherever she went, but all excruciatingly uninteresting to Enderby. Finally, in many cordial and strangely accented words, she bade him good-by. He escorted her to the door, and found it hard to dissemble his relief as she got into a vivid green roadster and drove away along the tree-lined road toward Myersville.

Returning again to his parlor, Professor Enderby again reclaimed his easy chair and assigned Quong to

the mixing of a drink rather larger and stronger than the one he had taken with Hermione Simmons. When it arrived he took it in one hand, and Ashton's book about diabolism in the other. He was reading the conclusion of the preface:

The frontispiece is supposed to be the only specimen of Satanic caligraphy in existence, and is taken from the "Introductio in Chaldaicam Linguam" by Albonesi (Pavia, 1592). The author says that by the conjuration of Ludovico Spoletano the Devil was called up, and adjured to write a legible and clear answer to a question asked him. Some invisible power took the pen, which seemed suspended in the air, and rapidly wrote what is facsimiled. The writing was given to Albonesi (who, however, confesses that no one can decipher it), and his chief printer reproduced it very accurately. I am told by experts that in some of the characters may be found a trace of Amharic, a language spoken in its purity in the province of Amhara (Ethiopia), and which, according to a legend, was the primeval language spoken in Eden.

Enderby turned to the frontispiece, which was made up of several lines of symbols, quite incomprehensible to him. Some of them suggested three-pronged forks, diabolical enough. "Facsimile of the only known specimen of the Devil's writing," read a legend below. But, if Ashton's preface was correct, this was really a printer's copy of such writing. What if one could translate it, understand it? Enderby grunted in intrigued puzzlement, and put out his hand to set aside his half-empty glass. Then, suddenly, he turned and looked hard at his smoking stand.

Surely Hermione Simmons had laid on that very stand the book bound in human skin. He had seen her do so. But now it was gone. It was not in its place on the shelf, either.

AT ONCE he called for Quong. The Chinese appeared.

"Did you pick up a book in this room, Quong?"

"No, Plofessa." The dignified, lemontinted face was reproachful. "Quong neva take up you' books, Plofessa Endaby."

"Then she sneaked it out," muttered Enderby, suddenly bristling in

strange, apprehensive anger. Aloud he said: "Quong, is the car still out of order?"

"Yes, Plofessa. Quong can't fix. Call mechanic—he come tomoillee."

Enderby got to his feet and finished his drink. He buttoned the white linen coat around his slender, spry little figure.

"Get me my hat, Quong. I'm going to walk to town."

WHEN he arrived in Myersville—the walk across fields had taken a good two hours, and dusk was gathering—Hermione Simmons had left the little inn. She had not exactly checked out, said the man at the desk in the front hall; she had hurried through the place about half an hour before, and jumped into her car at the curb in front, and driven wildly away.

"All her stuff's still upstairs," finished the clerk.

"May I go up?" asked Enderby hopefully, and the clerk nodded. People in Myersville were usually complaisant about any of the professor's requests.

Hermione Simmons' room was at the head of the stairs, and the professor let himself in with the borrowed passkey. The bed was rumped, and two open suitcases gushed expensive feminine frills. But it was on the floor that Enderby's eyes fastened themselves.

The rug had been kicked back from the clean, white-painted boards, and upon the bared space had been drawn a circle, more than a yard in diameter. It was of dull red, as were four names in big block letters, spaced evenly around the circle at the four points of the compass. In the exact center of this diagram was an intensely black stain, that might have been made by a pick, hot touch of fire, or the presence there of utter filth.

Enderby put on his spectacles, stooped and looked at the red markings, taking care not to touch them. They had apparently been made with a lipstick, of the same extreme redness as Hermione Simmons' mouth.

He read only one of the four names, grimaced over it, and knew what the other three were without looking at them.

Only once before had Professor Enderby seen the "evocation ring" of the diabolist sorcerers, but he had not forgotten how it looked nor what it meant. And this one had been completed, crudely but correctly, with all the proper words and rituals—even to the stain in the middle which showed how truly the ceremony had run its course to a climax he did not like to think about.

Straightening, the professor looked around. He saw on the bed that which he had come to reclaim. In making his way to it, he stepped with catlike gingerliness around the red-drawn circle on the floor.

The buff-colored book that Hermione Simmons had pilfered lay open on the pillow. It was written in strange but legible red characters with, at this point, a diagram similar to the circle in lipstick on the floor. Enderby glanced at the exposed pages, then caught up the book and snapped it shut. His eyes flashed worry signals.

"If she read that far," he said under his breath, "I can guess what it was that appeared. Naturally, she ran from it. And, naturally, she ran to—"

He tucked the book under his arm, left the room and went down the stairs.

"I'll make a deal with you," he said to the clerk.

"Deal?" repeated the other.

"There's a mess upstairs. But if you leave it alone and stay out of the room, I'll send over my servant to clean it up."

The clerk was curious, but sometimes things happened in Myersville that taught people not to interfere with Professor Enderby.

He studied Enderby.

"Just as you say, Professor," he agreed.

Enderby emerged from the hotel and went to a house in the next street. There he talked to a certain respectful young man, who agreed to

drive him back to his cabin beside the Susquehanna.

When Enderby sprang out at his own front door, he recognized a bright green roadster parked there. He felt that he might not be any too soon.

Hermione Simmons was again sitting in his favorite chair, but in no other way did she resemble the breezy interloper of the afternoon. She stared up wildly when he entered and spoke to her, but she did not answer. The professor passed through the room and interviewed Quong in the kitchen.

The Chinese listened closely to some rather exact directions as to the cleaning of the room at the inn. If he was amazed or daunted, his solemn face and slant eyes gave no hint. "Go now," finished Enderby. "A friend of mine is waiting at the front door with his car. You can have all day off tomorrow."

"Yes, Plofessa," assented Quong. "You be all light here?"

Enderby smiled and nodded, and Quong went out the back way.

WHEN he heard the rumble of the departing car, Enderby returned to his own sitting room. Hermione Simmons sat as he had left her. He lighted the carbide lamp, and set the front door slightly ajar.

"Let me tell you a story," he offered, but not hospitably. "Once a Russian soldier went to visit a comrade, and found him out. But a book lay open on a table—a book written in blood-colored characters, such as this one." He held up the retrieved volume, with its binding of human skin. "The strange words intrigued him, and he read them aloud. And then, in answer to the spell so ignorantly cast, there suddenly appeared—"

"Don't," It was a low but gusty response, like a puff of wind at a chimney. Hermione Simmons had awakened to life and horror. Her rouge was smeared, her hair disordered. "I didn't mean—"

"You're going to say that you did not mean any harm," broke in Enderby coldly. "I daresay you didn't.

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. And the road to hell can be traveled from either direction. Things can come from hell just as easily as things can go there."

He carefully replaced the controversial book on its shelf, and selected instead a brown-backed volume. It was *Select Cases of Conscience Touching Witches and Witchcraft*, by the Reverend John Gaule; and the date upon its flyleaf was 1646.

"Whether you want it or not," said Enderby, wiping his spectacles and putting them on, "you have procured yourself what is called a familiar—a personal spirit of evil."

Hermione Simmons shook her disordered dyed locks, in denial and horror.

The professor did not bother to argue with her.

"Have you ever heard," he began again, "of what happened when Cornelius Agrippa was lecturing at Louvain, four centuries ago? Probably not, or you wouldn't be in this present trouble, Miss Simmons. You can read about him in any library." He laid Gaule's book face down on his knee, and began to fill a pipe that looked very large for so small a man.

"Well, Agrippa's young wife had an admirer, a student, who wheedled from her the key to Agrippa's study. The student crept in, and found a most fascinating book—again all written in red, a favorite color of wizards." Professor Enderby was able to observe a trembling of Hermione Simmons' wretched, painted mouth. "With some difficulty, he deciphered aloud a few words which must have been a spell of magic; for there was a noise at the door, exactly as with the Russian soldier I have mentioned, and in there stole—"

"No!" wailed the unhappy woman. "It doesn't happen! It can't happen—not to everybody!"

"That's something of an admission, Miss Simmons—an admission that it happened to you, at least." Enderby thrust the pipe stem between his square white teeth, and struck a match. Tobacco would hardly spoil any diabolical doings, he reflected sagely—not when King James, the

witches' bane, hated it so deeply. The woman stirred in her chair.

"Don't get up," the professor said at once, with gentle insistence. "You are to sit right where you are, until I tell you to move."

Hermione Simmons subsided, gazing at him incredulously.

"I mean it," he assured her. "If you don't do as I say, I'll tie you there."

"Tie me?" she echoed faintly.

A GAIN he lifted the book on his knee. "Let me read aloud: 'Having taken the suspected witch—'"

"I'm not a witch!" she wailed hysterically.

"Not willingly, perhaps; but we have no time to argue the point." Enderby resumed his reading: "'Having taken the suspected witch, she is placed in the middle of a room upon a stool or table, cross-legged, or in some other uneasy posture.'"

He paused, and looked at her over the tops of his spectacles. Hermione Simmons appeared uneasy enough without being cross-legged, and he continued: "'If she submit not, she is then bound with cords. There she is watched and kept without meat or sleep for the space of twenty-four hours for (they say) within that time they shall see—'"

Hermione Simmons was weeping, loud enough to drown out several sentences, and Enderby had to wait for the sobs to subside before he could read on: "'—and lest it might come in some less discernible shape—'"

At last he fell silent, and perused the remainder of the passage to himself with set lips. He muttered something that sounded like "beastly," and put away that book also. Then he glanced at the clock. It was just fifteen minutes after eight, and quite dark.

Settling back in his chair, he talked to Hermione Simmons more charmingly than she deserved. Gradually the woman in the easy chair seemed to rise from her hysteria as from a slough, listening and calming the quiver of her lips. She even dabbed her hair into something like order, and made a twittery rejoinder or two.

"Am I really going to stay here all

night, Professor?" she timidly asked. "In this chair?"

"All night, and probably all day tomorrow. Without food or sleep."

"But how can I?"

"You must. I also am going to do without food or sleep. You see, we're going to have a visitor."

"I see. . . ." And her voice trailed off. Then: "You truly believe it is going to come?"

"Yes, and so do you. You saw it once already today."

"I've—I've tried not to think about it."

"Well, think now. Describe it."

She gazed at him, and courage flowed from the little professor to her.

"It came into view the way you told in those stories," she said. "First like smoke, but then taking form. And it put out hands, or something like hands—and caught hold of me—oh!"

Her eyes had turned toward the front door, which Enderby had set so slightly ajar. Something was there—a gross, crawly-surfaced lump, like a dark shoulder thrusting slowly in. Or was it no more than a cloud of particularly heavy smoke, of a sort that somehow kept from dissipating in the atmosphere? Whatever it was, a long, lean streamer of the vapor came slowly inward, its end lifting and swaying from side to side, like a half-blind snake.

Hermione Simmons shrieked, loud and shrill, so that the drums of the professor's ears rang unpleasantly. But he did not stir in his chair, nor noticeably draw tense. He watched the mystery at the door, with attention that was earnest but not fearful. In a moment the thing evaporated, or drew back.

THE woman shrank in her easy chair, growing smaller than even her tight girdling had ever made possible. Enderby rose, and with a steady hand poured water from a thermos carafe into two glasses. From a box in the top drawer of his desk he produced some small white tablets.

"Swallow two of these," he directed Hermione Simmons. "You needn't stare in such horror—they're nothing more occult than caffeine tablets."

They'll keep you from growing faint, or from going to sleep. I'm taking a dose myself."

And he did so.

The glass trembled in Hermione Simmons' over-manicured fingers. "That thing at the door," she said hoarsely. "That was how it—it looked at first."

"I know. I've been told, in similar cases. And it wanted to come in to you." Enderby blew from his pipe a swirl of smoke not unlike that exploring streamer that had shown itself briefly in the doorway. His small, slender figure relaxed easily, as though he were quite sure of what he said.

"Come it shall, within the twenty-four hours of our watch, though just now it's timid. For a witch's familiar cannot stay away. In the end, driven to your side, it must show itself in a solid form. And with a solid form I shall be able to deal."

He turned over many odds and ends in his mind. They began to shape into a plan of campaign. Rummaging in drawers of his desk, he produced first of all a metal-topped glass cylinder; then what looked like a coil of braided leather cord; and finally a stick or sliver of wood. These he arranged on the desk-top, within easy grasping distance.

Hours ticked by with very little conversation, and that little strained. Finally:

"It's nearly midnight," said Hermione Simmons dully.

"I know," nodded Enderby. "If Bolingbroke were here, he'd warn us to be on our guard."

"Bolingbroke?" The allusion mystified her.

"Yes. You need go no further than Shakespeare for him. The second part of King Richard the Second. Look yonder, at the door. Perhaps my mention of Shakespeare is a sort of evocation."

They both looked; Enderby with his calm interest, the woman with horror.

It was not smoke this time, but a semisolid and solid form, pressing through the narrow space of the door ajar, pushing its stealthy way in. It seemed to grow, rather to unfold, like

a membranous wing or a jointed limb trailing a dark garment. At the top showed a swaddled lump, like a head in a cowl. Enderby thought he saw something in the depths of the folds, a gleam as from a secret, peering eye.

Enderby held up his slim right hand, palm outward, to still the cry which he knew was rising to Hermione Simmons' lips. The same hand then took up the nearest of the objects he had arranged upon the top of his desk. More of the visitor was coming in, a further clump of draped membrane or fabric. Against the wall spread a spidery something—a clutching talon, black as soot.

ENDERBY hurled what he had taken from the desk. It whipped, sparkling, through the air, and burst like a little grenade against the wall just above that exploring talon. The air there was momentarily full of white particles, and something made a noise, like the brief rasp of a locust in flight.

Then the visitor snatched itself back from view. Enderby rose and went to the door, peering out. His nostrils flared over the smell of damp decay. He looked at the wall beside the door-jamb. The print of the talon still remained, like a narrow-rayed star drawn in smudgy grime.

"I almost got it," he remarked. "Keep your seat, Miss Simmons."

Fetching a brush from the hearth, he began to sweep the threshold.

"What did you throw?" asked Hermione Simmons fearfully.

"Salt—a whole shaker of it. If I'd made a direct hit, we would have been rid of our friend forever. Demons can't abide salt, and certain other things." He continued to sweep. "But it'll be back, and the next time it may come all the way in. That's why I'm clearing away the scattered salt that may warn of danger."

Enderby's prosaic manner restored some little assurance to his companion and she was able to resume the story of her adventure.

The entity had appeared in her room at the inn, she said, seeping up like murk from the section of floor inside the circle she had idly drawn and

lettered. Her first emotion had been of intrigued curiosity, and she had stepped across the red line. Immediately the vapor had taken on form and solidity, a cloaked figure that beneath its wrappings seemed to conceal strange deformities.

The head, cowed as they both had just seen it, had thrust close to hers, and arms or tentacles had embraced her. And she had seen piercing eyes and gross lips, that opened and showed gaunt, sharp teeth.

"I fainted," she finished, "but first I was aware—I was sure—it kissed me."

Enderby shook his gray head. "Not exactly a kiss. There's a little scratch or cut on your cheek, isn't there?"

She lifted a red-polished fingertip and quessed gingerly. "Yes. Like a burst blister."

"That's where the mouth touched—but not in a kiss." He came close, stooped and peered. His eyes narrowed behind their thick lenses. "Mmmmm—yes. A little dried blood."

Hermione Simmons was no longer able to dismiss such ideas with the word "fantastic." She only looked up with fear under her false lashes. "Like Dracula?" she suggested faintly.

"In a way, yes. But this was no vampire. It's what the ancients called a familiar. Not a new conceit; the woman whom Saul visited at En-Dor had one. There was more in colonial Salem and Hartford, and, within sixty years past, on Staten Island. And your visitor wouldn't have been the first of his kind in Pennsylvania.

"I've a book here by a Mr. Aurand of Harrisburg—but perhaps you're a bit tired of my books. In any case, I think we have here the truth of the matter. Where there is a witch, look for her familiar demon, waiting for her to give it evil work to do."

"But I—I didn't dream of anything like that," Hermione Simmons managed to protest. "I haven't any work for it to do, and so perhaps—"

"Then," Enderby finished for her, "it will destroy you in anger. When evil is released, it must strike somewhere, unless it's destroyed. And that's why we wait now. The thing is obliged to win to you once in every

twenty-four hours and taste your blood—that's a part of the machinery of witchcraft, too complex to explain. Yes, we'll see this visitor a third time; and the third time may be the traditional charm."

HERMIONE SIMMONS looked ready to faint, and Professor Enderby forced her to swallow another caffeine tablet.

"'Sin crouches at the door,'" he quoted. "That's from the Bible, Miss Simmons, another book it would do you good to read. Now to improve on scripture, and get that thing inside."

Dawn came, and Hermione Simmons expressed relief at its coming.

"Won't we be safe during the day?" she asked.

"Not entirely, but we can relax a little." Enderby was hungry, but he would not eat in the presence of the woman, lest she beg for the food she must not have. He made a pot of coffee in the kitchen, with the door open and an eye on the woman in her chair. They each had three cups and, as the sunlight and warmth increased, the professor brought a basin and Hermione Simmons bathed her weary eyes.

The day wore on.

"Are we going to wait here forever?" wailed the woman at last, eying her ravaged makeup in the mirror of her vanity case.

Enderby shook his rumpled head. "No, not forever. It's getting toward evening; our sitting will last only twenty-four hours at most. At the end of that time—but something is sure to happen first."

Eight o'clock was striking somewhere, far off and faint. Enderby looked at his own clock, plain in the light of the rekindled carbide lamp. It was exactly on time. He tried not to yawn, and for the hundredth time filled and lighted his big pipe.

"Fifteen more minutes," he said very softly.

As if in response to his voice, there was noise in the early darkness outside. Hermione Simmons turned quickly against the back of her chair, as though she would climb it for safety. Enderby faced the door with-

out rising. The narrow aperture was widening, slowly and steadily.

A figure stepped upon the threshold, expressionless of face and silent of foot, but recognizable.

"Oh," breathed Hermione Simmons in instant relief, "it's only your house man."

"On time to the dot, Quong," Enderby greeted the bowing Chinese. "Did you have a good time on your day off?"

"Yes, Plofessa," replied the soft, accented voice of his servant. The quiet feet still lingered on the threshold of hewn hickory, the graven yellow face slanted downward as if to study something on the floor. "Is there salt or something here, Plofessa?"

"There was, but I swept it away, Quong. Why are you standing there? Come in."

It was a strangely diffident and cautious Quong that moved forward into the bright light. The long yellow hands, clenched tightly, rubbed their knuckles together, as if nervously. The slant, jet eyes turned to Enderby.

"Evellything been all light?" asked Quong.

"Up to now, yes," replied the professor, somewhat enigmatically.

"I sink maybe I help some way?"

"Yes. Get a good supper for us," directed Enderby. "A bottle of white wine, if there's any left, and some chops."

AT MENTION of food, Hermione Simmons sat up. The bright eyes of Quong regarded her interestedly.

"Is the lady all light?" he asked.

"Don't worry about me," she said, and smiled urbanely. Her eyes were on the clock, that was ticking off the last minutes of the danger period. Quong moved slowly toward her chair.

"Anything I can do, lady—" he began.

"There's just one thing, Quong," said Professor Enderby mildly, his hand sliding across the desk to the coil of braided thong. "If you'll just—*stay where you are!*"

The last four words exploded almost as one in the still air of the

room, and Enderby, swift as a gray cat, sprang from his chair upon the yellow man.

Quong's voice rose to a windy howl, and he tried to leap away from Enderby and toward Hermione Simmons. His hands unclenched, spreading toward her as if to clutch, and there was a flash of sicklelike claws, such as never grew on human fingers. His mouth, writhing open to his cry, exposed narrow, cruel-pointed tusks, white as china and sharp as needles.

Enderby's free hand slipped from a clutch at the yellow wrist, but the looped cord fell around Quong's neck and drew tight. With strange strength Enderby whipped Quong backward and down, like a snared rabbit. The parchment face twisted into a hideous and horrifying mask of rage, the body distorted strangely as it thumped the floor. The air was suddenly charged with an acrid smell of animal musk.

Quong was not Quong.

But Enderby had pinned his captive with a sharp knee, and drew the braided noose tighter, strangling a coughing roar. His own little linen-clad body could not blot from view all of the struggling shape he had felled, and what could be seen was strangely and suddenly dreadful. Hermione Simmons, staring in horror, thought of scrawny apes, then of bats and reptiles, and of spiders unthinkably huge—

Enderby's free hand darted back and up toward the desk, his arm making itself needfully long. He clutched the last curiosity he had laid out ready. For a moment he poised it on high—a child's toy, whittled crudely out of pale wood into a dagger shape. With all the strength of his lean, hard arm, the professor drove it downward, into the center of the changing, churning form that was becoming not a form.

There was another ear-twisting shriek, this time of agony and despair, and a sudden bursting forth of sooty vapor that hid from view a final unthinkable metamorphosis. Back from this obscuring cloud sprang Professor Enderby. His hair and glasses were awry, and his nose crinkled in disgust as he straightened erect.

"Whoof!" he snorted. "What a filthy business!" He turned to Hermione Simmons, and his voice became calm again. "It's all over. Even demons can be destroyed."

She stared at the vanishing swirl of soot. It was transparent once more, and she could see through it. "But it—it's still there!" she quavered.

He shook his head.

"No. Look again. Only a black stain on the floor, such as it made when it first appeared to you at the inn. I had braided silver wire into my noose—it held the creature, where an ordinary bond would have been useless. The stab of that whitethorn spike found whatever mystery passed for its heart. Whitethorn is a holy wood, Miss Simmons. Read about it in Sir John Mandeville, or James Grant, or *The Golden Bough*. Maybe you'd like this piece for a souvenir."

HE HELD out the wooden dagger. She rose from her chair, but was afraid to accept the thing.

"And to think," she chattered tremulously, "that it was your servant, all the time."

Enderby smiled indulgently, as at a dull child. "Wrong again. It wasn't Quong. The demon, desperate to

reach you, took Quong's shape in an effort to deceive us. Just as you, Miss Simmons, dye your hair and glue on false lashes and rouge your face—"

Again a sound at the door made them both turn quickly.

Quong was coming in. He smiled shyly, glad to be home. It was hard, now, to see how the other creature had ever hoped to be mistaken for this honest looking retainer.

"Bring water and suds, Quong," the professor directed at once. "Clean up this mess. Say the words that I taught you for that other cleaning job at the inn. After that, we will want food."

Hermione Simmons had become herself again. She gazed with an extravagant show of rapture at her deliverer.

"Oh, I think you're wonderful!" she twittered. "I'll never be able to repay you! Anything you ask—"

Enderby looked up at her calculatingly. "I'll ask three things."

"Yes?" Hermione Simmons coyly half held out a hand to him.

"Wash off that paint and keep it off," said Professor Enderby. "Then eat your supper without talking. And finally—aren't you in a hurry to get to wherever you're going? Well, then, don't let me keep you."

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The Soul of the Cello

By MARIA MORAVSKY

Author of "The Great Release,"
"Let Me Out," etc.

ATALL, stooping lad of eighteen, with sallow face and burning black eyes—that was my picture in early youth. The sordid poverty of the New York East Side; the burning desire to possess a cello fit for a concert—these were the circumstances which created a crime.

Have you ever wanted anything so passionately that the desire would not let you sleep? Then you will understand me. Longing for that antique violin-cello I saw at a private exhibit of a New York millionaire was like being feverishly in love. I have never



I believe to this day that my cello has a soul

The Haunting Strains of Immortal Melody Envelop a Devotee of Music in a Strange Web of Song!

wanted anything so much in my life.

But I am jumping ahead of myself, as we Russians say. Let me tell you how I first saw my cello.

I was a child prodigy, playing for money since the age of eleven. Hence the diminutive "Misha" which stuck to me even though I am bald now and my youth is but a memory.

My parents encouraged me all they could. They bought me a cheap, new cello which grated on my sensibilities as a musician. Ach, such a silly toy-instrument! I was ambitious. I wanted a cello fit for the immortals.

And then—I met that adorable instrument! I can not talk about it in terms of an inanimate thing, that is why I say "met", as if it were a human being. For I believe to this very day that my cello has a soul.

A New York millionaire, a connoisseur of musical instruments, was giving a free exhibit of his treasures. Was it charity or vanity that prompted him? It might have been both.

I read about it in the paper. I put on my best suit of ready-made clothes, which hung loosely on my thin frame, and spent an agonizing half hour trying to achieve an artistically-tied tie.

I was vain then, in the remote days of my youth. With my black hair slicked carefully back, a clean handkerchief in my pocket, my hands moist with nervous perspiration, I hurried to the exhibition on that early Winter afternoon.

It was on the other side of Manhattan, on the then fashionable Riverside Drive, but I had to go on foot, saving carfare. The occasional concerts in cheap halls of the East Side did not net much.

THE small, brownstone house with an elaborate crest on its front door, seemed inadequately lighted. I wondered whether I was too early. To be sure, the dark had fallen, but days were short. The exhibit was scheduled for five o'clock. I had no watch.

I walked in, and saw that the place was lighted entirely by candles. The owner, I was told later, thought it in keeping with his antiques. The sense of style, you see.

But that dim candlelight gave the lofty hall an eerie aspect. Dark shadows seemed to lurk in the corners. The great electric candelabrum in the ceiling threw up a distorted outline, like the tentacles of some deep sea monster. I felt creepy as I stood before the large, carved, highly-polished table on which the instruments were displayed.

The host explained to the hushed, deferential crowd:

"These six cellos are the best in my collection. I bought them in Italy. The oldest one was made over three hundred years ago."

He gave the name of the Italian town and the cello maker, but I forgot them as soon as I heard them. For he passed the bow over the strings of the great, shining cello, and my heart leaped up. I have never heard such a mellow, deep, soul-penetrating sound!

From that moment on, I was consumed with the violent desire to possess that cello. I found one hundred and one arguments why I should have it. The thing was not made to be buried in a private collection. The owner was not a musician. The cello was meant to be heard by thousands.

I saw enchanted listeners, I imagined their eyes burning with admiration, their cheeks hot with excitement, even as my own.

Instead of listening to the host's lecture on the methods of cello makers, I scanned the room for the possible ways of secret entrance. I already planned to steal the cello.

Nothing could be easier than to hide oneself in one of the dimly lighted corners, while the crowd was leaving the hall. I stood there, crouching behind an armored figure of some medieval knight, until the last visitor had departed and the candles were snuffed out.

Then I heard the host addressing his valet.

"Don't wait up for me, Rodney. I'm going to dine at the club and sleep there. This house is too damp when the wind is blowing from the river. I wish I never inherited the darn old barn." The last words were spoken after the valet had left.

I heard the owner walking down the

creaky stairs. I heard the key scraping in the lock. My sense of hearing, always acute, magnified all the sounds. Finally there was silence, welcome silence.

I left my hiding place cautiously. I almost screamed when my awkward foot caught against the armor and it jangled faintly. It seemed to me that the servant would surely hear me.

But all was quiet when I approached the table with its antique treasures. My hand shot forward. Just then I saw a shaft of moonlight reaching through the narrow Gothic window by the side of the fireplace. It fell on the coveted cello, forming an aura about it.

IN THAT pale, wintry moonlight, it seemed a thing of ethereal beauty. Its highly polished wood shone like satin. Its strings seemed to quiver with suppressed melodies.

As I was about to snatch it from the table, I heard a faint sound. I started, almost paralyzed with fear. Yes, it was the sound of the cello!

Yet I never touched it. Even after all these years I remember clearly that I was a step or two removed from the table when I heard that sound. It was the ancient cello come to life of its own volition, uttering a warning sound to the would-be thief.

But even that horrifying phenomenon did not stop me. I blamed my nerves for it. I dismissed it as futile imagining. With the feeling of exultant guilt in my heart, I grasped the shining instrument and pressed it to my breast as if it were a beloved woman.

We crept down. I say "we" because all the while I had a feeling that another human being was with me, enlivening that mystic cello.

I don't quite remember how I got out of the house, which one of the back doors was incautiously left open. I only remember running along the wintry, wind-swept Drive, with the unwieldy, bulky instrument in my arms, I forgot to steal its case.

Suddenly I saw a policeman and slowed my pace. Instinct rather than reasoning warned me that I might be suspected if I ran like that. As we were passing by the red-faced police-

man, stamping his feet to keep himself warm, I heard a shrill note coming out of my cello. It was for all the world like a scream for help!

I was terrified. Fortunately, the policeman was too occupied with his own comfort to hear the devilish thing screaming. I pressed the strings to my shaking body, to muffle the terrifying sound, and ran blindly into the first narrow street leading across town.

The East Side seemed like a haven. They don't ask you questions when you are carrying a caseless instrument on those streets. People mind their own affairs there, pretending that they don't see guilt. I might have been carrying the cello to a pawn shop. I might have been a street musician. I felt safe on those crowded streets.

When I came home, my parents were out. I found a note telling me that they had gone to a wedding, and asking me to join them. But what did I care for any earthly wedding? I, wedded to my art, with that marvelous, priceless, sweet voiced cello!

I sat in my cubicle of a room and played it with self abandon. Never had I heard such melodies coming from a man-made thing! I imagined angels in heaven praising Jehovah with the instruments like this.

The cello sang with a voice that was almost human. It mourned my starved youth, it rejoiced in my ambitions. It was tender, compassionate, understanding.

It soothed, it inspired. It was a solace and a challenge. It was a cello, a thing with a soul!

I loved it. My feeling of guilt only intensified my passion. I felt like a man having a secret love affair. But I could not imagine any lover more desirable than my cello. It was a pure affection, generous affection, although born of crime. My only regret was that no crowds could hear that cello. For it was too well-known to be displayed. Its description, no doubt, was in the hands of the police the day after it was stolen.

I ceased to read the papers for fear of finding it. I hid the instrument even from my parents. I dared to play it only in the rare hours when they were both away.

My father kept a second-hand book store. I mean he sold second-hand books there—my English is still wobbly, in spite of my many years' residence in the States. It is because my chief means of expression is music.

But I could not express myself all alone. Every artist needs an audience. I could not think of playing on the cheap new cello I had used before I got the Sweet-Voiced One, for that is what I called it to myself, in Russian. My people were the educated kind of Hebrews. They belonged to the Russian intelligentsia.

The Sweet-Voiced One seemed at times reluctant to answer the pleading of my fingers. At times it acted as if possessed of its own will. Instead of enchanting melodies, it would utter harsh, sharp sounds, going against my will.

Much as I tried to blame it on my own faults in playing, it came to me forcibly that the cello had a spirit, a rebellious spirit of its own.

The thought depressed me like a stormy cloud, dampening and darkening my life. I no longer played in the cheap halls of the East Side. I became a parasite in my poor father's home. I spent day after day waiting for an opportune moment to play my cello in secret.

But it was impossible to hide it indefinitely. One day Mother found it hidden among my clothes when she was hanging them out to air, on one of those days of general housecleaning women are so partial to.

"Where did you get that cello?" she asked me severely.

She knew I had no money of my own. Every cent was counted in our household.

"I . . . it was given to me," I stammered.

She saw that I lied. I never could lie to her. She called in Father. We lived next to the store. He made a terrible scene, demanding that I return the stolen treasure. He had read about the theft in the papers.

I could not bring myself to do it. It was not so much the fear of prison, as the intolerable fear of losing that incomparable means of musical expression. I thought that I would rather

die than part with my wonderful cello.

THAT night, exhausted by the persuasions and threats of my parents, I went to sleep without undressing, with the cello clasped in my arms. I was like a child loath to part with its beloved toy. I had wept hysterically. I think Mother thought me slightly crazy, for she dissuaded my father from taking the cello by force.

I woke up with a start at midnight. There was the late moon streaming pale shafts of light through the dusty panes of my cubicle-like room. Mother had washed them only yesterday, during the general housecleaning, yet they seemed to be covered with some sort of misty cobwebs, reflecting pale rainbows.

My hand jerked at the strings of the instrument and I went cold all over. How foolish it was for me to take it to bed with me! What if I had broken the delicate, satinlike wood?

I examined the cello carefully, tenderly, as a mother would a child. No, it was intact. Not a scratch on its polished surface. Suddenly I wanted to convince myself that it was absolutely sound, and, in spite of the lateness of the hour, passed the bow over the strings.

I gasped in horror! Not a sound came out!

I looked the instrument over once more. Not a crack, not a slit. Its surface gleamed darkly, like a polished stone, like an unbroken sheet of calm water. Yet it was mute, mute!

I wanted to scream in anguish. I laid the voiceless cello on the window ledge and dropped my head on my folded forearms, gave way to a silent attack of sobbing.

And then, I heard a faint melody!

I did not move. I was paralyzed with wonder, as my cello played by itself. It was a faint music as if coming from an immeasurable distance. It was like the muffled music of the spheres.

I thought about the angels praising Jehovah with the instruments like this. But, no, this was an earthly music. One could hear the babbling of a stream in it. One could almost

distinguish the voices of singing birds. Birds singing of love in May, during the mating season. In some beautiful, unknown country. A country of musical dreams.

Something made me lift my tear-stained face and look out of the window. There, through the cobweb mists, I saw a picture I shall never forget.

It was a panorama of a foreign city, with canals instead of streets, with tall spires of churches and marble fronts of palaces bathed in bright moonlight. My window seemed to be situated in some high tower. I could see the dream city below, as though from a skyscraper or a plane.

Its narrow water streets were alive with slim black boats manned by swarthy men in scarlet-lined cloaks. I could see it clearly in the light of innumerable bright lanterns. They were hung over the hunched bridges and along the narrow sidewalks, swaying over the water, their reflections awakening in it pale rainbows.

Beautiful women reclined in the noiseless-moving boats, singing to the accompaniment of guitars. But all of a sudden I realized that all and every sound of that harmonious holiday emanated from one single cello—my cello—uniting everything in melody.

I turned in the direction of the bed on which I had left the stolen instrument. It was no longer there. It seemed to be poised in midair. After my eyes got used to the dusk in the room, I saw the faint outline of a man in strange clothes holding the cello and playing on it.

"I made it!" he said in a sibilant whisper, which suddenly hushed the music. "You stole it. You will have to return it."

I HEARD those words with my soul rather than with my ears, for the music continued to flow with them, as if they were just a motive, a musical motive and not the harsh words:

I made it.
You stole it.
You must return it.

It was like a song, the cruel meaning softened by the melody. It was like a hypnotizing admonition. I had to heed it.

"Take the last look at my beautiful city. This cello can conjure the spirit of that city. The spirit of Venice."

The instrument was silent now, yet I could remember its music. I could render it myself, I was sure of it. I could have played it even better than the cello maker. I was exultant over it. I was sure that I could move people to great enthusiasm if allowed to play it before the thousands. But no, that could not be. I was a thief. I could never dare to pass my bow over those enchanted strings in public.

I was in despair. Mentally I invented one hundred and one new excuses for possessing that cello unlawfully. In agonizing silence, I was pleading with the ghost of the music, in my thoughts only, that I be allowed to keep the Sweet-Voiced One. I said: "This cello was meant to be heard by someone who can appreciate it. That rich man is but a collector. He doesn't know the ABCs of music. He would keep it there, in prison as it were, with his valet dusting it and polishing it, like a mummy in its plush-lined coffin. And I can play it. I CAN play it!"

The ghost was unmoved. He pointed to the door.

"Must I return it and deliver myself to the police?" I pleaded again. "I'm an artist. I may become a great artist. I may bring joy to many. Oh, please, can't I keep the cello?"

The ghost was inexorable. He made a step toward the door and motioned me to follow him.

Cursing and pleading in turns, despair in my heart, I followed the apparition out into the frosty night. I forgot to put on my coat, and all the winds of the universe seemed to blow through my threadbare clothes.

The violent wind seemed to sweep me along, so I reached the connoisseur's home with lightning swiftness. I saw the old house ablaze with lights. The old man must have overcome his aversion to electricity, I thought. When I entered, miraculously unnoticed. I saw that it was a stag party, at the end of a supper.

The very same table which had held the six precious cellos on the day of the exhibit, was now loaded with half-

empty dishes. The white cloth covering it was stained with wine, and to my distorted imagination those stains looked like spilled blood. The guests were animated, hilarious. They stared at me with amused surprise.

"How did you get here, young man?" the host asked me, not unkindly. "Your face is familiar somehow."

Only then he noticed the cello in my arms. "Why, it's the stolen cello!" he cried out.

I felt suddenly resentful toward that paunchy old man, with his eyes bloodshot from too much drinking, with his face showing his unwise excesses. Those unsteady hands, to hold my cello, the instrument of the immortals. Never!

Inspired by sudden, rebellious courage, definitely foreign to my native, rather timid, character, I shouted:

"Yes, I stole it, but I'm not going to give it back! This instrument is too good to remain idle in a private collection. It should be heard by multitudes or . . ." I lifted it above my head, about to smash it.

MY DESPAIRING gesture was stopped by an unseen hand. To my surprise, I heard the host's voice, singularly void of anger:

"This boy must be mad. He talks as if he were in love with my cello."

"I'm not mad. I am in love with it. I can play it, hear me? I CAN play it, for thousands of happy listeners to hear! I'm entitled to it!"

"Well, why not show me that you can," my host retorted, with a mildly derisive smile.

Upon hearing that ironical invitation, my hands suddenly grew numb with nervousness. I became so self-conscious that I could not even lift my bow. It was the most complete stage fright that had ever possessed me.

I stood, full of unbearable agony, shamed beyond words, utterly impotent. I had a mad desire to run away, to hide my shame in the river.

And then, as I deliberated between suicide and murder, hating the man who challenged me, I felt some unseen fingers touching my hands.

That touch was like a miraculous balm to my soul. All of a sudden the terrible numbness passed. My hands became steady, my mind cleared. And, from an immeasurable distance, I seemed to hear the first notes of the Venice melody.

"I'll play for you the musical story of the 'Soul of Venice,'" I said.

I disclaim all the credit for that performance. Even as I heard the enchanting sounds rise under my nimbly-moving bow, I knew all the while that it was the dead cello maker, the master of his craft, who put life into his immortal instrument. It was his spirit, proudly demanding to be heard. It was his pride in his instrument which craved expression under my obedient fingers. I understood it now. He wanted me to bring his cello back, so it could be heard by all the world.

After a long silence, when the last echo of the "Soul of Venice" departed into Eternity, my host spoke:

"You are a genius, my boy. I'll see to it that thousands of people hear you and YOUR cello."

CLOTHESPIN NOSE



Cold make breathing difficult? Nose feel "clamped in a clothespin?" Put a Luden's in your mouth. As it dissolves it releases cool menthol vapor—which, with every breath, helps relieve clogged nasal passages, unclamp "clothespin nose!"



FOR LOVE OF A

By **MANLY WADE
WELLMAN**

*Author of "Half Bull," "For Fear of
Little Men," etc.*



A Lovely Seeress Conjures Up Magic

WITCH

*A Complete Novelet
of Weird Prophecy*

CHAPTER I

Under a Curse

HOBdene was only a hard-held fort against the uncut American wilderness. A double row of log cabins, each cabin set chuck-a-block to its neighbor, all doors facing to the court between the rows, and only loop-holes instead of windows turning to the forest. The two ends of the court were shut off by upright palisades, one pierced with a great gate that looked upon the long, uneven trail to the shore settlements far in the east. The other set with a smaller gate, little more than a wicket, toward the bright, clear stream called Nhamawusk—spear-mint—by the Indians, because of its bracing chill.

There were clearings for the corn patches, and where the few cattle and sheep could graze. Beyond these, the forest stood defiant, seeming to threaten these audacious invaders, to promise them pain, death—and worse.

And danger was real in those shadowed thickets. Every male over the age of fourteen was fighter as well as farmer, ever ready to beat back a savage foray. Every woman was, by necessity, an expert bullet-molder and wound-dresser.

As dire as Indian warfare, was the chance of starvation. The scanty harvests, the deer and bears and turkeys shot by the hunters were all community property, every soul sharing them. Nor did the settlement have parasites. That was the care of Captain Nele Foraker.

Foraker was the best shot, the wisest hunter, the coolest head in a land where all men had to be excellent in such respect. Therefore he was, by vote of his forty fellow-settlers, "Captain" Nele Foraker—which meant



*Huge demons, awakened by
her trance, dispersed the
savages*

to Further the Conquest of Wilderness!

that he led the people of Hobdene in necessary battle against the Indians. He settled all disputes and interpreted all laws, read from the prayer-book when they judged a Sunday was due, said last rites over the frequent victims of fever, savage arrows, or other frontier mishaps. He set hours and conditions of labor, leading the toilers himself with mattock or scythe or axe, and adopted the policy which another captain, John Smith, had decreed at Jamestown in Virginia some sixty years before: "He who does not work shall not eat."

It was softly said that Captain Foraker was a gentleman of blood and coat-armor, who had turned his back on the silken court of England's second Charles. Whatever his reasons, they must have been good ones. He was the sort of man who never had a poor reason for anything.

On an evening in bright May, after a bachelor-cooked supper of venison and hoe-cake, Captain Foraker ventured outside the stockade to taste the spring air.

THE setting sun poured rosy light upon an active figure in buckskin shirt, leggins and moccasins, and wide, unplumed hat. The waist was girt with a long rapier and a well kept flintlock pistol. Captain Foraker's curly black hair was long, and so were his tanned face and his proud, lean nose. He shaved his chin, and so looked less than his thirty-six years, but his mustaches showed as sharp as his sword, his wits, or his black eyes.

He hummed to himself a song by John Wilmot, whom he had known in England when both were lads:

All my past life is mine no more,
The flying hours are gone
Like transitory dreams giv'n o'er,
Whose images are kept in store
By memory alone.

Well, he reflected, John Wilmot was now Earl of Rochester, and he, Nele Foraker, chief of a desperate and forgotten garrison in the wilderness. Nobody at home could say for sure where that garrison was—in southernmost New England, or northernmost Virginia, or neither.

But Foraker was not daunted or displeased. He had done wonders—a fair harvest last autumn, a good-spirited and healthy following and now, after a cold winter's skirmishing, honorable peace with Sangunga, chief of the Indian tribes about him.

And the air of the land was sweet, and a gentleman could take a stroll in finer woods than environed London, without hearing aught to vex his soul. . . .

But in the midst of Nele Foraker's reverie, that same sweet evening air was rent by a loud cry, the cry of a woman in mortal fear and pain.

He did not pause to listen or decide. His hand flew to his hilt, and his moccasined feet were speeding before the echo of the scream had died. Crashing through a scrub thicket, squeezing otterlike between close-set trees, he sprang across a dry brook course and came out upon a bend of the twilight trail, eyes glaring and rapier out, ready for use.

Four figures panted and struggled—three naked Indians, one white woman in dark kirtle and white cap. She was thrust down upon her knees by two assailants who held her by arms and throat, while the third lifted a war hatchet.

Before any of the group saw or knew he was near, Nele Foraker sprang in among them. With the rapier's heavy basket guard he uppercutted the Indian with the hatchet and knocked him spinning into a clump of early thistles. The others released their prey and shrank before the threatening point. Foraker knew them both.

"Dogs and liars!" he roared in their tongue. "Is this how you respect the pipe-smoking, the promises, that passed between your chief and me? Are you not bound to a truce with white men?"

The woman rose shakily to her feet, and the Indians fell back from her, sidling around Foraker as though to keep between them and her.

"Jeebi!" stammered another of the Indians. "Jeebi!"

"Do you call her evil spirit, you rank simple heathen?" Foraker roared. "She is but an English lass, and—" He

broke off, before he added that she was a young and lovely one to boot.

"We break no peace," the third Indian ventured to plead. "She is not of your people, though she seems so. Indeed, she was cast out by the English who dwell by the Great Water, and came to this country as a fugitive, with us hired to carry her possessions."

A BROWN hand pointed to where two canvas-bound packs had fallen at the trail's edge.

"You walked hither from the sea, without horse or cart?" Foraker asked the young woman in English. "Brave lass!" Then, to the red men: "Your offense is the sorer because you turned against one who paid for your good services."

"She is *jeebi*—a spirit, a demon," insisted one of the two standing Indians.

"We found her alone on the trail, walking this way, stooping beneath her bundles," the first spokesman hastily explained. "By signs she let us know that she was in danger from the English. She offered us things—a shiny glass that shows back the face like still water, a little knife with a blade that folds, and a string of red beads from her neck. We thought to bring her to you."

"Go on," prompted Foraker, without lowering his ready rapier.

The Indian continued:

"We started—three days ago. We were five then. After our first night's camp, we were four. The man left on guard sat dead by the fire, his face drawn with fear, no mark on his body. We wondered and grieved, but did not suspect. Burying our friend, we came another day's journey. That night, another sentry died. We kept up our march. Knowing we were but a few steps from your fort, we did not stop to camp this evening, and then we learned—"

The moon was rising to replace the sunken sun, and by its pale glow Foraker saw the fear on the dark face of the savage, as he hesitantly paused.

"She began to moan and breathe heavily, as if in pain," he went on in a low, hushed voice. "Then she trembled, and fell on her knees. And from

her body rose something misty, that began to take terrible shape—"

He broke off again, and quieted his shaking limbs. "Had one of us been alone with her, he would have died at its touch. But we took courage from one another, faced it boldly, and it vanished. Then we sought to kill her for a wicked sorceress."

The brave that Foraker had knocked down scrambled back to his feet. Yelling fiercely, he hurled his ax. Foraker dodged just in time, spun swiftly to meet a rush. His ready rapier stabbed through the biceps of one of the savage's arms. The warrior dropped a knife and drew away, the fight out of him.

"Begone!" Foraker ordered the Indians. "This is ill doing for those who call themselves my friends. Tell your chief that I require satisfaction at his hands."

He glared the Indians off the trail and watched them slink away among the trees.

"And now, mistress," he said to the young woman, "what have you to say to this talk of a monster rising from your body to slay savages?"

"'Tis true," she replied. Her words, the first he had heard from her lips, were soft and level, and he liked the sound of her voice. "I am—I suffer under a curse, good sir. Perhaps 'twould be better if yonder Indians had risen—"

Foraker thought her hysterical. He brushed aside what seemed the beginning of a strange, mad confession.

"Not so. Come to the fort." Then he remembered his manners, doffed his hat and bowed with all the grace of a courtier. "I am Captain Foraker, at your service, fair mistress."

"I am—Melison Hargrove."

She paused, as though she expected the name to tell him something. But though he seemed to have heard it long ago, he could not remember where.

"Captain," she went on at last, "do you truly offer me shelter?"

"Aye, do I, and comfort withal. Come, before those red fools have other nightmares and hold us to account."

He sheathed his rapier, hoisted her

two bundles, and so led her to the fortified settlement of Hobdene.

CHAPTER II

Night Attack

A NEW white face was novelty enough to set every Hobdenean staring, but Foraker had other things to do than make introductions. He issued crisp orders to the throng who loitered around the trail gate in the still evening.

"Inside, all! Fetch a supply of water, for siege. Drive the stock within the walls. Winford and Sallet, mount guard at the gates, and Figg to the lookout tower. The peace with the Indians is at an end, I fear, for that I stood by this damsel."

Men in leather jerkins, women in patched homespun, barelegged children, hurried to obey. But a few remained, a trio who looked on the newcomer as if they needed no introduction to her. A lank graybeard stepped close.

"Aye, 'tis Mel Hargrove, as I am a true man!" he cackled. "Mel, child, happy these eyes to see you. Remember you my good wife here? And my son Aran?" He gestured to a huge, vacant-faced lout of a man, who ogled and grinned. "You, too, were forced to quit England, is it? You shall make one of our family, Mel, and welcome—"

But Foraker saw that Melison Hargrove shrank from this greeting, even as the Indians had shrunk from her. He stopped the old fellow's chatter with a flourish of his hand.

"Enow, Goodman Greensheaf. You have work to do, I think, like all of us. To it, then." He turned and addressed the girl. "Mistress, I make you welcome to mine humble hut."

And he led her into the stockade, and to his quarters.

The three Greensheafs watched curiously, and somehow mockingly.

Foraker had a cabin midway of one of the rows, small but snug, built of notched logs with clay plaster chink-

ing. In one corner, on a shelflike bunk, an Indian bed of fir tips and blankets was made up. A table and two benches of split logs, a shelf with several well-thumbed old books, a fireplace, several bright cooking utensils—these completed the furnishings. On pegs in the walls hung two muskets, a spare sword, and some pieces of armor.

"I make you welcome," he said again, and drew a brand from the fire to kindle a tallow rushlight. "Now, before I go to mine employments for defense, had you not better tell me about yourself—coolly and truthfully?"

The young woman sat on the nearest bench. Her face was a pale ellipse, with a lovely trembling mouth and blue eyes as big as two-shilling pieces.

"I am Melison Hargrove, and I am three-and-twenty," she said. "More than that I—I know not how to tell."

"Nay, speak as to a brother, a father," he urged. His thirteen extra years seemed a great margin of age—too great. "I saved your life today, and I warrant you my friendship."

She sighed deeply, and her words were only a murmur. "If," she tried again, "if I said I was a—a witch—"

"Nay," he objected at once. Years ago he had read Reginald Scot's "Discoverie of Witchcraft," and shared that work's skepticism. "I am no school child, Mistress, to be frightened by old gaffers' tales of puckles and bogles. I pray you, deal honestly with me."

"So I strive to do!" she flashed back with considerable heat. "You do make me out a liar before I finish." Then, more calmly: "The name of Hargrove is known to many as that of witches. My grandmother, the wise woman of Devon—"

"Aye, so!" exclaimed the captain, for he remembered now.

THE creepy tale had been still fresh in his own childhood, of the woman who had done magic, plagued her enemies, and raised the foul fiend himself in an old Druid lair. Her name had been—Melison Hargrove. And this, her namesake, was a granddaughter.

"You know about her, I see," the young woman sighed. "My father, her son, was almost borne to the same scaffold with her, but since evidence was feeble against him, he was only imprisoned. Later, during Cromwell's wars, he was set free, and the charge forgotten until King Charles came back to his throne. Then it was given report that I—I had a familiar spirit. And that, Captain, is a hanging crime. Well"—and her voice as she finished was almost bright—"if you are master here, the law is in your hands. Having saved me, I give you leave to punish me."

"Soft," he made reply, filling his old stone pipe and lighting it to gain time.

He mused over the shaky talk of the Indians, their talk of how from Melison Hargrove's body had risen a spectery terror. He came to a decision.

"You speak freely, calmly, of these things," he said. "'Tis not the way of the guilty so to do. If they are truth, the truth is natural." He blew smoke. "I hold by Sir Francis Bacon, and before him with Thomas Aquinas, that all things are of Nature. Who speaks of the supernatural, speaks only of matters beyond his grasp and ken. I pray you, what befell when the report was made?"

"I fled in a ship to Holland, and thence to New Amsterdam, knowing that the Dutch settlers made no great matter of witches."

"New Amsterdam is fallen to the English, and is now named New York," reminded the captain.

"That happened while our ship was still at sea. I landed at the dock, and found myself suspected as a fugitive. My case was looked into. A letter was sent to England, and an answer came that a witch-finder was on the way." She shuddered.

"Hum!" said Captain Foraker.

He knew about witch-finders—strange officials, knowing or purporting to know all about magic, its discovery and destruction. Some were sincere, most were charlatans; all were paid according to their convictions and executions. Such a person, armed with a warrant and set on one's trail, was apt to be a sore trouble.

"I fled again," went on Melison

Hargrove. "I came here, hoping to hide."

"You did well," approved Foraker. "Hark you, I hold not by these witch tales. I do think that your neighbors at home might have shown you mercy, and made study of your case as a wondrous illness rather than crying out upon you. As to the Indian story, I count it not a fly. Bide safe here, Mistress Hargrove."

He bethought himself of the Greensheaf family, of their mocking words to the girl, and her patent dislike and fear of them.

"As to these Greensheafs," he quickly explained. "They are new among us, not over-pleasant or over-useful. If they molest you against your will, say but the word—"

But at that moment Melison Hargrove sprang to her feet. She lifted a hand, tilted her head as though to listen.

"Danger!" she gasped. "Danger!"

"Nay, I hear naught, and the sentiments—"

"The water gate!" cried the girl. "Your guard hath dozed, and is stricken down! Indians creep upon us! Hurry, fight, or the place is taken!"

She caught up his pistol from the table, and rushed out.

FORAKER came after, drawing his sword. Night had fallen, and shadows lay thick inside the palisade at the water gate. Half a dozen settlers glanced up in wonder from their stoops as the two ran past, then all sprang erect to the roar of an explosion.

Melison Hargrove had pistoled a big Indian, even as he tore the scalp from the dead sentry at the threshold.

There were others, and upon them Foraker fell with darting blade. One he spitted like a Christmas goose, then cleared his point and slashed open the scowling, paint-barred brow of a second. More of the garrison came at a run, firing into the thick of the assault with their muskets. The Indians gave back, dragging their fallen with them, and the little gate was closed and barred.

"A night attack, shrewdly planned!"

snorted Captain Foraker, "Man every loophole, and let the women load extra guns. Poor Sallet—he nodded, and 'twas his last nod. Mistress Hargrove, I do thank you for your quick ear and quicker hand. But for your warning, I fear that Hobdene would have fallen."

"Sir," she replied, "do you doubt my witch power now?"

But he had turned from her, marshaling his forces. Three watches he set, so that no man got more than six hours of sleep. He himself paused only to don breastplate and steel cap, and did not even wink the night long. At dawn the Indians howled from the encircling trees, and rained arrows upon the walls and into the enclosed grounds. The settler in the watch tower was taken through the neck with a shaft, and the man who climbed up to replace him was wounded a moment later.

"Stand to your arms," cried Captain Foraker, first to one musketeer, then to another. "They will seek to carry us by storm!"

"'Tis all because of me," said Melison Hargrove at his elbow. "You had peace with these savages until I came. Better had I died, and found peace myself. Even now, if 'twould please you I will leave."

He turned and smiled. "Nay," he told her gently, "'twould please me no whit."

And then came the attack, and he had no more time for words.

The Indians simulated a second attack on the water gate, but when most of the white men turned that way, then came the real smashing charge against the trail gate—a yelling cloud of painted, feathered braves, over whose heads flew a new blizzard of arrows. Among the foremost stormers was carried a great pine trunk, and this they dashed butt-first into the gate. It splintered the cross-spiked timbers, and as Foraker hurriedly formed a party to meet the new menace, a second ramming swing of the trunk cleared the way for the Indians to enter.

As at the water gate the night before, the captain flung himself into the midst of the first attackers to gain en-

trance. Again his sword-point found a fierce enemy heart, and his left hand fired a pistol into a yelling face that forthwith exploded into a gush of gore.

A tomahawk came down on his steel cap, staggering him, but he wrenched his sword from the dead warrior's breast and fell upon the ax-wielder. Friends came to his side, defending, but this time the Indians did not flee. They battled, sturdily and frantically to hold their footing inside the gate, and others pushed in to help them.

Forakers' men were being beaten. Winford was down, dying, and so was poor young Figg. Foraker himself received a slash on the jaw that laid it open. Yet he stood his ground, engaging three Indians at once. He could not give back, like the others. He was captain. If his stronghold was taken, the best—the only thing—he could do would be to die fighting.

THE Indians yelled in triumph—then in dismay. And they recoiled before him, staring past him in un-Indian horror and crowding back, back, all struggling to be first through the gate again. Foraker set his feet wide for support, for he was swaying with weariness, and panted, open-mouthed.

Someone moved to his side, and past—Melison Hargrove, in her dark gown and white cap. She held up her hands, chanting words that were neither English nor French nor any Indian dialect Foraker had ever heard.

"*Jeebi!*" wailed a brave, one of those Foraker had encountered in rescuing Melison. And he added something else: "*Kenibec!*"

That meant snake. Other Indians shouted of bears, catamounts, bull bison.

They ran, as from a horde of such fearsome beasts. Survivors of the fort hurried to repair the broken gate.

And then there was a rush and a gathering around the slender, dark-gowned figure who had changed disaster into victory. Men, women and children chorused their hubbub of amazed thanks, some of them on their knees before Melison Hargrove, and all trembling in fearful joy.

"'Twas magic, blessed magic," chanted one deep-voiced musketeer.

"Aye!" chimed in his good wife. "The beasts were there, charging at her behest one moment—then gone!"

"Happy mine eyes to behold a miracle," moaned an old woman.

CHAPTER III

Pipe of Peace

ONLY four of the whole garrison stood aloof. To one side stood the three Greensheafs, father, mother and son. They gazed at the pale face of Melison Hargrove with a cheerful triumph, as though they alone shared her secret.

The fourth who kept apart and watched with stern wonder, hand to bleeding cheek, was Captain Nele Foraker.

Suddenly he raised his voice in a parade-ground bark that silenced all others and captured complete attention.

"Have I relieved any man of duty?" he demanded. "Even as you vapor, the Indians may be on us again! Back to your posts!"

They sprang to obey, and he strode forward to confront Melison Hargrove.

"I will speak of this matter anon," he assured her gravely. "You have saved us once more, but this time I do not know whether or not to thank you."

She bowed her head, and her hands came together on her bosom in a submissive gesture. Foraker plastered rags on his wound and got back to his work, but the Indians seemed to have had enough. They howled no more from the thickets, sent not an arrow.

"Guard the gates, and keep a man in the tower," the captain ordered. "When you go to planting, let each man take his gun." He beckoned to Melison Hargrove. "Come to my house. I would question you."

At his door a figure moved as if to block them—Aran Greensheaf, huge and stupid-eyed. Clubbed musket in

hand, he had sought the thickest of the fight, yet was not wounded, not even weary.

"If't please you, Mel," he said, "I shall serve you in any manner. 'Tis right that such as we help each other."

"Out of the way," Foraker bade him.

The big man met his captain's gaze defiantly.

"Out of the way," the young woman repeated, and Aran Greensheaf stepped glumly aside.

Once within, Foraker fastened his door with its big wooden latch. He sat down at his table, but did not bid the girl sit. His black eyes were puzzled above his patched cheek and haggard face.

"I would I knew what to think," he said at last, heavily. "You spoke first of a curse, an evil that came upon you against your will. You said that you would die to be quit of it. For a moment I thought—" He paused. "Then you showed terror to the Indians. They spoke of bears, snakes, other beasts, and fled as from Satan."

"I launched a glamour upon them," she replied. "They saw, and feared." She gazed at him incredulously. "Captain Foraker, worthy sir! Did you—not see—the animals?"

"I saw nothing save a posturing lass and a cozened hobble of silly heathen. Yet, 'tis true. The others of this fort must have seen. They praised and adored you like an idol. Was I alone blind?"

"Oh, 'twas heaven brought me to you!" she quavered, and fell to her knees on the puncheon floor, humbling herself to Foraker even as the others had humbled themselves to her. "You saw no vision, were not bemused or affected by the glamour! You are not blind, Captain. No, rather are your eyes open because of your bravery and goodness!"

"I pray that it be so," he agreed heartily. "Get up, and truckle not. We spoke briefly of your case before the first fight. Let you speak of it more fully now. Sit, madam."

She obeyed, and he heard her story at length—the tales her father had told of the sorceress-grandmother. She spoke of her own wonderings, half

fearful and half fascinated, about those dread powers beyond the knowledge of ordinary folk, of her own awful adventure when, at twelve, she first drifted into a half-trance and was aware that from her proceeded a great and grotesque shape that frightened all who saw it.

“I KNEW, from the first, that I could order the spirit to do mighty things,” she finished. “I never tried—not until this night. The death of the Indians on the trail was not my doing, but their own mortal fear. Also, I can sometimes know things that are out of sight and hearing, even in the future.”

Foraker shook his head. “I do think that this shadowy shape which comes forth to vex you is but a delusion; that your second sight is coincidence, and that no mortal person ever read the future aright. As to the Indians, it was surely their own poor spirit that slew them. Remember that, when several stood against it, they saw it withdraw and vanish. Belike those who just now dreamed they saw wild beasts could have made a stand and brought the vision to nothing.”

“And so had we all died,” she rejoined. “Captain Foraker, I swear that for the first time today I voluntarily evoked my power. Hitherto it came upon me, like a fit of illness. This day I did what I did because you, sir, stood in dire peril and I could not let you bide unhelped. But I had not hoped”—her voice rose exultantly—“that there would be one to whom the vision would not come, who could see naught but empty air where others saw ravening monsters. Captain Foraker, you will be my salvation.”

“That I hope to be,” he said. “Now, list to my plan. I am a bachelor, with employments enow beside keeping house. Can you cook and sweep? . . . Good. I take you into my service. A blanket slung midway on this room will divide it into two. We shall get along famously.”

“I do thank you, brave sir,” said Melison Hargrove.

She caught and kissed his big brown sword-hand before he could know her intention, or prevent her act.

At noon Melison prepared his dinner for him, and it was most savory, though simple. Even as he finished, the sentries called aloud that Indians came, and he hurried out, tightening the straps of his corselet.

But there were only three principal chiefs—stalwart, blanketed men of bronze, with heads shaven bare save for scalp-locks in which were thrust eagle feathers. Sangunga himself walked foremost, holding up his right hand for a truce, while his left bore a ceremonial pipe of red stone. Standing at the gate, Foraker gestured for the trio to approach.

“White chief,” said Sangunga deeply, “we poor warriors cannot fight against the *jeebi*, who commands the mad beasts of the forest. Let us have peace again.”

“Gladly,” replied Foraker, who accepted the pipe and drew a puff of smoke from it. Then he turned.

“Melison,” he called, naming her informally for the first time, “hither, child.”

She came into view, and the three chiefs made as if to run, but Foraker held out his hand appealingly.

“Because of this white woman was our truce broken,” he reminded. “The pipe of peace must be smoked with her, too, in token of good faith and friendship.”

“Not with the *jeebi*,” muttered one of the chiefs.

But Foraker insisted, and Melison took the pipe, puffing smoke and fighting to keep from making a wry face. Hesitantly Sangunga smoked after her, as though expecting to drop dead. Then he stretched out a dark hand and touched, first the steel-clad shoulder of Foraker, then the dark wool of Melison’s sleeve.

“White chief, white squaw,” he said, “let your children be the friends of mine.”

Captain Foraker, at Melison’s query, said shyly that the chieftain had wished them well and hoped that the peace would last until another generation.

“Tell him that it shall be so,” she said, “and that we and ours will not only keep peace, but will help him and his in time of need.”

When Foraker had translated, Sangunga and his two companions signified acceptance with a grunted "Ugh!" as with one booming voice.

Then they turned and stalked away among the trees.

The whites were able to turn again to corn planting and hunting and fishing in the creek Nhamawusk. At nightfall, Foraker and his new housekeeper had their evening meal together. When they made an end, she brought him his pipe and kindled it at the rushlight, and they smiled at one another. But the next moment Melison's face went blank and wan, and she appeared to listen.

"Tell me not that the Indians break peace again," growled Foraker.

But then he, too, could hear—a song by several muffled voices, outside the stockade.

Cummer, go ye before, cummer, go ye—
Gif ye will not go before, cummer, let me.

Innocent enough to hear—but it was not a song of innocence. Three quarters of a century before, at North Berwick Church in Scotland, that song had been chanted by the demoniac followers of odious John Fian, as they made enchantments to overthrow King James.

Who sang the song of witches here?
Now the melody took form of an invitation:

Mel Hargrove, my love, come out beneath
the sky,
And ye shall get a black fruit baked in a
pie.
Baked in a pie, love, and bowls of black
wine—
Come out beneath the sky, love, and so we
shall dine.

Foraker was gentleman enough not to swear in Melison's presence, but he sniffed like an angry boar, sprang up and went to the loophole that served for outer window. He twitched aside the pivoted wooden screen that covered it.

There they danced and postured in the moonlight, clumsily nimble, which made them look all the stranger in the pale corpse-tinted rays. Old Greensheaf, his wife, and his loutish son Aran.

They saw the glow from Foraker's unscreened loophole, and scampered away toward the woods, snickering like children caught in a prank. When the captain turned back toward his own room, the door was open and Melison Hargrove was nowhere to be seen.

He dashed out.

"Have you seen my housekeeper?" he asked the first settler in sight.

But the settler had not, nor had any others been aware of her. Foraker returned to his quarters, buckled on his rapier and thrust a pistol in his belt. He took, too, a stout staff of hickory in his hand, and strode out of the stockade while all his fellows wondered.

In the clearing at the side just without his cabin, the earth had been recently loosened for cultivation, and easily Foraker sorted the trappings. Moonlight was enough for any seasoned huntsman to see by. Here were the marks of Greensheaf's feet, toed in like an Indian's. There were the smaller flat ones of his wife. And there were the deep moccasin-prints of Aran, whose foot was the largest in all Hobdene.

SO THEY had danced in a ring, and beyond the dancing spot went the triple trail of their retreat. No, the trail was quadruple! A fourth line of tracks came from the direction of the stockade, and these were small, slim feet, wearing shoes instead of moccasins. Melison! She had joined the Greensheafs!

Foraker did not like it. He tramped rapidly away, on the trace of the quartet. When he came to the forest's edge, the light was gone, but he bent and saw how the four had come into single file, making a lane through the undergrowth that he could follow even in the dark. He made slow progress for awhile and then, up ahead, caught the glint of a fire. He headed for it, as swiftly and silently as he could, and came up behind a tussock of scrubby willow.

Just beyond blazed the fire, not large but intensely bright. It strengthened as he watched, for Greensheaf's old hand was throwing in powder—per-

haps lime, or a lime mixture. And Aran had gathered great thick branches for fuel, breaking them in his powerful fists like straws. To one side stood Melison Hargrove, with Goodwife Greensheaf at her elbow, the old woman's skinny hand clutching the girl's neck from behind. Foraker thought that the grip was not to hold, but to caress, and the fancy was horrible.

"We will not be spied on here," said the graybeard at last. "Mel, the fortune of our cult brought you to us. The three of us make four now, and others will come among us, others."

"The little children of Hobdene can be won to us," croaked his wife.

"Perhaps the Indians," muttered Aran, stoking the fire.

CHAPTER IV

The Witch-Finder

MELISON'S face was rapt and pale, like that of a dreamer's. She did not move or speak. Foraker knew that her trance was upon her, brought on, perhaps, by the activity of these three grisly companions.

"Nay, not savages," Greensheaf said to his son. "They must be slain, driven out to make room for us. In this wild land we will thrive, we children of the Old One."

Foraker pricked up his ears. The Old One—Old Scratch, Old Nick, Satan, master of witches. Were these folk serious in calling themselves his children?

"Mel," Greensheaf went on, "I knew your grandmother. Foul fare those who slew her! But we fled to this wilderness where, though the way be hard, there are no gibbets or courts. Captain Foraker, the only law, is a fool, who dreams not of our knowledge and worship. We can do what we list under his long nose, until the day comes when he, like all other enemies, is overthrown and we rule."

"And bring others to our circle," elaborated the wife. "There will be food enow, land enow, for every sor-

ceress unhangd in Europe—wilderness enow for every Sabbat—all can fatten here, and we be kings among them."

Melison plainly heard, but still was silent and immovable. Foraker scowled. Here was the will, if not the power, for evil anarchy. Could the New World be given over indeed to a devil's rule? How would this unsavory knot manage it? What did they expect to get from Melison? Even as he wondered, he heard the question answered.

"'Tis your place, Mel, to befool that captain," urged Greensheaf. "He loves you even now. Speak him fair, sweeten him—"

"Nay," growled Aran. "Mel is for me. You promised, Father."

"Silence," snapped the old man. "Your time will come. Meanwhile—"

He nodded to Goodwife Greensheaf, who thrust Melison forward. The girl gazed into the hottest and whitest of the fire.

"You are one of us now, Mel," intoned the old man. "Prophesy for us."

"Aye, prophesy," echoed big Aran. He tried to seize one of Melison's hands, but his father pushed him away. For Melison was about to speak.

She lifted her face, so bloodless that her blue eyes seemed dark by contrast. Her lips stirred slowly, as though throwing off bonds.

"Discovery is near," she intoned then.

"Discovery?" repeated Greensheaf. "Triumph?"

Her head shook. "Nay, destruction. We are watched. An enemy—"

"Aye, by the black dog!" snarled Aran, and sprang to his feet. "'Tis Captain Foraker. He shall suffer, shall die, if he spies upon us. Speak, Mel, is it Foraker?"

His vehemence caught her attention. She met his eyes, as though at last she wakened.

"Foraker?" she said after him, mechanically and breathlessly. "He spies? No, no!" Her voice rose wildly. "Not Foraker! Harm not Nele Foraker!"

The watcher felt that he had waited long enough. As though summoned by the sound of his name, he thrust himself forward into the light of the

fire. His left hand raised the staff, his right drew the sword.

"Is it true that witches fear swords?" he cried. "I heard one of you call me the only law here. Well, then, I sentence you all to—"

THERE was a rush upon him from all sides. Ceasing to speak, he fought for his life.

Goodwife Greensheaf impaled herself on his blade, and her shriek of agony was also of amazement. She had thought she was impervious, that she could bring his weapon to naught. Whatever the value of her witchcraft, it had failed her. Even so, her skewered body weighted down Foraker's sword-arm, while the two men closed in from either side.

He smote with the stick in his left hand, and the elder fell with split skull. Aran, bereft of father and mother in two seconds, grappled with the captain.

They strained and swayed, and Captain Foraker knew that this hobbedehoy was stronger, far stronger, than he. Aran Greensheaf had no science or grace, but by sheer weight and sinew he foiled a leg thrust out to trip him, broke a clutch on his arm, would not be turned or toppled. He stood like a rooted tree, a tree come to evil life, with arms for branches and clutching fingers for twigs. Despite his struggles Foraker was borne back, fell heavily.

The weight of Aran held him down. The immense hands groped upon his face, a thick thumb hooked into the corner of his mouth. Foraker bit that thumb, but Aran did not wince. His other hand sought to gouge an eye.

"Yield!" thundered Aran.

Foraker bucked and wriggled, but he could not throw off the adversary. "Confess yourself vanquished," growled Aran. "I will spare you—but swear on your soul to take my instruction—"

Something fumbled at Foraker's waist, where his pistol hung. He tried to snatch at the fumbler, but too late. The gun was gone. There was a thunderous detonation, a fire-flash in his very eyes. And the hands quitted his face, the hulk of Aran tumbled side-

ward, and the prone captain was able to get up.

A second time Melison Hargrove had killed for Nele Foraker with his own pistol.

She looked up into his eyes, and she was not a dreamer now.

"Thank heaven you are safe," she breathed. "For a time they took advantage of my trance, but I cast it off."

"Melison," he said earnestly, "by throwing it off, you have conquered. 'Twas when they sought to make you betray me."

"That I shall never do," she promised.

The fire burned an honest red by now, and they stood a little apart from the three corpses, but close to each other. Foraker took the girl in his arms and kissed her.

"These stark-mad fools spoke one truth," he whispered. "I do love you, and was fool not to know it. You love me, too. You lied for me, even in the midst of your trance, saying that 'twas not I who spied. And you killed for me!"

"I dread to think it," she quavered, her voice muffled against his buckskin bosom.

"And I glory to think it. But promise me one thing. Abjure forever these strange fits, whether they be witchcraft or magic or simple doting sickness."

"They are involuntary."

"Fight against them. Forbid them your heart and soul."

"That I will do, I swear."

He kissed her again. "Now go you back to the fort. I will bury these three, in yonder swamp. And tomorrow we will journey together along the road you came. Another fort lies a day from here, and in it dwells an ordained minister. He will marry us. . . ."

AND so it fell out. When the bride and groom returned, they began their honeymoon with work. Foraker, though captain, was prone to work as hard and long as any cornplanter in Hobdene. With a hoe he gashed the earth, and Melison would drop in four seed kernels, laughing and singing the ancient jingle:

One for the blackbird, and one for the
crow,
One for the cutworm, and one to grow.

As he labored, Foraker looked at his wife and saw that her cheeks had color, that the tight lines had vanished from brow and mouth. He congratulated himself, because whatever witchcraft was, it was banished, or nearly. Love made Melison happy and normal. The black mystery would shed from her like an old garment and be forgotten. He, too, sang, and the words were Thomas Campion's:

There is a garden in her face,
Where roses and white lilies blow;
A heavenly paradise is that place—

"Look, Nele," said Melison suddenly. "A troop of horsemen have come from the trail, and they head thither."

It was early afternoon, and the sun made metal glint among the riders who, in double column like soldiers, came toward the fields. Here and there planters stopped work to gaze. Foraker, too, glanced up.

There were ten hard-faced men, clad in mail-coats and helmets, and at their head rode a figure unarmed and elegant, with plumed beaver and beribboned doublet—a courtierlike spark, with pink cheeks, curved lips, tiny, foppish mustaches and an abundant, full-bottomed wig. But his eyes were as black, as piercing, as Captain Foraker's own.

This leader swung down from his caparisoned gray and tossed the reins to an armored attendant. He advanced, toying with his gilded riding switch.

"By heaven's grace," he lisped, "my surmise was right. Here she is—Melison Hargrove, the witch!"

"You have—found me!" she stammered.

"Aye, the trail was broad enow," the stranger nodded. "Not far along your line of retreat was a fresh Indian grave. We delved, and found a poor savage—without a wound, but with a famously frightened face. What weapon save yours visits such a death? Then another grave, farther along. And last night we lay at a fort where, said the folk, a lass of your description visited the preacher."

Foraker had ceased his hoeing and now confronted the springald.

"Sir," he said, "this is my lady wife, Mistress Foraker. Ere you make free to accuse her, name yourself and your business. I am captain of this fort, and have right to know."

"You are Captain Foraker?" The cupid's-bow mouth twitched into a smile. "Meseems I have heard of you, as one who turned his back on the royal court to seek his fortune in this desert. And hath this damsel cast her enchantments upon you?"

Melison was trembling like a leaf. Foraker shifted his hoe to the ready, like a quarter-staff.

"Sir," he said again, "I demand that you state your name and business, and afterward apply yourself to the business, leaving us to ours. Know, too, that I like you not nor your face."

THE mailed horsemen muttered, and two of them swung down, as if to protest violently. But the exquisite appeared to take no offense. He tapped a yawn with the butt of his riding switch.

"Ah, Captain Foraker," he sighed, "many dislike me. If you will have my name, 'tis Pancras Shawkin. My business is that of witch-finder."

"Witch-finder!" growled Foraker.

"And, as you bid me, I shall apply myself to that business, for under warrant of Sir Francis Lovelace, His Majesty's governor of these colonies, I have followed this enchantress hither. I shall now try, sentence and punish her."

With a growl and a bound, Foraker was at him. But the beribboned body was tensed knowingly for just such an attempt. The switch butt, lifted to Shawkin's face in such languid wise, drove out like a cudgel, striking and numbing Foraker's fist upon the hoe-handle. The tool fell to earth, and a moment later the switch—it must have been loaded with lead—smote him on the temple.

Foraker staggered, recovered, and shakily drew his hunting knife, the only weapon he wore.

Melison cried out, and sprang to steady him upon his shifting feet. Two of the guardsmen also ran in.

They seized Foraker by the elbows and wrested the knife from him.

"Well done, lads," praised Shawkin languidly. "Bring him to yonder stockade—the woman, too. There is still much daylight, and we will complete the affair before this night falls."

CHAPTER V

"Pain Strong and Lasting"

THEY set up court with the knowing ease of old hands. Some of the retainers gathered up all firearms, lest Foraker's friends give trouble, and themselves mounted ready guard with drawn swords and loaded guns. Others dragged Foraker's table into the open, also a bench for Shawkin to sit upon in his role of prosecutor and judge.

Before him were set the silent Melison, pale as death again, and the darkly scowling Foraker. The other settlers crowded to gaze curiously and suspiciously.

The witch-finder opened a large portfolio, filled with official-looking papers. From the top one he read a formal indictment, charging that Melison, "forsaking the true laws of Heaven and the realm, and hearkening to the temptations of Satan," had dealt with a familiar spirit. That through the spirit's means she had caused illness and distress in England, and that she had fled from the legal consequences of that action, thereby making the seriousness of the matter the greater.

"To which the prisoner's plea is—" Shawkin broke off expectantly, but when Melison kept silent, he prompted her: "Guilty, or not guilty?"

She closed her eyes, and when she spoke, her voice was low but steady. "Guilty."

The silence that fell was broken by a roar of protest from Melison's husband.

"Sir, sir!" cried Foraker. "Look upon her—she knows not what she says! She hath dreams, yes—trances, yes. There is mystery here, perhaps evil mystery, but none of this is her

fault, nor comes of her malice or ill will!"

Shawkin was writing notes of the proceedings, and from them he smiled up, like a sophisticated schoolmaster upon a dull youth.

"Handsomely defended, my brave captain. Yet I dare think that you are yourself deceived. This woman is a notorious enchantress, as was her grandmother, from whom she does inherit her familiar spirit and its magic."

"That does not obtain," flung back Foraker. "As well prosecute the child of a cross-eyed murderer because he has inherited the parent's affliction."

"I make no doubt that somewhere upon her body is a mark," continued Shawkin. "A mole, belike, or a tag or scar. A needle would draw no blood or cause pain. Such is the devil's mark. Search her, guards."

A man-at-arms stepped forward, his hand outstretched as though to seize and tear Melison's clothing. Foraker stood in his way, ready to fight unarmed, but Melison, herself, stopped the indignity.

"I have pleaded guilty," she said calmly. "What needs examination?"

"Such a mark, or such absence of pain, proves naught," Foraker snapped. From his own shirt-front he drew a steel pin and stripped up his sleeve. "Look! I will show that in every person's flesh are senseless places."

He chose a spot and drove the pin deep into it. All gazed at him, and he did not quiver. When he withdrew the point, no blood came.

"I HAVE proved—" he began.

"Aye," broke in Shawkin, with his languid mockery of tone, "you have proved what I already suspected when you so warmly defended this wench. You, too, are witch and warlock."

"Let him charge that who dares!" growled Foraker.

He took a step toward the table, but guards at either side moved to forestall him, swords ready. Others faced down the knot of settlers who were stirring and muttering. Shawkin made more notes on his paper, then laid down his quill-pen.

"So we can deal with two cases instead of one," he announced. "Nele Foraker, do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

Foraker's face writhed with anger, his muscles swelled, but he did not speak.

"Guilty or not guilty?" repeated Shawkin, then pushed back his bench and rose. "The law provides inducements whereby a stiff-necked prisoner may be brought to make reply."

"Why should I speak?" Foraker flung out contemptuously. "You will conduct the case to suit yourself, condemn me foully. Kill me what way you will, without any help from my lips."

"As you plead not, my way is plain." the witch-finder told him. Then, to the guards: "Unship the door from this man's cabin yonder, and gather heavy stones. We must press him."

"Nay, is not my confession enough?" pleaded Melison tremulously.

"My hand is forced, and the case does not concern your plea," Shawkin told her glibly. "This, your husband, stands suspect, and rudely refuses to plead. What if I should release him unadmonished?"

"I shall answer that," Foraker raged. "Once free, I would to my sword, and prove upon your knave body that you are a walking parcel of lies, prettied by ribbons and curls—"

"Lead him out," Shawkin ordered. "Give him the *peine fort et dure*—pain strong and lasting—as by ancient statute governing those who flout the authority of courts and plead not."

Two guards drew Melison away, but full four were needed to subdue the sudden mad strugglings of Foraker. They dragged him through the water gate and to the side of the creek Nhamawusk.

In the calm evening they stripped him to the waist, flung him down upon his broad back, and bound him cruciform to four stakes driven into the ground for the lashing of his wrists and ankles. The door of rough-hewn planking was placed upon him, and held steady there by more cords strung across it. Finally, at Shawkin's command, stones were heaped upon it; a hundredweight or more.

"All this I do by process and de-

mand of the King's law," said Shawkin once more. "Prisoner, you will lie here the night, to meditate upon your rebellion. Without a plea, we cannot try or sentence you."

"So shall I go without trial or sentence," snapped Foraker, tensing his muscles against the weight.

"Men have died ere this under the *peine fort et dure*," replied the witch-finder, one hand gracefully on hip, while he twirled his mustache with the other. "You, however, will last some time. Tomorrow we will bring bread and water—and more stones. The same each day, until your will is broken, or your heart, or your back and ribs." He addressed the staring knot of onlookers. "Back, all of you, to your cabins! Let one man keep guard here, and another over the witch, Melison Hargrove."

ALL departed save the sentry posted, and Foraker, prone and crushingly rock-weighted, could not lift his head high enough to see them go.

This was the end, Foraker decided. He had always thought that his death would be violent, but he had hoped that it would be quick and easy and of value to others. Now his hopes perished. He would linger for days, under increasing weight and pain, to a miserable end—unless he pleaded to the charge.

But that he could not bring himself to do, for honor's sake. And he had read in the delicate, cruel face of Shawkin, the witch-finder, that whether he called himself guilty or no, he would be brought in the end to a shameful noose.

Foraker set his teeth. He would keep silence, though they stacked all the boulders of America upon his stubborn limbs.

But what of Melison, who had already confessed? In the morning they would surely hang her, perhaps within his own sight and hearing. Of that Foraker could not think. He moaned despite himself, and the sentry chuckled.

Silence for awhile. Foraker thought that the blood beat strongly in his ears—or was it footsteps, echoing through

the earth so close to his head? The armed man beside him brought his musket to the slope.

"Who goes?" he challenged sharply at the intruder.

"Friend," replied a voice strangely accented.

An Indian, Foraker decided at once. They had learned to respond with that word of English, often the only word they knew. He twisted his eyes side-long and upward, and saw that through the moonlight stalked a tall figure, its shaven crown garnished with a single feather, its body wrapped in a blanket.

"Friend," the Indian said to the sentry once more.

Foraker recognized the voice of Sangunga, the chief with whom he had so lately fought, then smoked the pipe to restore peace and friendship.

"'Tis all right," panted Foraker to the sentry, though he suffered doubly with the weight upon his chest as he spent breath in speaking. "We here are at truce with the Indians."

"Pass, then," the sentry granted, stepping aside.

Sangunga lingered for a moment, towering above Foraker's prone figure and gazing down.

"The white chief lies on a strange bed," he pronounced from the depths of his chest.

"I am chief no more," Foraker replied, "but the truce we made holds, Sangunga. Even when I am dead—"

"The white chief expects to die? And his white squaw, what of her?" Sangunga asked.

"She will die, too," Foraker told him, and felt like weeping to say it. "You will see us no more. But keep the truce, Sangunga."

"Ugh! I keep the truce," the Indian chief vowed.

The Indian strode away toward the stockade, and through the water gate.

"You have done well," the sentry growled. "Even at New York and Boston, we have war with the redskins."

"I have tried to speak them fair," answered Foraker. "Sangunga has sense and honor. And now let me save my breath, friend. I need it sorely."

"Faith, so you do," agreed the other.

And once more there was silence.

CHAPTER VI

Last Prophecy

SLOWLY an hour passed; or more. The moon crawled slowly across a segment of sky, the black shadows of the trees and the stockade lengthened. Foraker's head ached, his straining muscles and lungs cried out in agony as they braced themselves against the load they must bear up. And his ears were telling him stories again of approaching feet, more than one pair this time.

The sentry did not challenge, so it must be an illusion. Then he could see a figure approaching from the stockade—a figure slender and elegant in plumed hat and jaunty doublet. Shawkin, the foppish witch-finder, who was his downfall.

"Good-even', Master Shawkin," spoke the guardsman, and brought his piece smartly to the salute. "Would you question this fellow? He is a stubborn one, hard to bend or soften."

"Shawkin," managed Foraker thickly, "I knew you at sight for a scab-hearted popinjay, who pretends to knowledge of evil and so fattens on blood, be it guilty or innocent. Now do I know you for a fiend and coward, come to exult over a helpless man. If I were but free, and within clutch of your dainty throat among those ribbons—"

Shawkin's face was not visible under the wide, modish hat-brim, and Foraker could not know whether he smiled or scowled. But the slender figure bent, and laid inquiring fingertips upon Foraker's sweat-beaded brow.

"Hands off," choked out the weight-oppressed man.

"Hark you, prisoner," put in the sentry officiously, "'twould benefit you if you showed proper respect to . . . Aaaaah!"

He broke off in a strangled gurgle. Foraker, lifting his head as far as his bonds and weighted planks would let him, saw a flurried merging of two figures—a blanket-wrapped thing had

stolen up behind the guard and seized him. In the scuffle, the blanket fell away, and Foraker saw the great naked bronze of Sangunga's torso.

The chief's huge hands made a clamping circle on his victim's throat, his arms knotted like constricting snakes. So sudden had it been that the musket fell from the hands that had held it.

"Take care!" wheezed Foraker to Sangunga. "This other will fall upon you!" For he remembered the shrewd, smashing blows that Shawkin could deal.

But Sangunga neither spoke nor ceased to strangle his prey. The body of the sentry slackened, and Shawkin, far from aiding his man, was tugging the great stones away from the plank that half crushed Foraker. After a moment, Sangunga let the sentry drop limply from his clutch, and came to help.

The planking was lightened and lifted away, the Indians' knife severed Foraker's bonds. The freed captain got upon his shaky legs, breathing deeply and gratefully, and rubbing his numbed wrists and forearms.

"Master Shawkin," he said at length, "in whatever way you came to see my innocence and freed me, I do thank you for it. I would be ungrateful now to pick quarrel; yet I say that unless you set free also my wife—"

"Nele, do you not know me yet?" spoke a soft voice he knew and loved.

A slim hand tore Shawkin's hat away, showing him the oval face, the blue eyes and trembling mouth of Melison.

"Silence," grunted Sangunga, from where he stooped to plunder the unconscious guard of his weapons. "This is no time to hug and mash your faces together. Come away into the forest, before other enemies learn of this work and follow . . ."

AS DAWN came up in bands of rose and gold, the three paused to rest on the mossy roots of a big tree, many hours' journey into the pathless depths of the wilderness. And Foraker heard at length the reason and strategy of his rescue.

"I was held in our cabin," Melison

told him, "and when all others were gone to bed, Shawkin came to talk. He insisted that I aid him in forcing you to confess."

"The devil!" growled Foraker. "For the sake of his reputation, his fees, he would hound innocent folk to a miserable end!"

"Speak not ill of the dead." Melison cautioned. "'Twas then, dear Nele, that I strove once more to summon that evil power, to pass into a trance, confront him with a dread shape in seeming—"

"Did you kill him so?" demanded her husband. "Nay, you should not have done that. You vowed to me—"

"I say I strove. But, Nele, the power did not come upon me. 'Twas as though my swearing of it away had indeed vanished it. I was like any mortal, free from magic and its help—or harm. And then I remembered what I had vowed, and whispered, 'Thank heaven.' Then"—her voice rose in her gladness—"then, like a player entering to his proper cue, in stole this good savage."

She paused, and thanked Sangunga with her eyes.

"Nele, bid him tell on," she begged Foraker.

Urged in his own language, the chief complied.

"Hunters brought me news of strange violence to you and your squaw," he told Foraker. "Remembering the truce and its terms, that you and I were to help each other, I came. You, too, reminded me of that truce—"

"Nay, friend, I spoke in hope that you would keep peace with my people after I died. I did not dream that you would help me against other white men."

"A truce is a truce, and friendship is friendship," rejoined Sangunga, in a tone of lofty reproof. "If you forgot, I remembered. When I saw you bound and oppressed, I paused to speak a little and then I saw the whole matter. Entering the stockade, I was met by no one."

"That is true," nodded Foraker. "My captor told the people to remain in their cabins."

"I went to your place of dwelling,

and listened outside the blanket hung over the doorway. Though I do not understand the speech of the whites, I could recognize that your squaw was being tormented by a certain strange man."

"Shawkin," said Foraker. "Go on."

"I crept in, and a thrust of my knife drank the soul from him before he knew. Then, by signs, I set a plan with your squaw, whose heart is that of a warrior. While I guarded outside, she put on the clothes of that strange white enemy of yours. The rest you know."

"Was it not wonderful?" asked Melison. "We are free!"

"That is true," Foraker agreed.

HE TURNED and spoke solemnly to Sangunga.

"I trust, my friend, that this will not hurt you, or bring war back upon your tribe."

"It cannot do that," pronounced the chief. "None saw me except the man you name Shawkin whom I slew, the guard who lost his senses without looking upon my face, and you two who are running away. The others will think that it was enchantment. If you go farther away to the west,

where they will not follow, I myself will give you food and blankets for the journey. Your squaw has brought your sword, and a pouchful of the things you call books. I have this musket I took from the man who guarded you, and his powder-horn." He passed them over.

"It can be done," agreed Foraker stoutly. "Melison, do you fear living in the unknown forests to the west?"

She shook her head. "I will love them." Her eyes took on a rapt light, as though she saw glories far away. "I gaze down the years, Nele. I see a time when poor folk are no longer wrongly tortured as witches—when these settlements are grown and spread and made a true home of freedom—when the wilderness blossoms into great gardens and cities—"

She broke off in mid-phrase, and her eyes turned to Foraker, full of trouble and repentance.

"Alack, what have I done, prophesying thus? I swore to do no more witchcraft!"

He laughed and hugged her close to him.

"'Twas no witchcraft. Any wise and true person can see those same good things in the time to come."

COMING SOON

TIME TO KILL, *by* Henry Kuttner

SINGING BLADES, *by* Lloyd Arthur Eshbach

THE SAILOR QUILTS THE SEA, *by* Earle Dow

"I TALKED WITH GOD"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, drive a lovely car, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-

Law, under any and all circumstances.

You, too, may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you, too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 711-12, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use, too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 711-12, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

A Gift for Uncle Herman

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

Author of "A Message for His Majesty," "Man in the Dark," etc.



Uncle Herman came from behind the curtain like a misshapen gnome

*Ellsworth Barnes, Embezzler,
Keeps a Final Grim Tryst
With His Fate!*

ELLSWORTH BARNES, who was, as his neighbors put it, "alone in the world," was a commonplace gentleman in his forties, who had lived ever since his parents died ten years before in a ramshackle house on a by-street in Soho.

For some years he had fancied him-

self an artist, but he had given over such pretensions long since. He was now existing by virtue of a position as keeper of accounts for his Uncle Herman, a half mythical old man who lived a secluded life in Wapping.

Barnes saw his uncle very rarely. Sometimes over a year passed between

meetings and the younger man had a horror of this misshaped individual who habitually wore a heavy ulster and kept most of his face concealed behind a beard and thick glasses, regardless of the weather.

Barnes had long ago decided that his Uncle Herman was very old, and would die very soon, upon which happy occasion, whatever was left would go to Barnes, and he would be free of the onerous task of caring for the books, collecting the old man's rents, which were heavy and many, and keeping his various properties in good condition.

He did not know precisely how old Uncle Herman was; he had scant knowledge of anything about Uncle Herman, save that he disliked him, which was not informative.

He had once been inside the old man's house, and had on that single occasion been so upset by the curious and malign things sheltered by its walls that he had never since sought to go there.

But it was gradually borne in upon Barnes that there was one thing of which he could be certain. Uncle Herman would not die. The old man never became ill, and he never aged. He seemed as close to death as always, but he did not die.

TO a man whose fund of patience was very definitely limited, this was not a circumstance calculated to make life more enjoyable. As he neared forty, Barnes became more and more irritable and impatient; as he passed forty, he began to fall victim to that feeling so common to mankind of having passed the best part of his life, and he began to reach almost frantically for additional crumbs of experience with which to enrich his existence.

Unfortunately, having limited means, Barnes succeeded only in experiencing one frustration after another. Experience which had the natural effect of still further increasing his bitterness and anger, all of which turned in his mind upon Uncle Herman.

Barnes was, however, not without resources. After all, he had virtually

complete control of Uncle Herman's rentals, and he could get along for quite a while by deceiving the old man.

The idea, so casually thought about, developed into a determined thing, and Barnes immediately began to act upon it, pilfering small sums here and there and altering his books accordingly.

The success of his plan went to his head, so that presently he found himself able to enjoy life in the manner he had hoped to know it.

He never bothered his head about a day of reckoning, because he had no difficulty convincing himself that Uncle Herman would certainly die before he took the trouble to investigate his affairs to such an extent that the defalcations were discovered. In this, Barnes' consuming vanity was in error.

After ten months of riotous living, Barnes received a note sent by the hand of a messenger boy. It was not difficult for him to recognize the crabbed, spidery handwriting that was his Uncle Herman's. He opened the note with some trepidation.

My dear nephew:

There is apparently some error in the papers which you sent out last week. I had meant to call upon you before this time, but I now find that my time this week is entirely taken up by research. I will, accordingly, meet you in my library at nine o'clock one week from tonight. Do not fail me; I will not fail you.

Your Uncle Herman.

Barnes' conscience, which had lain dormant all this while, was roused at once. Not by the sense of wrong, but by the quick twinge of fear.

As Barnes' fear was quelled, his conscience returned to that pleasant dormant stage once more. He understood at once that somehow Uncle Herman suspected his pilferings, and he knew also that he could expect no indulgence from the old man. Having already committed himself to a life of wrong-doing, he was not averse to going farther.

The next step in his existence was obvious. He must protect his own skin. So Uncle Herman must die.

He spent a sleepless night thinking

about some way in which to put the old man out of the way. He had no trouble at all convincing himself of his essential rightness, however, by reminding himself of how long he had waited for Uncle Herman's death. How meanly Uncle Herman had paid him. How miserably he had lived. And how he could not and would not give up his new life.

That Uncle Herman's death would make him a rich man was not exactly a deterring factor. And of course, it was essential that Barnes would not be caught.

AFTER thirteen hours of thought, he hit upon a dramatic device, not precisely new, but at least worth trying. He would send Uncle Herman a gift, a cat with poisoned claws.

This device had worked so successfully in a mystery novel Barnes had once read, that he could not but think it infallible. It would be necessary also to obtain a cat that was not too gentle, and that could be expected to scratch Uncle Herman before the poison on its claws was worn off.

He had no sooner hit upon this plan than he set about putting it into execution. He encountered no difficulty obtaining just the cat he wanted from an artist acquaintance of his living nearby. An undernourished, half-wild creature, which he took to his home and immediately prepared for Uncle Herman.

He washed the animal, being well scratched in the process, then filed small furrows on its claws, having first lashed the creature to the table, and finally poisoned her claws. Into a box she went, and over to Uncle Herman's house by messenger.

All he need do was sit back and wait for word of his uncle's death, whereupon he must at once retrieve the cat, scrub her claws thoroughly, and pose as Uncle Herman's sole mourner. He promised himself that he would enjoy cleaning up the old man's queer house.

In three days Uncle Herman was dead.

Barnes was summoned at once. He had no difficulty taking care of the cat, and, being a plausible talker, he

had no difficulty convincing a jury that his uncle might have sustained the festering scratch from almost any one of the strange, ancient things in that labyrinthine house in Wapping.

Barnes appeared modestly sorrowful, he made a good impression upon the coroner. He gave the appearance of being profoundly shocked at hearing testimony of his uncle's neighbors that Uncle Herman had been a very wicked man indeed, a bad man, who practiced magic and held consort with devils and undoubtedly attended the Black Mass.

This had come from a portly woman who had a cast in one eye aggravated by peering too much from behind curtains.

"Such is the punishment of wickedness," she intoned gravely, departing from the stand. And blessed Barnes with her gracious smile.

Naturally, Barnes was tremendously impressed with his success. It was like wine to his poor, dim brain. He moved into his uncle's house before the old man was buried, and sat there gloating over the old man's corpse.

Barnes had never been a nice man. This small success in his venture into a life of evil had made him even less likable. And to crown his venture, his uncle's lawyer announced that everything Uncle Herman had owned was to go to his nephew, Ellsworth Barnes, without conditions. Of course, there was the tax to the crown, but that would still leave a comfortable sum, a very comfortable sum.

The day after the funeral was the day on the night of which Uncle Herman had expected to go into the matter of alterations in the accounts with Barnes. Barnes had burned the old man's note soon after reading it. He had forgotten about it, and, since Uncle Herman was dead and buried in an obscure cemetery not far away, there was no further reason for Barnes to worry about it. Still, to make quite sure that his defalcations were forever concealed, he had shrewdly burned the altered books. It was on this day that Barnes began to clean the house.

Barnes had begun with the intention of starting in the attic, but

that was so jammed with odds and ends that he descended to the basement floor.

This was little better. He moved a few things about—exceedingly strange things—ancient weapons, curious stones, a shuddersome bas relief or two, and returned to the street floor, where at last he got to the library, which was at least in less disorder than the attic and basement. So he began to clean up the library.

Being naturally a lazy man, he was not hurried. He took his time. He peered into one book after another, and wasted time. It was not until mid-afternoon that he became fully aware of the fact that all Uncle Herman's books dealt in some way with black magic. Some of them quite blatantly, some obscurely. Many of them were in Latin, which was beyond Barnes.

He grew interested and presently fascinated, and by five o'clock he had turned on the lights, attended the fire, for it was January, and cold. And he had begun to read one of the most readable of the texts. It was also one that Uncle Herman had apparently read a great deal, for it was well thumbed, and its margins were dotted with copious notes.

That any sane person could believe in such a hodge-podge of curious superstitions was incredible to Barnes, but he could not put the book down; he read on.

He read about familiars, a chapter his uncle had very definitely underlined. In one portion of it he chanced upon a reference to habitation of a suit of armor by a familiar. He could not help thinking of the suit of armor that stood just inside the front door, in the wide, dark hall.

If he had been a nervous man, he would have been stirred at the thought. For the hall was very dark, and the house was silent with that silence which only an ancient and large dwelling can have. But Barnes read on with singular detachment, coming at last to another heavily marked chapter near the end of the book.

He read this with increased interest, possessed by a feeling that he must know its contents. Not only because

Uncle Herman had given it so much attention, but for his own good, as well.

But he was enlightened. He could not believe in such ridiculous nonsense. He could not understand how Uncle Herman could have believed in it.

But of course, Uncle Herman had been a strange man, and, according to his neighbors, a bad man.

The body, naturally, ages, and little can be done to change habitations, for no one taking his own life can possess another's body. But if it should happen that by some change an appointment has been made with another, and death intervenes; then indeed it may be possible to change dwellings at the time of the appointment. There are other ways, true, but none very successful. The elixir of life has not yet been found, and there exists no key to it. The Lord of Evil has not seen fit to prolong our lives.

All this and more had been heavily underlined, and thickly annotated in Uncle Herman's distinctive script. The more he read, the more amazed Barnes grew. He began to chide himself for having feared Uncle Herman at all. He began to feel only contempt for himself for having been afraid of consequences, for having felt even the least twinge of conscience at the old man's death.

HE CLOSED the book at last and flung it carelessly to the floor. He looked at the clock and saw it just beginning to strike nine. Fascinated, a chord struck in his memory, he watched and saw the clock stop still as soon as it had struck.

At the same instant he was aware of a curious air of waiting, he was possessed of the conviction that walls, books, even the furniture were watching him with a strange, aloof air. And he heard footsteps slowly ascending the outer steps.

He waited almost breathlessly for a knock, but none came. Instead, someone opened the door and walked in. Listening to footsteps advancing down the hall, Barnes was not so much alarmed as he was indignant; only a lingering, vestigial fear of the police prevented him from springing to his feet and stalking angrily to meet the intruder in the hall. He sat still and

waited, and the house waited with him.

In a moment it was borne upon him that the police would never invade a man's home without summoning him to the door: not in England, in London. But action on his part was too late. He had only time to rise to his feet when the curtains shutting off the hall were thrust aside.

The suit of armor from the hall stood there, a little bowed, as if in obeisance.

Behind it came Uncle Herman, walking with his habitual businesslike air, swathed as always in muffler and great-coat, like a misshapen gnome, coming straight for his nephew, saying:

"Just on time, I see. I must thank you for your gift, Ellsworth—that wonderful body. I never dreamed—"

Barnes sucked in two short gasps of air and crumpled into a dead faint.

The Metropolitan Police spent two futile nights watching at the obscure cemetery where Uncle Herman had been buried for the return of those vandals who had obviously molested the old man's grave.

There was some wonder about the footsteps. The trail away from the grave with no corresponding trail coming to it in the first place, though the freshly-fallen snow would certainly have betrayed such a trail if it had been there at all.

The other trail, leading to the grave, was even more confusing. Clearly it was that of a different man, carrying something heavy. It was too confusing and muddled for any paper to

mention, but it bothered the police a good deal, and Ellsworth Barnes, with an unaccustomed gleam in his eye, appeared at the cemetery and commended the efforts of the watchers.

THE policeman who had been on the beat for years was touched.

"Ain't it queer," he said conversationally to his younger companion, "but it beats all how that young Barnes walks now, just like his old uncle, all bent together. And he's got the look of the old fellow in his eyes, too. Quite a bit different he is from the day of the inquest when he was like to fall all over everybody. I thought him a nice, quiet-spoken fellow, but now I ain't so sure."

The matter blew over, inevitably. Other people remarked upon the curious similarity between the Barnes of today and Uncle Herman. In his gait, his mannerisms, his strange doings in his queer, silent house that seemed forever peopled with strange, supernatural beings all designed to do his bidding—as they had done the old man's.

As for the malicious old lady who had given such damning evidence against Uncle Herman at the coroner's inquiry: one dark March night while she was making her way home through a windstorm, past the edge of the dark, gloomy house in Wapping where Barnes lived, she received such a thorough whacking where it would do the most good that she ate her meals standing for three days. She was superstitious and made no complaint, which was a tribute to Uncle Herman.

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The Grip of Death

By ROBERT BLOCH

Author of "Pink Elephants," "The Curse of the House," etc.

*Luke couldn't keep his eyes
from his uncle's hands*



LUKE HOLLAND'S narrow, sal-
low face twitched as he slowly
mounted the stairs. He carried
a tray on which rested a napkin, a
decanter of port, and a wineglass
filled with poisoned wine.

Luke had acquired the poison by
soaking sheets of flypaper in water;
he'd read of the trick in a book. The
police would have no way of tracing
it now. Some people—his uncle, for
instance—might think of him as
stupid. But no, he was wise and
cunning. Yes, Luke Holland was very

*Two Hands—and a
Throat; Ten White
Links in a Grim
Necklace of Death!*

cunning, with the warped brain gen-
erations of decadent Puritan stock
had given him.

Luke's cunning was not unmixed
with superstitious fear. That was

why he meant to kill his Uncle Lionel. He thought he knew of the old man's trafficking in witchcraft; the Bible forbade that, and said a sorcerer deserved to die.

Besides, Luke could use the money he would inherit with his uncle's death, as sole living relative. Then he could get away from this strange, evil house and cease being dependent on the whims and vagaries of an eccentric old man.

How he hated Uncle Lionel!—hated his white, wrinkled face, his sunken, watery eyes, his thin blue lips. He hated, too, the disturbing smile on that withered countenance when old Lionel talked about the money Luke would get when he died. It was almost as though the wretch knew what was in his nephew's mind and was mocking him.

So Luke had thought it all over very carefully for many days, and decided to act. The poisoned wine old Lionel would drink as his regular midday tonic, and the police would say that his death was due to heart failure.

What a joke! All deaths, thought Luke, are due to heart-failure, in the final analysis. Quite a whimsical notion. He laughed now, as he mounted the stairs.

It was good to laugh again. He had found little mirth here in the gloomy house where for the past year he had waited for his invalid uncle to die. For Lionel Holland was an occultist, and dabbled in certain realms of knowledge better left alone. Upon his retirement from the spice business eight years ago, the old man had taken a long sea voyage in the East. His original plan of rest had evidently given way to a less wholesome purpose, for when he returned he brought many crumbling, queerly bound books, and this new gnawing interest in black arts. Slyly, he had adopted the life of a recluse, breaking all social connections and retiring to his family house on the decaying grandeur of the waterfront. His nephew was suddenly offered a secretarial position, and that was all the world ever learned.

Luke Holland had not learned very

much more himself. It was what he *suspected* that now made him so afraid.

His uncle was a very peculiar man. During his years' stay in the dwelling, Luke had seen his elderly employer infrequently, for the old invalid stayed upstairs in carefully locked chambers. Luke's duties consisted merely of preparing meals, administering his uncle's medicine, and discouraging all callers. The meals were sent up on a dumbwaiter, a speaking-tube served for infrequent communication, and Luke was left with plenty of time on his hands to think—and to listen.

WHAT was the old fool doing up there? Why was he so secretive? And what were those noises from the locked chambers? From the second floor, on recent evenings, had come the grating that accompanies the opening of long-sealed windows. After that he had heard a measured chanting, subdued, yet resonant. The low, scarcely audible litany seemed to strike Luke's straining ears like the insistent beating of primordial jungle drums. His uncle was praying—but not to any gods Luke knew. These were older gods, for who but the Ancient Ones demanded sacrifice?

One day, in response to written orders, Luke had procured three fine white roosters and sent them up, still alive, on the dumb-waiter. That night, after endless brooding and a strange ordeal of anticipation, his troubled vigil was disturbed by the shrill screech of a butchered fowl. There was the clatter of a heavy knife, the vibrant beating of blood-dabbled wings, followed by short silence and then the muttering rise of a prayer. The windows groaned open from above.

It was then that Luke became certain his imagination was playing him sorry tricks. For he smelt the reek of heavy incense drifting down into the room, intermingled with the odor of fresh blood and *something else*.

There was an alien scent his nostrils could not name, and which his brain dared not. It was the stench

of a carrion thing, summoned to accept a blood offering—and it was not an olfactory but an atavistic sense which told him what was answering that prayer and sacrifice.

Luke shivered in his bed, as presently the feeble yet immeasurably potent ritual was resumed. Even his shocked and half-dazed mind dared not credit that final dread suspicion—that now there were two voices chanting instead of one.

But when Luke felt the massive timbers of the house shake beneath that lumbering tread, when he heard the whistling wind from the harbor howl through the upstairs rooms in answer to that gargantuan footfall, he knew what must be done. A black tryst, a scarlet sacrifice; those mocking sounds from the ceiling must be stopped. His uncle was practising sorcery. How much longer must he be pent up here in this rotting old house, prisoner and slave of that sorcerous monster?

A monster may be killed. . . .

Luke thought about it the following night before he sank into the noxious nightmares that now lurked in slumber.

A monster should be killed. Witches and wizards must die. . . .

The next night the scent of incense pervaded the house. Luke's sleep was interrupted by the trickling whispers that slithered fearsomely down through the ceiling. Then again that lumbering, far-off tread of gigantic feet—or hooves. He remembered the open windows and lay awake until dawn brought the sanity of sunlight.

I will kill him. I must. . . .

THAT was when Luke Holland began to plan, and got the fly-paper, and tampered with the dumb-waiter so that now he personally must carry the meals and medicine upstairs. He planned, and acted, and all the time he thought. He thought about how he hated his uncle, and about how he feared the legends of New England childhood that spoke of witchcraft and the nauseous beings that could be summoned from afar. He thought of how he could use his

uncle's money, and he thought of how the pious were enjoined to destroy wizards and warlocks.

So now Luke Holland went up the creaking staircase with his tray. There was a merry little tune humming within his head; a whimsical phrase of catchy music that tinkled gaily to the rhythm of his pounding pulse.

"Kill him, *Kill him, KILL HIM!*"

A surge of confident elation seethed in his veins. Never had he felt more alive, more powerful. He was the Angel of Death. His feet moved in a set cadence; his pulse beat in harmony, his very eyelids blinked to the rhythm of that tinkling tune which beat into his brain.

"Kill, kill, kill, kill him!"

For the first time in months Luke Holland's face wore a peaceful and contented smile.

THE big black door swung open, and he was in the room. His uncle was sitting by the table, a faint smile on his withered countenance. It was all Luke could do to prevent himself from answering that smile with a burst of triumphant laughter.

His uncle did not know about the little tune in back of Luke Holland's head; the little tune that was rising to a sure, swift climax.

Luke tried to master his elation. He stared at the huge, old-fashioned chamber, with its oaken panels shooting up toward the ceiling. It was furnished in a fashion popular fifty years ago—filled with great mahogany chairs, cumbersome sofas, and massive tables. The walls were ranged with bookshelves stuffed with tomes of a size and age commensurate with the room's general atmosphere. It looked sane enough, that room, but there were others further on behind the locked doors. Mad things lurked in the sealed chambers, just as the mad tune lurked in the sealed chambers of Luke's brain. And mad things lurked now in the face of old Lionel Holland.

The invalid had changed terribly in that last shadow-shrouded year. His face had become deeply reticu-

lated, so that wrinkles shot from his eyes like the strands of spiderwebs. His mouth was a toothless black slit in corpse-white skin, and his pallid face was framed by the dank locks of silver hair that hung below his brow. Luke, gazing upon that countenance, was reminded of the mummied visage of some long-interred Mongol conqueror.

Old Lionel was dressed in a black robe that hung limply over his dwarfed, stooping shoulders. It was embroidered at the breast with a crescent moon design in leprous silver. That was the only note of life in the figure—that and the old man's eyes.

They were blue and deep like the ice of polar seas, and they seemed tinged with a peculiar and disturbing awareness. Luke, meeting them, felt some of the elation ooze from his veins; the eyes gripped his gaze and held it as if in some way they had the power to drain all secrets from his mind. Two blue magnets, they were. Luke shuddered as he thought of what those eyes must have looked on in past moonless nights.

Abruptly he jerked back to consciousness. No time for fancies now, for he must act. The old man was speaking.

"Thank you, Luke," said Lionel Holland. His voice disconcerted the youth queerly; it seemed to come from far, far away—from some source infinitely behind the shrivelled lips purporting to utter the words.

"No trouble at all," Luke answered, forcing a smile.

"You have been most kind and patient with me of late," continued the aged recluse, quietly. His voice was a droning purr, but those searching eyes never left his nephew's face.

"I shall remember that kindness when I die, which will be very soon now—I am told."

Told by what? Luke shuddered at the thought.

"Soon I shall finish my experiments and will be ready to go."

LUKE couldn't keep his eyes from his uncle's hands. They were fumbling with the filled glass now. The long, skinny fingers twitched

like the tentacles of two tiny octopi. His uncle was "ready to go," in just a moment, if he would only raise that glass. In just a moment Luke would be free—free of those eyes which still stared ceaselessly into his own.

"You are so impatient, my boy," said the old man. Still that grim mockery lingered in his tones. "Too impatient, I fear. Too hasty. You really should think matters over before taking drastic steps. If you should ever get the idea of hastening my demise, for example, before I have completed my experiments, it would be impossible for you to escape. You realize I have learned many curious things."

He suspected! A pang of icy fear went through Luke. But no, his uncle was raising the glass to his lips. Three inches more and . . .

The hand holding the glass stopped in midair.

"Are you ill?" the old man demanded, staring at Luke. "You look like a corpse. What's the matter?"

"It's nothing," Luke muttered. Would the old fool never drink?

"Here!" Lionel reached out a slender, blue-veined hand to a nearby table and picked up a small glass tumbler. "Take some port with me before you faint, you ninny. Go on go on, pour it out," he commanded, as Luke hesitated. Was this some trap?

Apparently not, for although Luke watched carefully his uncle made no attempt to switch glasses. Instead he waited impatiently for Luke to finish pouring the red wine from the decanter. Together the two raised glasses to their lips. Only after Luke had drained the tumbler did he realize that his uncle's glass was still filled.

Instantly fear lanced through him. He put down the tumbler quickly, staring at his uncle with bloodshot eyes. The old man deliberately tilted his glass and poured his wine to the floor.

"Why did you cut the rope on the dumbwaiter?" he asked very gently. "Did you think you could murder me, Luke?"

A wizard. The old man was a wizard! He had stared into Luke's eyes with his own ice-blue orbs and read the secrets of the mind behind them. Lionel Holland was a wizard and this was proof. Something he had read swam into Luke's mind. "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live. . . ."

He tried to speak, but only a low, choking gasp came from his lips. Little flecks of foam appeared at the corners of his mouth.

"You fool, Luke." The old man's voice was mocking. "You're a superstitious, wicked fool, like the rest of your breed. Only I, the black sheep of the family—have had the strength to throw off the weakness in our blood. There's genius, but there's decadence, too. Your righteous ancestors were white sheep, bleating in their pulpits. I am a black sheep, and I have had the courage to learn that a black sheep can be sacrificed in return for certain boons. And now you, the last little superstitious, decadent white sheep, come seeking to slay me."

HE LAUGHED gently, and Luke knew he was quite mad. Luke was mad, too—he felt that something had happened to his body, numbing it to ice that bit like needles at his throat. He gasped: "Have you—poisoned me?"

"I took precautions. Poison? No, nothing as crude as that; not your stupid trick here. I've dealt with you in a manner I learned from my experiments. Experiments with life and death, Luke, and with that strange trace of life that remains after a body is dead. D'you know what tetanus is, Luke?"

The younger man did not answer. He was staring horrified at his uncle, his eyes all whites.

"I suppose you don't. It's a contraction of the muscles, like *rigor mortis*, only that comes after you're dead. That is—it usually does." Lionel Holland smiled, tapping the arm of his chair with withered fingers. "I wonder what poison you put in my glass, Luke? Strychnine? That causes tetanus, you know; tonic te-

tanus, in which all the muscles of the body are rigid. By experiment I found a drug much more effective than strychnine. It causes *rigor vitæ*—the rigor of life rather than the rigor of death. Slowly your muscles become rigid, and your body becomes paralyzed. But not your brain, Luke. You'll be able to see and hear quite clearly—when they put you in your coffin."

A strangled cry burst from Luke's throat. For a moment he was no longer Luke Holland, product of the twentieth century—he was a fanatical Puritan, stamping out the black and evil foulness of witchcraft; the sin that the Scriptures cursed.

"You devil—you had powder at the bottom of the glass you gave me," he panted.

He lunged at Lionel Holland, his hands rising swiftly.

A mad rhythm jangled in his brain. As his fingers closed around the neck of the startled old man the rhythm screamed louder, into words.

"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."

Everything dissolved into a red haze, and nothing seemed to exist but his hands, closing very slowly around his uncle's throat. It was oddly difficult to move them, and they seemed strangely cold. He threw all his strength into the effort of sinking stiff fingers into the wrinkled flesh. It was queer his hands were so cold and stiff—very queer. He was surprised to hear himself laughing gently and quite insanely. He forced himself to stop thinking and listen to the tune in his head as he choked and choked. . . .

Then it was very still. The only sound was the faint creaking of the chair as Luke shook his uncle's body back and forth. He did not see the blue pallor on the wrinkled face, nor the bulging, agonized eyes. He was trying to remember something. It was very important that he remember. Oh yes—he had it now. Something to do with a drug; with paralysis. What had Lionel said? "Slowly your muscles become rigid, and your body becomes paralyzed." His feet were cold, lifeless. And

his throat ached. Luke felt stiff all over.

Suddenly the haze cleared and he stared down at his hands gripping the wrinkled throat. He tried to relax his grip, remove his hands. And—he could not. His muscles were rigidly contrasted about the neck of the dead man, as though in *rigor mortis*.

Luke began to whimper like a hurt dog.

AN HOUR later Luke Holland still crouched over his uncle's corpse in the big dark room where now the shadows crept away to secret caverns in the night. Time after time he had attempted to free his fingers from their grisly embrace, but to no avail. They were deeply imbedded in the rapidly cooling flesh—ten white links in a necklace of death.

He wondered how long he had been lying here. Five minutes? No, an age, a century, seemed more accurate. The dull ache in his throat had increased, and the strange cold had penetrated his knees.

It was apparent that he could not free himself from the ghastly grip without tools to assist him. At the thought hope shot through him. Why hadn't he thought of it before? He must get rid of the body. A knife would pry his fingers free.

Luke tried to crawl to his feet, but fell heavily. His legs were encased in blocks of ice. Breathing in hoarse gasps, he hitched himself laboriously on his knees, painfully dragging his monstrous burden behind him. There seemed to be no knives in his uncle's room; he dared not waste time searching further.

Into the hall he crawled, dragging the ghastly prisoner between locked fingers. Down the great staircase he clambered. Almost at once he lost balance and plunged forward, wheezing. Down they came, dead and half-dead together. And slowly, slowly, Luke felt the icy tide of doom creep through his veins.

How could he handle the knife? His feet were useless; his hands trapped in their frightful grip of horror. Yet there remained his mouth;

he could grip the hilt of the knife in his teeth and pry his fingers free.

Blood smeared his face before he managed to drag a kitchen drawer from its place and let the cutlery cascade to the floor. There it was—a slender-bladed carving knife. Now—

He deliberately rolled over on the floor until his lips brushed the bone handle of the knife. The dull ache had subsided from his throat now, but there was a sensation of icy cold in his jaws. . . .

He could not open his mouth! The jaws were rigidly clenched! The muscles worked in hard knots, the knife lay mockingly against his lips, but he was powerless to grip it between his teeth. Whimpering, he tried to catch it between shoulder and cheek, but this was impossible. And all through his body the cold crept slowly. . . .

Luke knew then that this was the end. He could not leave the house, chained to the evidence of his crime. He could not eat, nor sleep, nor stand erect. He was as dead as the corpse between stiffened fingers; the corpse with the mocking face that seemed to smile upwards in triumphant appreciation of the grim jest.

What had the old wizard said? That Luke's body would become rigid and paralyzed. "But not your brain, Luke. You'll be able to see and hear quite clearly—when they put you in your coffin."

Luke visualized what searchers would find when at last they broke into the house. Two dead men, stiff in *rigor mortis*, the icy fingers of one sunk into the cold throat of the other. *But one of those men would be living within that dead shell. . . .*

"No!" gurgled the stricken murderer. "No!"

And he painfully rose to his knees, crawling along the floor with his grisly Nemesis dragging behind.

HE MADE the stairs, somehow; cut and bruised, with blood flowing sluggishly from wounds he could not feel. It took ages to ascend the staircase with his monstrous burden, and more than an hour to reach Lionel's room with the open windows

through which sea-borne twilight seeped.

The icy bonds were tight on Luke now. He could scarcely move his stiffened body, and the hideous bulk he dragged made his task almost an impossible one. Very slowly he crawled toward a window. He had to make it. There was only one way to break the bond, to sever his linkage with the dead. Only one way to kill himself and not be buried alive. A fall from a height would loose his fingers, kill him. He'd escape the wizard's planned vengeance yet.

Somehow Luke propped himself up against the wall, reached the windowsill with his knees, and dragged the smiling thing up beside him. Only the ghastly thrill of triumphing over his uncle animated him, for the cold was gripping his heart now, stopping it. Soon he would be merely a living mind in a dead body, unless he fell out into the street, quickly. He must.

He stared down between his fingers at the smiling sardonic face that leered insanely upwards. He felt it stiffen. Six hours dead, and *rigor mortis* was actually setting in on his uncle's body. It was nearly as stiff as his own. Luke wanted to smile, but his face was ice. And now he had to will himself to lean forward and topple out, dragging the stiff body with him. He had to. He felt the cold stop his heart. Now he was only a living mind in a dead body.

He leaned, plunged—tried to drag the body after him.

NEXT morning the hastily-summoned police broke into the Holland mansion and invaded the second-story bedchamber. There they found what had attracted a crowd to the streets below—the body of a man, dangling from a window, hands clutched in an inflexible grip of death about the throat of Lionel Holland. Lionel Holland's body had become wedged in the narrow window-opening; *rigor mortis* had kept it from becoming dislodged and squeezing through. Apparently *rigor mortis* had held Luke's grip firm on the dead throat of his uncle so that he had hung there in midair, attached to the rigid body of the old man.

The mystery was never solved, and the undertaker seemed singularly disinclined to speak of what measures he had taken to loosen the hands of Luke from their iron grip.

The two were buried with modest obsequies a few days later. The funeral was for the most part quiet and dignified, as befitted services for one of the oldest families in the region. A brief disturbance, however, was occasioned when a youthful artist attending the funeral suddenly went into hysterics over the rigid smile on Lionel Holland's face—and because of a certain look he swore he glimpsed in the glazed eyes of Luke Holland as the coffin-lid swung into place.



*The Curse of the Ancient Mancis
Casts an Eternal Spell of
Luring Sorcery*

in

THE BAG OF SKIN

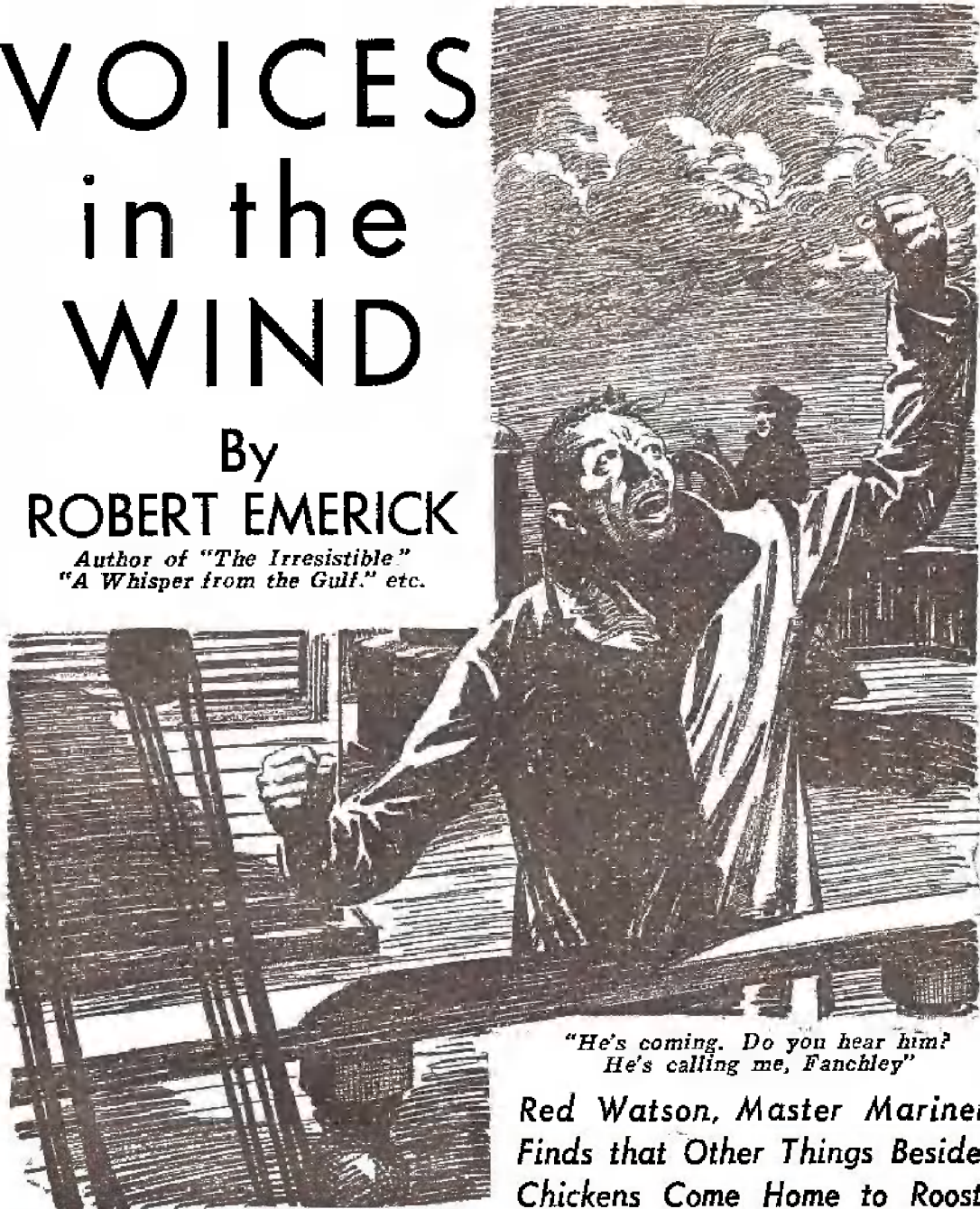
A Complete Novelet by DOROTHY QUICK

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

VOICES in the WIND

By
ROBERT EMERICK

*Author of "The Irresistible"
"A Whisper from the Gulf." etc.*



*"He's coming. Do you hear him?
He's calling me, Fanchley"*

*Red Watson, Master Mariner,
Finds that Other Things Besides
Chickens Come Home to Roost!*

THE ship was making good southing, for the wind was fair and steady, and most skippers would have congratulated themselves on making such good progress.

"Red" Watson, however, was not pleased. He was new to the ship; this was his first voyage in her, having taken the command at short notice to replace her regular skipper who had fallen down a hatch and broken his leg.

What displeased him was something his mates could not see.

With his pale eyes cold under the flaming thatch that gave him the name of "Red" throughout the seven seas, he paced the deck in a sullen temper almost from the day the ship cleared New York with a cargo of non-rush goods for Matthewtown and ports in the West Indies. From time to time, he paused and canted his head as though he were listening for some strange sound, far away and faint.

"Summerfield," he questioned his first mate, "do you hear anything in the wind?"

The lanky mate, red-nosed and watery-eyed, was startled.

"In the wind, sir?"

Summerfield shook his head and covertly sniffed his captain's breath. A man given over-strongly to liquor himself, he at once suspected the promptings of alcohol in so senseless a question.

"I hear the creaking of the rigging and the swishing of the wind itself, sir," he responded.

The captain's brows fell still lower.

"Don't lie to me, Summerfield. I'll strip the hide from your bones if you lie to me."

HE hesitated a moment, then with an obvious effort like a swimmer diving into cold water for the first time, he elaborated on his question more thoroughly.

"I want to know, Summerfield, if you can hear words in the wind. Words like these, 'You and your ship, Red Watson, will never see land again.' Words said over and over, half a dozen times a watch. You've never heard them, Summerfield?"

The lanky mate fell backward a step and laid a lanky forefinger against his bulbous nose. For a single instant the nose seemed to suffer an extraordinary paleness.

"Good Lord, no! Nothing like that, sir."

His eyelids blinked up and down several times rapidly over his watery eyes. His scrawny neck craned apprehensively.

"What does it mean, Captain? Does it mean we're going to be lost with all hands?"

"It means," began Captain Watson, and suddenly stopped.

Before him stood half his crew, and in their van, standing side by side, was Larson the big Swede and the little, wizened, middle-aged cook.

Larson spoke first.

"The grub on dis ship," he grumbled angrily, waving a tin plate. "bane swill. I tell—"

"It ain't," screamed the cook. "It's good grub."

He stabbed a finger dramatically at the Swede.

"That hellion," he went on shrilly, "threw it in my face. I won't take it, I won't. It's that big, dumb—"

Captain Watson took one step forward. He didn't yell at his squalling crew. He merely spoke, but the words dripped from his thin lips like quiet poison.

"I'm going to count ten," he said, "and when I get to ten, I'm going to begin laying open the head of every man in reach. One—two—three—"

They began to edge backward, uneasily. There was something in his face told them this was no fooling. The cook broke first. He began to run, as the captain's count mounted. They were all moving by then, all except Larson, who stood his ground stubbornly, staring at his skipper with hard, contemptuous eyes. Of a tough crew, many of whom had blood on their records, Larson was the toughest.

"Ten!" finished Red Watson.

With a single step, he reached a fid and hurled it with a motion so swift that Larson had no time to dodge. The big Swede went down with a kind of dumb astonishment on his face, and the blood from his cut head oozed slow and dark across the deck in a widening pool.

"Take him below," the captain ordered. "Do what you can for him, and if anyone wants to complain about the grub, speak up. What, no grumblers?"

As Larson was dragged away, the captain said to Summerfield.

"I'm as tough as any man on this ship, Mister. I've been around. It won't do any harm for my officers to understand that, too."

He listened a moment to the wind, canting his head in that characteristic gesture, and as he listened, his bulldog jaw jutted out like an iron-bound cape on the rugged coastal line of his face. Slowly he turned until he was looking full into the wind, that fine strong trade which was whipping the blue Gulf Stream into white-trimmed, vivid life, and he spoke to the wind as though to a material being.

"You saw what I did to Larson? I do that to everything that crosses my

path. And I mean to take this ship to port regardless of hell and man."

TURNING to Summerfield again, he said:

"Send the carpenter aft. Tell him to bring a hatchet, a jimmy, and a cold chisel."

When the carpenter appeared on the quarter, Captain Watson pointed down the hatch to his own cabin.

"On the bulkhead," he said, "you will find a wooden medallion—the face of a black man. Remove it. If necessary, chop it off. But get it off!"

He then smiled at Summerfield with smirking satisfaction.

"A woman's face, now," he grinned, "would be all right. But who wants to stare at an ugly blackamoor first thing in the morning?"

The mate had seen the medallion. An odd bit of sculpture, the bas-relief of a man's face, sardonic of expression and with staring eyes. A bit creepy at that, Summerfield thought, but certainly it was not the face of a black man. The features were more incisive than his own, the dark hue of the thing apparently resulting from age and weathering.

"It looked to me like a white man's face," Summerfield commented.

Captain "Red" Watson's face, always a rich red, mottled swiftly at the contradiction.

"It's black," he grated. "Don't you suppose I know an African when I see one? I'll show you, my man. I'll show you it's black. Right here in the daylight."

He turned his back on Summerfield, stalked aft and for a moment inspected the patent log, spinning around steadily on the taff rail. The ship was making her southing, and the wake lay behind her almost as sharp and long as that of a steamer. The sun was steady and clear and hot, and the shadows of the ship's canvas danced in the fine weather on the sea, and the heart of the skipper should have been light.

Abruptly, however, he flung himself once more to a full facing of the wind, and his voice was like a bellow, rising from his big chest.

"I will see land again! Do you hear

me? I'm master of this ship, and, by heaven, I'm going to take her into port! Every shred and spar and rope of her. D'you understand?"

Scowling, he stamped forward to meet the carpenter who was just emerging from the cabin. In the man's hands were his hatchet, jimmy and chisel.

"Where's the medallion?"

The carpenter looked frightened.

"I couldn't get it off, sir. There's something funny about that thing, sir. It ain't wood, sir, but I don't think it's iron. I don't know what it is, sir."

He held out his tools helplessly. "I couldn't make any impression on it, sir."

Captain Watson snatched the implements from the man's grasp.

"By heaven, I'll get it down!"

He lunged down the ladder, and almost at once came the rising sound of violent, slogging blows which gave evidence of the fury of his attack on the medallion.

The mate and carpenter looked at each other, and the carpenter shook his head.

"I don't think he ought to do that," said the carpenter in an awed voice. "I think that medallion means something, Mr. Summerfield."

HE HAD hardly finished speaking when a sudden darkness fell over the sea. The ship heeled far over in the wild grasp of a violent squall. The sea, boiling suddenly gray and dirty white, swept aboard through the scuppers. In an instant the hatch covers became little islands in a storm of ugly water; the cook shrieked in terror as the unexpected combers flung pots and pans helter-skelter in the galley.

Summerfield flung himself on the wheel, aiding the wheelsman to ease her off before the onslaught, shouting all the while for all hands on deck. The groaning of the masts filled his ears, together with the pistol-like reports of bursting canvas and the screaming of the wind in the rigging, the shouting of the watch below leaping in panic from the forecabin.

"This is the end," he thought, his

eyes filled with the confusion of ship and water. "We'll never have time to get her under control."

But as suddenly as the squall had fallen on the ship, it lifted. Dazed, Summerfield raised his face to the sunshine, to the fine warm sun, to the live blue sea. He wiped his eyes, as though to clear away a veil of impossible texture and hue, and there was Captain Watson standing in front of him.

"I never saw anything like it," panted the mate.

The captain nodded, and Summerfield observed with a start that his left hand was wrapped in a towel, and on the white surface of the towel, a disc of bright red was slowly widening.

"The hatchet slipped," Watson said. "Nearly took off my finger."

He regarded Summerfield quietly.

"No, I never saw anything like it, either," he went on. "The damn thing wouldn't give an inch."

"I meant the squall, sir," said the mate. "Look at the ship. Canvas half in ribbons, deck gear half over the side. Maybe half the crew gone, for all I know."

"All right," commented Red Watson. "You know what to do. I don't need to tell you. I've got to think."

And with that he turned his back on the mate and went aft to the taff rail, where he leaned moodily beside the spinning log, and stared silently into the smoky wake.

Night came, but Captain Watson refused to leave the deck. The watches changed under the stars, and the phosphorescent water ran luminous with its strange fire along the sides of the ship as she steadily plowed her way south. Every hour the wings of the trades carried her nearer to her destined port, and in all the seas of the world, no ship could have sailed more satisfyingly.

But when dawn came, and the sun once more floated up from the sea, Red Watson's face was strained, and his eyes gleamed redly in the brassy reflections from the water.

Fanchley, the second mate, a chunky young fellow who had been trained on a schoolship and could take a sight

with speed and precision, had the deck.

"A fine day, sir," said Fanchley. "Why don't you go below and caulk off a while?"

Watson regarded him with cold unfriendliness.

"When I feel the need for sleep, I'll sleep. But I intend from now on to sleep on deck, my man. I learned long ago to sleep on the topside in low latitudes. Only a fool or a boy will put up with the heat between decks."

"I never thought of that, sir," said Fanchley, reddening. "But I think the wind is keeping the ship pretty cool, so far."

"Wind? Wind? What do you know about wind?"

FOR a moment the captain stared at him with blazing eyes. Then a thin smile slipped over his hard red face.

"I know what to do with the wind, my lad. The way to beat the wind is to face it twenty-four hours a day. Never go below. Never look at the thing hanging above your bunk. Keep your eyes where they belong, and the wind will lose its voice. I know, my lad."

He smiled widely then, a cunning, smirking smile, the smile of a man who has won a point in a battle of wits.

"The wind hasn't spoken to me since last night. I've beaten it, my lad, beaten it badly. All it can do now is take us safely into port."

He began humming to himself, and young Fanchley, recognizing the tune, fitted the words in his mind:

Oh I never give a damn,
For I fear not hell nor man!
I'm Bloody Billy Bird,
The Buccaneer.

Captain Watson stopped and said with finality:

"There's a way to beat everything, my lad. Even powers from beyond life. I know, because I've just done it, with the wind."

He began again his humming, then abruptly stopped. For on the instant, there was no longer any wind at all.

The fine steady wind that had been urging the ship so staunchly, gave up suddenly and quit. The ship lost her way and wallowed in the swell. Her sails emitted a brief, exhausted flapping, then hung from the yards like rags on the arms of a scarecrow.

The captain turned his gaze from left to right in a sweep of the horizon, and what he saw caused his face to darken. For all around the ship, save only in that precise spot where she lay, the wind was fair and strong on the sea. The waves were losing their tops in white spindrift, and far off to port, the smoke of a steamer with the wind full astern, was whipping forward faster than the ship, so that it rippled like a dark plume in projection from her bow.

Captain Watson began solemnly and profoundly to curse.

"So that's your idea, is it?" he growled, his eyes blazing into the distance. "Well, I'm not beaten for a moment. By heaven! I'll wait you out. You hear? I'll lie here forever, before I'll go below. You blasted devil!"

Mr. Fanchley said timidly:

"According to the chart, sir, the Gulf Stream is running northeasterly at this spot at more than two knots an hour. We'll lose plenty I'm afraid, sir, if the wind is long in picking us up again."

The captain turned away, snarling something in the way of a reply over his shoulder. It sounded to Fanchley as though he said:

"We'll be under weigh again any minute. This calm is a freak."

But the sun moved across the meridian, and the ship still lay immobile on the sea. All her people came on deck to watch the wind stirring the sea everywhere save in the precise spot where she lay.

By mid afternoon, the crew began to whisper among themselves, all except Larson, the big Swede, who strode among them with his head in a white handage. Larson, when he spoke, spoke so that all with ears could hear.

"Dis ship," he bellowed, "bane hell ship. Look! She no move. We dead for sure."

Captain Watson, leaning stolidly on the quarter railing, heard him. Then his big jaw clicked.

"Mr. Summerfield," he shouted. "Mr. Fanchley!"

The two mates snapped to attention.

"Mr. Summerfield, take the starboard quarter lifeboat, and Mr. Fanchley, you take the port boat and call out the boat crews. We'll carry lines to the forward towing bits, and tow her."

"I don't think we can do it, Captain," Summerfield said. "She's a big ship, heavily loaded, and in a two-knot current."

"If you don't do it," Captain Watson said coldly, "there'll be no supper tonight for any of you, officers or men."

So the boat crews manned the boats and lowered them, but when they let go the falls, the current picked up the boats and whipped them astern of the ship despite all they could do.

For a solid hour the men sweated and panted at the oars, and their only progress was to relieve a little the slack on the lines which still connected them with the ship.

AT SUNSET, the captain permitted them to return on board.

"Didn't I told you?" bellowed Larson. "Dis bane hell ship all right. We good like dead, sure."

Captain Watson said nothing at all, just stared at them with hard, red eyes. However, as the short twilight fell, darkening swiftly, he said to Summerfield:

"Either I go below again to face that damnable thing on my bulkhead, or the ship and all in her are fated to rot here on the sea. So I'm going below, my man, but I'm not finished yet. Oh, no, there's a trick or two yet to be played."

He dropped down the hatch, and five minutes later the wind poured inboard in a tumbling flood, filled the sails in an instant. The water turned white in the dusk under the vessel's forefoot, the sudden roil of the wake danced in a whirl of phosphorescent fires, and the ship, with an enormous sigh, resumed her fast progress.

That night, during the mid-watch,

there was a fire in Captain Watson's cabin. The man at the wheel, standing his lonely silent watch, suddenly saw the stars mistily through a haze of smoke, and coughed with the odor of burning wood sharp in his nostrils. A moment later he had filled the night with the clangor of the ship's bell, and the bellow of his voice, spreading the alarm. The men tumbled out of their bunks half-dressed, clumsy with sleep, falling over each other in the darkness as they ran for their stations.

The captain met them at the doorway to his cabin. The light from the swinging saloon lamp showed him to be fully dressed, but his stubborn red hair was badly singed, and his eyebrows and lashes had been burned almost entirely off.

"It's out, you swabs," he greeted them, his big frame blocking the doorway. "The whole blasted ship would burn up if I waited for you to put out a fire. Get back to your stations, all of you. And hereafter when I upset a lantern, see that you're on hand a damn sight quicker than this time. Next time it takes you an hour to show up, I'll break every bloomin' head in the bunch."

Next morning the carpenter went to the cabin to repair the damage. He found the bulkhead at the foot of the captain's bunk to be badly charred, but the old medallion, around which the fire seemed to have burned most fiercely, showed no damage whatever and clung to the bulkhead as securely as ever.

FROM that night, Captain Watson began to change in temperament rapidly, and not for the better. Always quick-tempered and irascible, he grew almost ferocious. Talking with him was nearly impossible. He seemed to sink into himself, and spent his time on deck pacing interminably, his head canted to the side, hearing voices in the wind.

"I think he's losing his mind," said Fanchley to the first mate.

Summerfield, being neglected by his skipper, relapsed to his bottle. He became more and more muddled as he stood his watches, to the extent that Fanchley began to fear for the ship

when Summerfield had the deck. The crew sneered at the first mate openly.

"I never saw such a ship," he sniveled on Fanchley's shoulder. "The captain's crazy, always hearing things in the wind. And the crew—the crew, boy, it's made up of gutter-scum and pirates, who have no respect for years or authority."

He wiped his bulbous nose on his sleeve and went below for another drink. In the end, it had to happen.

Summerfield put his arm around Captain Watson's shoulder and tolled off his troubles maudlinly. Red Watson measured him carefully, and the crack of his big fist on the mate's jaw was heard as far forward as the mainmast.

"Now, my man," said the captain, stirring the prostrate figure with his foot. "If you're not already dead, let this be a lesson to you. I'll have no damned drunken officer on my ship."

He wheeled to face the wind.

"It is my ship," he shouted into the wind. "You hear? My ship! And you're not going to take it from me, either."

They carried Summerfield below, his jaw broken, and young Fanchley found his duties doubled. He called Hogan the boatswain and said:

"Hogan, you'll have to act as a mate for the remainder of this cruise. And, things being as they are, that means standing watch and watch for the two of us. Four hours on, four hours off. It'll be pretty hard on us, but there's nothing else for us."

"Aye, Mr. Fanchley. But what about the captain?" Hogan peered at the burly, sullen figure warily out of the corner of his eye. "What'll the captain say, Mr. Fanchley, about me acting as a mate?"

"To hell with what the captain says, Hogan. Somebody's got to navigate the ship. I've logged both him and Mr. Summerfield as being too ill for duty. That leaves me in command."

But things were not so easily settled as that. On the following day, during the morning watch, Captain Watson came storming on deck looking for Fanchley.

"What the hell do you mean, Mister, taking over my ship? By God!

you're under arrest. For mutiny, d'you hear? For mutiny. I'll show you who's master of this ship. Bos'un!" he bellowed. "Bos'un! I'm going to put you in irons, Mister. I'll show you."

He glared at Fanchley, his blood-shot eyes wild and eerie beneath their lashless lids and smooth brows. He resembled some strange hairless, inhuman doll.

"I'm working for the safety of the ship, sir," Fanchley said quietly. "You won't put me in irons, and you won't put me under arrest. Somebody's got to stand the watches. And you know it."

HE STOPPED abruptly as the captain walked away from him, going to the taffrail to shake his fist into the wind.

"You put him up to it. You did it, you devil from hell! But I'll show you! I'll take this ship into Matthewtown, and no man alive or dead will stop me. You hear me?"

Hogan, half-asleep and frightened, appeared on deck in answer to the captain's call. Watson looked at him without seeing him, then strode past him and went down the companion to his cabin, his red face working, his mouth muttering profound curses.

Almost immediately there came a shriek from below, muffled, broken, but unmistakably the voice of a man in a panic.

Fanchley stiffened.

"Take the deck, Hogan. He's murdering Summerfield."

Snatching up a fid, Fanchley flung himself down the cabin hatch. Watson met him at the doorway to Summerfield's cabin, his great bearlike figure and turbulent red hair silhouetted against the faint glow from the compartment behind him. Fanchley raised the fid and swung with all his strength. He thought he had hit hard enough to kill any man, but Watson bore down on him without any apparent damage, knocked him flat with a single lurch of his big shoulders, and continued on to his own quarters.

Fanchley got to his feet, a little breathless, and went in to Summerfield. The first mate was lying on the

deck of his cabin, quite alive, and mumbling in mixed fear and indignation.

"He tried to choke me, the damned murderer," he whispered through the bandages that held his broken jaw together. "Wanted to know where I kept my whiskey, wanted it for himself, the dirty hypocrite."

Back on deck, Fanchley said to Hogan:

"I think we'd better put him in irons before he kills somebody."

Hogan nodded, and Fanchley went below and got two big revolvers, one of which he gave to the boatswain.

"Shoot if you must," he said grimly. "Otherwise, positively not."

However, to put a man in irons, he must first be caught. And Captain Red Watson seemed to have disappeared. Alternately, Fanchley and Hogan searched the ship from stem to stern, their weapons in their hands. The mad skipper was not to be found.

The day passed with the ship fleeing steadily to the southward, a thing alive in a perfect world of sky and water. In the second dog watch, the appearance of things changed. The wind fell off to nothingness, and in the southeastern sky lightning began to flicker like brilliant streamers waving from a Maypole.

Fanchley said to Hogan:

"We're in for a blow. I wish I knew if it were an honest blow, or another of those damn things the captain and his crazy medallion seem to inspire."

Darkness moved on the ship like a curtain, the great black thunderheads of the storm rolling across the stars one by one. The lightning frolicked in alternate white and purple, and the thunder rumbled and echoed between the dark veil and the silent sea.

"I'll take a turn around the ship and see that everything's fast, sir," said Hogan, "And if you think it advisable, I'll begin taking in the tops'ls."

Fanchley nodded.

"Keep all hands standing by, Hogan."

FANCHLEY was wondering where the captain was all this time. Had he killed himself by leaping over the side, to drown in the darkness, or was

he carrying on his struggle with forces from beyond life in some obscure bilge of the ship? Would it be necessary to find him and make of him some sort of occult sacrifice in order to preserve the safety of all hands?

He looked again at the approaching storm, and the heart of young Fanchley trembled with misgivings. What a way, he thought, to die, to be the innocent bystander caught in a struggle he did not understand, and to vanish forever in a stormy sea, the victim of an unearthly madness.

And then, suddenly, Captain Watson was standing beside him.

"Don't shoot," said Watson moodily. "Keep your hands clean, lad, I'll be dead presently, anyway."

He leaned dejectedly against the rail, that great, red-haired brute of a man, and his figure slumped as though every bone in his body had become soft. Ruin, utter demoralization, shrieked from every line of him.

"You think I'm insane, lad," he said, talking over his shoulder. "Maybe I am. But, Fanchley, I've been through a thousand hells since I came aboard this ship. You know that head, fastened by the Devil to my bulkhead? It grins at me eternally, and its eyes are of fire. It is the head of man severed from the shoulders. I can hear the blood dripping, Fanchley, dripping like a warm rain, dripping and clotting, dripping and clotting. And when I look at my hands they are red, too, all red with the blood of a murdered man."

He stopped momentarily and shuddered, his frame shaking so violently with the chill, that Fanchley could hear his teeth clicking in the silence of the thunder.

"No wonder I am covered with blood, Fanchley. How it spurted! It was like red water from a burst hose. I never believed he had so much blood in him."

"Pull yourself together, sir," Fanchley soothed. "Your imagination is running away from you."

Watson shook his head wearily.

"No, lad. It's all true. It all happened. But it was very long ago. Twenty-five years or more. I thought it was all forgotten. And now, out of

the past, that head appears, his head, to make me pay, and it grins while I writhe."

The lightning by this time had become continuous, a kaleidoscopic weaving of colorful darts of vicious flame such as Fanchley had never witnessed before. It illuminated the sea and the ship, and the staring, agonized face of Red Watson in every uncanny detail. The ship lay on the black sea like a fragment of wood on a pool of ink, and the ends of the bare yards and masts stood like gibbet-fingers, empty and hungering, against the flaming sky.

The man at the wheel called out, his white face strained in the dancing lights:

"She has no way, sir. The wheel is dead."

"Hold her as she is," Fanchley shouted. "The squall will be down on us any moment now."

"No, Fanchley," said Captain Watson, his great bellowing voice subdued, "the squall will not be down on us any minute. It will not be down on the ship until I die. He is coming for me, lad. He is coming for me tonight, on the storm. When you first feel the wind, you will know I'm dead."

THE second mate shivered.

"Captain, you're overwrought," he said shakily. And thought grimly that with the elements as they were, the captain's words would soon have him in the same condition. "You'd better go below, sir. I can handle the ship."

"This morning," went on Red Watson dully, "just before daybreak, as I lay in my bunk with my face in the pillow to keep out the sight of that horrible head, it spoke to me. 'I shall fall from this bulkhead within a day', it said, 'and my fall shall be the signal of your death'."

"Nonsense," said Fanchley. "You dreamed it. Inanimate things don't talk."

The captain wheeled on him with a recrudescence of his usual temper.

"Are you trying to tell me I am hearing things? Don't be a fool, my man. D'you suppose I don't know

voices when I hear them? Hasn't the wind been telling me of my death for days?"

Fanchley shrugged. There seemed nothing to say. Also he was becoming more and more disturbed by the storm. It seemed to be settling down on the ship, as though finding in that little bark a target for its hurtling spears of lightning. He imagined that the flashes were darting into the black sea, throwing up hissing waterspouts in a white fence around the vessel, a fence that was converging steadily on the doomed craft. Yard and mast tips were glowing weirdly, appearing to be sheathed in pale pompoms of blue light.

He told himself, "This is only St. Elmo's fire you are seeing. Only superstitious sailors are afraid of St. Elmo's fire. Buck up, Fanchley."

His knees felt strangely weak. And there was a coldness running over his entire body.

It was at that moment Watson suddenly stood up, and clutched the second mate by the shoulder.

"He's coming. He's coming. Do you hear him? He's calling me, Fanchley. He's saying: 'Watson! Red Watson!'"

"I hear nothing but the thunder, Captain. Let go my shoulder, sir. You are breaking my bones."

The fingers of the mad skipper bit even deeper.

"Aye. He has fallen from the bulkhead. Did you hear the crash as he fell, Fanchley?"

"I tell you I hear nothing, sir. Nothing but the thunder."

"He is coming closer," Watson whispered, crouching closer to the trembling mate. "The air is chilled with the presence of the dead, and I can smell the fresh blood on his beard."

"It is the coolness of the coming storm, and the smell is only the salty smell of the sea. Let me go, Captain. Let me go."

"See!" Watson cried sharply, "Here he comes," and he pointed over Fanchley's shoulder. "Look, Fanchley! There he is. I didn't dream it Fanchley. He has come to kill me."

As Fanchley turned his head, peal

after peal of wild laughter burst from the lips of Red Watson.

"But he won't kill me, Fanchley. He won't. Because I know how to cheat him even now, the devil."

Pushing the mate from him, he backed up to the rail, all the while pouring out that wild insane laughter across the waters.

IN THAT moment the storm fell inexplicably silent. Not so much as a thread of light showed across the black sky, no whisper of thunder disturbed the profound stillness of the air. The ship lay as before, immobile and still on the invisible sea; Fanchley had the sensation of being alone in the middle of an illimitable void.

Then he saw something moving across the deck, something faint and luminous, like a ball of St. Elmo's fire falling from the yards. Through the darkness it moved, silent and uniform, traveling steadily at the pace of a slow walk, and suspended at the height of a tall man's head. It passed the paralyzed Fanchley almost within reach and once again he sought to regain sanity by saying over and over again: "It's St. Elmo's fire! It's St. Elmo's fire."

The pale luminous globe moved straight toward Captain Watson. Without turning his face from the pale radiance, the skipper began climbing the rail. The light illumined his ghastly face, his bulging eyes. Fanchley saw him as clearly in that moment as though it were daylight, saw his mouth drop open, his bull-dog jaw jut forward. The bellow that burst from his big throat echoed through the silence of the night.

"I'll cheat you yet, you devil!"

With that he poised on the rail for a single instant, laughing his wild laugh. Then he stepped backward into space.

His laughter ending abruptly as the sea received him.

Simultaneously the storm broke, and as he heard the wind shrieking in the rigging, Fanchley cried aloud: "Captain Watson is dead!"

Later, in going through Captain Watson's effects, Fanchley found a

(Concluded on page 129)

Passing of Eric Holm

By
WILL GARTH

*Author of "House of the Griffin,"
"Sea Vision," etc.*

ERIC HOLM, in common with millions of other human beings, might have been fittingly and completely biographed by saying of him that he was born and presently died. Indeed, so it might well have been with him, had not his passing been so extraordinary.

The facts of his life may be summed up briefly enough. He was a childless widower living on a secure income. In person he was a colorless little man about whom the only distinguishing thing was an absurdly inexcusable mustache, the incongruity of which in his pallid face had penetrated even the thickheadedness of the corner policeman whom Holm passed at least once daily on his way home from the newsstand.

But certainly that policeman did not realize, when he saw Holm returning to his residence on the afternoon of April 3, 1939, that the package which Holm was carrying beneath his arm

*A Book of Black Magic, and a
Weird Thing From the Sea—
the Rest is Silence!*



*The monster rose from the sea at
his command*

was anything but a harmless and unassuming purchase.

Yet, at the rather astonishing inquest, Jeremy Lansing, apparently Holm's only friend, inferred that Holm was on that fateful afternoon carrying beneath his arm his death, when Lansing declared that Holm died because he bought a book.

The policeman admitted that on that afternoon, the last Holm had been seen alive by anyone save Lansing, Holm had certainly been carrying a package which looked like a carefully wrapped book.

The matter was virtually placed beyond all doubt when Mr. Sanderton of Sanderton and Harker, Book Importers, came forward and stated that Holm had on the afternoon of April 3 bought a book in their Fourth Avenue store.

The title of the book was simply, "Confessions of the Mad Monk Clithanus," a priceless and rare volume, which, owing to the present economic crisis, Sanderton and Harker had let go at a very moderate price.

APART from the policeman and Sanderton, there were two other witnesses at the inquest. One was a young man who gave his name as Johnny Hekler, whose rather garbled story of having seen some vague but frightening thing slide over the wall of Holm's garden was at first discounted owing to the young man's reputation for too frequent attentions to a constant and well-filled companion in his hip pocket.

The other was Lansing, a middle-aged gentleman of sober mien and nautical bearing, considerably supported by his large and bushy sideburns cut in a fashion for decades out of style.

It was Lansing's deposition which split the press to have half the newspapers calling for his life as the murderer of his best friend. And the other half darkly hinting at deep-laid plots by certain representatives of foreign powers, and eventually left the coroner's jury to take press censure for gullibility. Apart from minor persons called to verify the conditions of the finding of Holm's body, Lansing was

the last witness called to testify.

"Please tell us, Mr. Lansing," asked the coroner, "what you meant by saying that Mr. Holm died because he bought a book."

Lansing considered the coroner and the jury for a few moments before replying. Then he spoke.

"It was this way, gentlemen," he said. "Mr. Holm had got into the habit of buying a good lot of books on witchcraft and such matters, and he'd got quite set on trying out some of those old formulas. We did try out a few, but of course, nothing ever happened."

A member of the jury rose at this point to request more detailed information regarding the unsuccessful experiments. But the coroner decided that such details would contribute nothing to the matter in hand. Lansing was instructed to continue.

"Well, last Monday night—say about six-thirty, Holm called me on the telephone," he went on. "You'll remember the night, gentlemen—a muckish night with a bit of fog from the sea. He told me he'd just bought another book—the real thing, this time. There was something worth trying in the book, and would I come right over? I said I would, having nothing better to do; so over I went.

"He had the book all right. Confessions of Clithanus, as Mr. Sanderton has already mentioned. I looked it over. It was supposed to be a book of revelations written by a mad monk somewhere on the coast of England and privately printed. It was fairly old, and printed in Latin, though it was easy enough to read for all that.

"Holm pointed out certain chapters, and I looked through them. They concerned something which the monk claimed to have called out of the sea—some kind of queer animal with a funny sort of name. I've forgotten it now, but if I could look at the book for a minute, no doubt I could find it again."

THE coroner accordingly handed the book down to Mr. Lansing, who, after a few moments of diligent search, looked up and announced that he had found it.

"It's this," he said, reading, "'spawn of Cthulhu from the sunken kingdom of R'lyeh.' That's the animal, one of the spawn, which Holm said he could call up from the sea."

At this point a member of the jury rose to express the hope that Lansing would proceed as quickly and as directly as possible to the facts concerning Holm's death. The coroner instructed Lansing to proceed accordingly, but it was apparent shortly after Lansing had again taken up his story that he had not diverged in any detail from his leisurely method.

"This animal seems to have been a sort of evil being—so the book said, at any rate—and was banished and sent back into the sea by Augustine, then Bishop over Clithanus. The formula for summoning this beast from the sea was given by the monk, who wrote that this beast could be used by a wise man to be sent against his enemies.

"Holm proposed that he call the beast up that night and send him out after me. I'd be safe enough, of course, because he'd send along the monk's formula of protection and of sending the beast back to the place from which it came.

"Well, gentlemen, naturally, I put no faith in the business, especially since so many other trials had come to naught. So I agreed readily enough, though, to tell the truth, I was getting a bit tired of his everlasting experiments that didn't ever work out.

"We set on the hour of ten o'clock for the trial."

"You mean ten o'clock that night?" put in the coroner. "Why couldn't it have been done in the day time?"

"Oh, Mr. Holm would never experiment in the day time. You see, he always looked to have one of those experiments come out—and that would never do by day."

The coroner nodded.

"Well, we sat and talked for a bit, he and I, and at nine o'clock, I went home. For the first quarter hour or so, I forgot all about that formula to protect myself, and it wasn't until five minutes of ten or so that I thought of it. Then I began to repeat the formula—"

"Have you a copy of the formula?" asked a member of the jury.

Lansing nodded. "Yes, it's contained in the book. It's in old Latin, and it's full of very odd references to Ancient Gods and such things. It's quite beyond me, of course, but all I had to do was repeat the formula.

"Well, I was a little over halfway through the thing, when I heard something snuffling about near the window of my library. I confess that I got nervous at that, even though I didn't believe in any such things. So I hurried the formula a bit.

"Then I heard my front door open, and a moment later queer, shuffling footsteps coming down the hall. And believe me, gentlemen, I rattled off that Latin faster than I ever thought I could do it. I got it done just when the noise of something coming down the hall got up to my library door.

"When I finished reciting that formula the noise stopped, too. I was near to being paralyzed with the shock of the thing; so I stood there a bit and listened. Then I heard the noise again—footsteps going back down the hall and out the front door. I didn't hear the door close and when I saw it later, it was standing open.

"I finally managed to get up my courage and look out into the hall. Gentlemen, there was nothing there. But there *had* been something there, and whatever had been there was soaking wet, because there was a trail of water all over my carpet in the hall, and nasty-looking footprints."

THOSE in the court looked puzzled as Lansing paused.

"What kind of footprints?" asked the coroner.

"Oh, nothing I'd ever seen before. Something like a big frog's. Webbed feet—but big, very big, and irregular—yes, gentlemen, most irregular. Believe me, it set me up to see them there, and the smell, too. Like the sea. Of course, you know there was a fog that night, and with the door open, why the smell *could* have come from that—but it was so *strong*, and there was something else about it, something *animalish*!

"I stood for a few moments looking

at the tracks. Then I thought of Holm. So I pulled myself together and went to the telephone. He was waiting. I guess, because he answered right away.

"I said who I was and then I told him, 'I think that beast of yours came all right, Holm. Left a nice mess of wet tracks on my hall carpet, I must say.' That's what I said to him."

"'Did you see it?' he asked me."

"'Oh, no, thanks,' I said. 'I saw its footprints and I can still smell it. That's quite enough for me.'"

"I could hear him laughing. Then he said, 'It's too bad you didn't see it. Tell you what we'll do next time—we'll reverse it. You send it to me. I'll take a look at it before I send it back—' Then he paused a bit, and I asked whether anything was the matter. 'There's someone at the door, I think. Just a minute—why, by George, I think he's coming right in.'"

"Then he went away from the telephone."

Lansing paused again, swallowed with some difficulty, and clasped his hands tightly together.

"Then, gentlemen, then—I heard him scream—a terrible scream it was. And I heard furniture being turned over, and things being torn, curtains and such like—and then horrid grunting sounds, awful little croaks and grunts."

Lansing paused again.

"I called into the telephone, but he didn't answer. No one answered. His man wasn't home—it was his day out, anyway. I called and called, and I could hear something all the time—a nasty, horrid sound like something—something eating."

"Then, gentlemen, I called the police."

"I met them in front of Holm's house and went right in with them. The front door was standing open on his waiting room—and, gentlemen, there were tracks there, like those in my hall, wet, nasty tracks that smelled like the deep sea, a slimy seaweed smell. And the tracks went all the way in, through the waiting room and the dining room and around into the library."

"There we found Holm. He was

dead. He had been sort of pulled to—to pieces. And he wasn't quite all there. I couldn't look at him, gentlemen, and he my best friend. I couldn't stand the library, either, and got back into the waiting room as quick as I could. The library had a smell twenty times worse than the one in the waiting room.

"After a while I went back and showed the police the telephone—it was hanging out of its cradle—just the way he'd left it. And then I picked up the book, too."

"A little later I went with the police on the trail of those footprints. They went out the back way, through the garden, where they dented in the ground fairly well, showing that the thing must have had a good deal of weight, and over the garden wall. From there they turned seaward and we lost them."

■ ANSING shuddered and stopped. ■ He looked from the coroner to the jury and back again.

The coroner appeared to be considering the story.

"Of course," he said presently, "you can realize how we react to such a narrative, even with the authentic evidence we seem to have. But there is one thing that puzzles me. You said that Holm would send back with you the formula for your protection and for sending the beast back to the place from which it came. I assumed that Mr. Holm meant that your reciting the formula would send the beast back to the sea."

Lansing nodded vigorously. "Oh, yes, yes, absolutely—he did."

"But, since the beast appears to have followed the appointed order of the formula—in coming in response to Mr. Holm's summons, and in being repulsed by your formula—I am at a loss to understand why it did not return directly to the sea instead of going back to destroy Mr. Holm."

A breathless silence hung in the room.

Lansing fumbled awkwardly in his pockets and drew out a piece of paper, twice folded. Then he put on a pair of worn spectacles and peered at the

(Concluded on page 128)

He Who Spoke

By BERNARD BRESLAUER

Author of "Them That's Tough," "Mountain Justice," etc.
(Illustrated on the Cover of this Issue)



WHY couldn't he move?

Often in dreams, Richard Carey had experienced this sensation of unwilling immobility, when the soul cries out for flight but the body takes root in the quagmire of nightmare. This was no dream.

What had become of the man in black. The thin man in black—the asker of questions. He was no longer there. He no longer cut off Richard Carey's vision of the brook and the pool and the green bank.

Suddenly Richard Carey found himself capable of motion. He walked to the pool's edge, took off his shoes and socks, dipped an experimental toe into the water. It was cool.

Hastily he divested himself of his clothes. He looked down into the pool. A boy's face looked up at him. But he did not think that was strange. He didn't think it was strange that the reflected body was that of a boy. He dove in.

A boy swam in the pool, turned somersaults, spouted water like a little whale. The afternoon sun moved westward, a breeze sprang up, and the boy came out and let his body dry in the breeze and sunlight. And the boy made as if to stretch, and as he did—the man once again found . . . that he could not move.

As a man's thirst increases when he finds that there is no water, so Richard Carey's desire for motion increased when he found that he could not move.

"I want to walk!" he thought

wildly. And an instant later he thought wonderingly: "But I've just come from a walk. It was a long walk and I got very tired." And he thought he heard his own wild laughter rattle at the queer perversity of his desires.

His laughter stopped. The voice of the man in black had dropped into it, but only in memory, like an echo.

"Speak. Give up the secret. The secret is heavy. Two can carry it more easily than one."

The man in black was gone now, carrying away with him Richard Carey's thin-lipped silence.

"Don't run, walk to the nearest exit," Richard Carey thought, but he could not remember the name of the Fire Commissioner who signed his name to that familiar warning in all theatres.

"I'll twist it around," he thought. "Don't walk—run. Don't walk—run!"

THE boy ran through fields and across meadows, dropping bits of paper on the way, in the game of hare and hounds. His sun-burned sweating face shone in the sunlight. Panting, he lay down to rest. A moment later he sat up. He was tired. And almost at once he was more than tired, he was old. And he could not move.

"Speak," said a voice, and it was the now familiar voice of the asker of questions.

But Richard Carey would not speak.

Where bank and pool and brook had been was desert, stretching away into loneliness. The meadows and the fields of buckwheat, barley, rye

The Face of the Sphinx was the Face of Richard Carey!

and clover were gone. There was sand where they had been, and there was the Sphinx. But the face of the Sphinx was the face of Richard Carey, and Richard Carey would not speak.

"Shut up," said Richard Carey to the memory of the man in black.

"I walked and then I ran," he thought. "I swam and I played hare and hounds. I ran—and the hounds couldn't catch me."

But he was wrong. The hounds had caught him. He could not move.

For an instant he stared into blackness. There was no brook, no bank, no boy in a pool, no hare and no hounds, no vernal sun nor April breeze.

Then suddenly there was light, there was a corruscating flash of flame! There was lightning and there was thunder, but a thunder and lightning such as he had never before heard or seen. And above the thunder there was the now familiar voice.

"Speak! Share your secret! You cannot take it with you! It's heavy! Give me some of it to carry!"

If he could not move before, he was ten times less able to move now! The lightning and thunder were within him, roaring in his veins like a torrent, and his inner self was ablaze with light.

But there was also light all around him now—and he gazed upon horror. A fiddler with eyeless sockets scraped upon a violin. The tune he scraped was a dance of death. The figures danced to the tune within the confines of imprisoning chains.

One sang, and Richard Carey's eyes

went to her. Loveliness unimaginable, but crowned with serpent tresses. And Richard Carey knew that what he was looking upon was the face of truth, but truth in chains. The other was also a female thing, with bat-wings and the head of a crocodile, and Richard Carey knew that this must be the outward representation of his thin-lipped silence.

"I did it!"

The fiddling stopped. The fiddler with the red eye-sockets faded back into white light and nothingness. The bat-winged thing faded with him. But the creature with the serpent tresses remained for an instant. The serpents that had been her hair and her fingers were gone, and her chains had snapped. On tip-toe she moved toward Richard Carey and kissed him with feather-lightness on the forehead. Then she too was gone—and so was Richard Carey. . . .

THE minister in black, the warden of the prison, the witnesses of the electrocution, all looked at each other.

"You heard him . . . we all heard him . . ." the minister said. "He spoke, broke his silence at last, confessed—but, my God, it was *after* the executioner threw the switch for the first shock. How was that possible, Doctor?"

"It's not," said the doctor in a low voice, "but it happened. We all heard him."

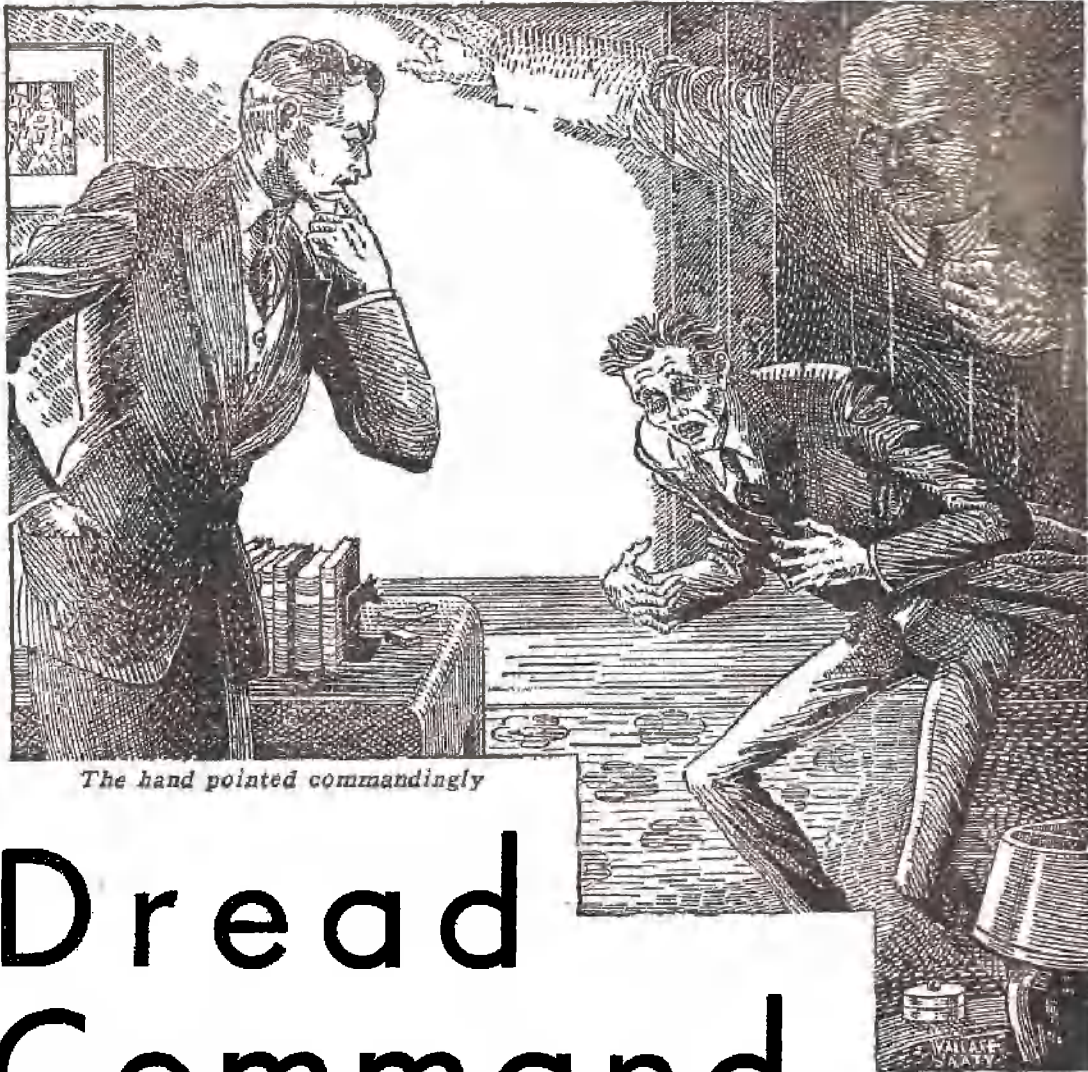
"I knew he would speak," the man in black murmured . . . "I knew he would speak. Now we are all sure. The Governor will be much relieved."

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The hand pointed commandingly

Dread Command

By DAVID BERNARD

Author of "The Piper From Bhutan," "Jekal's Lesson," etc.

THE man had deliberately followed me to my door. Lurking there, in the telephone pole's shadow, his cadaverous face was directed up at my window. This ragged creature was no mere panhandler, as I had thought upon first noticing him slouching after me when I left the public library that evening. I debated the proper course to follow, annoyed, when the strange man decided for me.

He shuffled slowly across the street. The door banged downstairs. Slow, laboring feet scraped their way up the wooden stairs leading to my one-room apartment.

Fists tightening, I sidled grimly to the unlatched door as the steps halted. Possessing one hundred and seventy-five pounds of youth in good condition, I had no physical fear of the stooped, emaciated stranger. I called out for his mission.

"Mister Simms—Ronald Simms—please, I want to talk—"

He knew me! But it was the peculiar, almost uncanny pitch and hoarseness of his voice that affected me most. Speech seemed to be for him an effort made mighty by deep-laid weakness or malignancy. I inched the door open cautiously—and recoiled.

Cadaverous was a euphemism! His face was a sickening green; unwashed, unshaven for days; devoid of visible flesh; lifeless, save for two close-set, deep-sunken eyes lit with dark, feverish fire. Had he straightened, his scraggly pate would have brought him but a shade under my five-eleven. He could not have weighed a hundred pounds, he looked so emaciated.

"Sorry—" I eyed his shabby clothes—"I don't recall—"

"We never met." Pale lips quivered, settling into a smile's semblance. "Grool is my name, Mister Simms. Eric Grool. I know you, Ronald Simms, the author."

I smiled. The compliment—"Ronald Simms, the author"—was impressive and sardonic. I was a part-time writer. Part time because I had to have a job in order to live. I could verily paper a wall with the rejection slips two years' writing had earned for me. But *Bizarre*, the foremost magazine of weird fiction, had published two of my stories, the last of which, "The Possessed," had won me quite a bit of attention and praise.

"The library, tonight," Grool said, before I could ask how he knew my name and address. "Your name, I noticed it once before, too, on your library card." His strained voice caught with a violent cough. "I—I'm always interested in those who read books on the occult. I always wonder if maybe, like me, they're seeking help—the answer to a frightful trouble—trying, like me, to find help nobody can give—"

He paused, rubbing his forehead, then blurted: "I wander... My mind—it turns and turns—but I can't help it! He—he's doing it."

He mumbled apologetically, check-

ing his outcry. "Your name, on the card—you see, I remembered it. I couldn't forget it, since reading 'The Possessed' in October's *Bizarre*."

I NOTED suddenly Grool had come across the threshold while talking. He stared like a hungry animal at a pack of cigarettes on my table. A nod from me and he went for them as if they were food and he starved.

He flopped into my only easy chair, the cigarette flamed in one swift move. He inhaled until the butt glowed brightly. Reluctantly he let the incredible inhalation of smoke escape from his lungs, and then, breaking his strange monologue with frequent draws of smoke, he went on:

"When I read your story, I said to myself—Ronald Simms knows what he's talking about. Not like the doctors—the fools! Ronald Simms can help me."

Five chilling bones gripped my wrist as Grool leaned forward. "You will help me—won't you?" he cried.

Astonished at the strength of that skeleton's hand, I said, "Well—just what is it? How can I help you?"

"He—he's driving me—I—" Grool seemed to be fighting tears. "I'm like him, the poor man in your story—"

A chill swept up my back. You'll recall, if you read my story, that it dealt with the ancient occult teaching that the universe is populated by beings of a material more ethereal than what we call *physical*. One of these unseen yet very real creatures employs the protagonist in my story as a tool, literally forcing into him a new and malevolent personality. I shook my head at Grool.

"Perhaps, Mr. Grool—if you saw a doctor—"

"Fools, I told you. The things I—and you—know, they laugh at! The cursed fools laugh when I tell them what he's forcing me to."

"Who is?"

Grool's feverish eyes flared even more. Like a worshiper cowering before his Nameless Unseen, he lifted his quavering arms and said huskily: "Morban—Butcher Morban."

I tried to put both contempt and

consolation in my stare. "If you read the news at all," I said crisply, "Butcher Morban got his deserved reward in the electric chair, one month ago—"

Grool interrupted wildly. "Do you think there's a thing I don't know about him?" He paused to croak in mirthless laughter. He hissed suddenly:

"From the first—the night he did his first horror—I knew. And not only because I lived with him—"

Two hands held my wrist this time; Grool leaned close, and like a long-repressed flood a ghastly story broke from his distorted lips.

The monster, Leon Morban, whose unspeakable ax murders had won him the sobriquet "Butcher," had been Grool's uncle. Ten years back, "I was still a young man," Grool went on, "I was working in Pennsylvania, earning little more than nothing. My mother and father—they died years before. I was glad to come here to work for Morban in his junk business. Maybe my trouble began when I became like a slave, but he bossed and kicked and beat me so, from the start. He and—his wife—"

"His wife?" I shuddered. "She was—"

"The Butcher's first victim."

I recalled vividly the monster's history. Leon Morban's wife was found, dismembered, bloody, in a deserted lot. The prosaic junk dealer was unsuspected. Weeping, he vowed to track down his wife's slaughterer. Only after six additional known butcheries, when he had been arrested and doomed by incontrovertible evidence, did Morban expose his true self. You who followed the trial will recall how he leered insanely in court, deeply pleased at the chance to tell how his first murder and mutilation had whetted his "inner hunger, whipping up my desire to kill, kill."

Grool shook his head, as if that could rid him of terrible memories. He half shouted: "And just as I knew, that first night—I knew it every other night. Every horrible one: the colored man, the little girl, the old doctor—and others, I tell

you, that the police still don't know!" I shrank away. "You—you knew—and kept silent?"

"What could I do? What could I do? I knew—yet not in the sense the world means by *knowing*—I knew, I saw him kill her—his wife. I—then I woke up when he came in and began washing his hands. He beat me into unconsciousness. When the detectives came I had to tell them what he told me to tell them."

"And the other times?"

"I saw each one, each time—yet it wasn't seeing—"

"What? Your words don't make sense!"

"But it's the truth. The police—I tried to tell them, that was after the fourth one—they laughed at my 'dreams.' Yet everything I dreamed—though it wasn't dreaming, I tell you!—everything was exact with what he told at the trial."

WHILE Grool fumbled with match and cigarettes, I weighed the patent sincerity of the man against the pitiful incongruity of his story. I said dryly, "You were, of course, in bed all the while, each time you say you *knew* and *saw*?"

"Yes. But it was both—sleeping and waking. After a while I began to understand somewhat how I could do it."

I began to regret having let Grool go so far, but I asked: "What?"

"Why—how I could see and feel it all the way I did. The time, for example, when that Negro was—hacked. Of a sudden, there he was, coming slow, turning the corner. It was like seeing him through a telescope you're focusing—when suddenly, there! you see him. I saw him that way, the colored man."

His voice quavered as he went on. "I felt, as he came nearer and nearer, like a—a cannibal must feel—wild, starved, and for some mad reason angry at him. I felt, heard myself scream. The colored man, he tried to fight—and he was so young. I saw his face so clear; the street—even the ax, shining under the street lamp. And then—then, God save me!—his face burst—red—" Grool was sob-

bing, his voice jerking in harmony with his body.

"Yes, somehow, something made it all go on and on—swinging that ax, with all my power; swinging it up—down—" He fell limply into my supporting hands, biting his lip as if to repress what he was saying, but he spoke on:

"Then, it was like all the rest. I felt I had to get away. Had to. And I'd run, run, run. And then a terrible shock would go through me. And of a sudden, there I was, bathed in ice, my body numb, paralyzed—in bed."

His voice fell into an eerie whisper. "And next, I would hear him at the door. He'd come in—to wash his hands. I faked sleep—but every time he'd beat me."

Grool stiffened abruptly, an almost comical look overspreading his face. "Yet—I never knew where he hid the ax."

I STUDIED the haggard face and held back the uncomplimentary remark that rolled to my lips regarding Grool's mental health. I said instead, "I'm sorry, truly sorry for you, Grool—"

"They all are—sorry—so they say!" Grool cried bitterly. "But you—you can, you will—help me—"

"Help?" I murmured as he clutched my hands. "What can I do?"

"Save me!" His eyes went upward. He might have been gazing at something or someone perceptible only to his disordered mind. And then the mounting fright which quivered through his every nerve and muscle seemed to focus and find a point of egress in his voice.

"Him"—the words swept past his saliva-flecked, tremulous lips—"save me from him—from Butcher Moran!"

"He's dead. Control yourself—"

"No! No!" Shouting had to be buttressed by a violent head-shaking. "The body alone meets death; the inner man lives on. He lives, I tell you. The mind that rules me—lives! Each night I know—"

I realized suddenly that I was shouting, trying to argue this shaken,

sick creature out of his frightful belief, but he ranted on:

"In that strange time that they call dream, we meet—he and I meet—he with those horrible eyes—the wet, hungry mouth. 'Go out! Kill, kill, kill!' That's what he commands. And he tries to make me go to where he hid it. The ax! His bloody, murdering ax! I—I jump out of that sleep—and sometimes there I am, groping, groping—in the corners, the dark, cluttered places of the stable. I'm groping for it! And—God in Heaven—some night I—I'll find it. Some night—"

I got him out of my apartment—bodily. I had to. He was sobbing hysterically, on his knees, begging me to use my "knowledge" to save him from a doom he believed absolutely to be hovering like the plague all about him.

I shoved the remaining cigarettes into his pocket, and a dollar bill, which he tried feebly to refuse. But he would not go until I took his address and promised faithfully to visit him soon and do my best to help him. And when he lurched off into the night he left me with a gnawing sense of—well—guilt. Something akin to what is felt by the hoaster whose pretensions are revealed in a moment of vital trial.

But the strange, and annoying, visit grew less vivid in memory as the cares of work and ambition beset me. Several nights later I returned home from work, looking forward a bit glumly to a new story for *Bizarre*—another story, excellent as it might seem to me and non-professional critics, which probably would be rejected for some unnoticed defect by *Bizarre's* perspicacious editor, Franklin Bard.

Entering my apartment, my gaze settled on the table where my mail always was placed by the landlady—and my heart sank with a sensation only a would-be-successful author can adequately appreciate. For there lay a large manuscript-size envelope, addressed in my own handwriting to me. Teeth gnashing, I lifted the manuscript from the large envelope.

A neat letter, with the letterhead

of *Bizarre*, was affixed to the story I had sweated over for fully two months and had mailed hopefully just ten days ago. "Dear Mr. Simms," the letter read:

There is good suspense in "The Great God," but the all-important eeriness of atmosphere seems inadequate. Somehow the yarn fails to convince. Sorry.

Very sincerely yours,

Franklin Bard.

"Fails to convince!" I repeated that phrase a dozen times, stamping up and down my apartment. That, in essence, summed up Bard's reaction to the last twelve stories I had sent him. Discouragement had mounted to the insufferable point. To think that after publication of "The Possessed" I had thought my success was assured!

Then I noticed a small envelope on my table. It was a letter from Grool, maundering, begging, humbly reminding me of my overdue promise to visit him. I ripped it into shreds and stamped from my room, heading for the nearest bar.

There, under the influence of patient contemplation and highballs, the idea took root and flourished. I *had*, after all, sold two stories; Franklin Bard went out of his way to write me criticisms of those he rejected; the success of *Bizarre* marked its editor's wisdom. Probably I had been going too far afield from my own experience in culling plots for weird stories. This line of reasoning proved a path of swift and easy travel for my mind. Soon I left the bar, my steps directed deep into the overcrowded tenement district, following the address given me by Eric Grool.

THE conglomerate mass of squalor and filth everywhere about me lent point to my thinking. Here, with more undoubtedly to come, lay the fertile ground for atmosphere—a quality my stories needed. Half-naked children, hundreds of them, were on the street, drawn by the warm night; their mothers lolled dazedly on stone steps, fire-escapes, shrilling at them. Older boys and girls danced, smoked, gambled in

noisy groups on curb and sidewalk, seemingly delighting in blocking my advance. Darker, dirtier, my surroundings grew as I neared the river. And all at once—there was the address.

Men—hopeless, sullen, unkempt, lurching from drink or disease—stared menacingly at my comparatively opulent clothes as I walked in from the sidewalk close by the waterfront, pacing toward the low garage-like structure that loomed inkily some fifty feet back there. The structure was a stable, trapped in the midst of awkward, bleak tenements; a prize of war, boastful proof of the sprawling city's conquest over rural life.

I halted before the stable's door, a spasmodic shudder riding through me—but not because of the gloomy shades, the ancient mustiness, the filthy cobwebbed panes. I recalled the scene, so much pictured in newsreel and tabloid; I was at the door of him who had brought unforgettable terror to the city, the lair of the ax-slayer, Butcher Morban.

I fought down the impulse to move away, fast. I had come with a purpose important to me. I rapped briskly on the stout, frayed door.

No response, save a dismal reverberation from within. Once more—and now I heard his voice—sepulchral tones sounding from a monument to age and rot. The door creaked and clanked. Light hit my eyes. A bolt was worked out of place—and, staring stupidly at me, a corpse-face in an oil lamp's fitful rays, his bone of an arm beckoning was Eric Grool.

I stepped in as he whimpered, "I didn't think you'd come." And as I crossed the threshold he rushed the door, heaving it shut, slamming its ponderous chain and bolt in place.

"What are you afraid of?" I asked sternly.

He gestured at himself. "I lock myself in. Oh"—he clutched my sleeve—"thank God you've come. I—I can't stand it much longer!"

I brushed free and walked down the dark chamber. Grool pointed at a heavy sliding door at the room's

far wall. "That leads to—the stable. In here," he waved at a single cot against the side wall, on which I seated myself, "I sleep—or try to." He lit a second oil lamp and turned to me.

"I've begged him—I try that now—begged him to stop. But he laughs, as if he knows that I'll soon, soon . . ."

"What?" I demanded, as he hesitated breathlessly.

"Find the ax!" He flared the end of a cigarette, drawing deeply.

I SHRUGGED hopelessly and commenced to take notes. Grool ranted on:

"Last night—I was conscious of a sudden that I was on Southern Road. I knew. The ice plant, the barbed fence, the old wharf. I was walking along, under the clouded full moon, all alone. I was after something, someone, but something seemed—not right, somehow. And suddenly I saw—her."

"A stranger, I guess; so young, sweet, she seemed lost. I drew back into the yard close to the ice plant. She came closer and closer. I could hear her heels clicking on the pavement. I—I tried, Mr. Simms, I tried, I tell you, to fight back that terrible feeling—that madness. But—even as I tried—I knew it was no use!

"I rushed forward all of a sudden. It—it's madness, I know, but as I did I knew I didn't have it—the ax! Everything—was right—but that. I was standing right over her. She—she screamed—God, how she screamed! She ran back and I tripped over a box. Then a whistle blew, and footsteps came running. I caught myself—and only knew that I ran and ran."

I looked up expectantly, finding myself, despite my note-taking, engrossed in Grool's vivid description. "And—"

"I ran—and as I did I kept saying to myself—just what you've said when feeling yourself waking from a horrid dream. I said: 'Thank God it was no more than a nightmare.' But"—Grool's hoarse voice became little more than exhaled breath—"then, as that icy shock pulled me

awake—I was *not* in bed. I was opening the door, the door through which you came tonight. I was coming in from the outside!"

"Wh-what?" My body went suddenly taut. Grool nodded fiercely.

"And—my—God—what if I had had it—the ax?" He sobbed softly.

I relaxed deliberately, taking time to light a smoke. I pitied this abject weakling, pitied him from the bottom of my soul. But, I rationalized as I glanced at the valuable notes his account had afforded me, the world held too much pitiable material; I had work to do.

His head snapped up, tear-filled, burning eyes on me as I arose.

"You—you're not l-leaving me?"

I hesitated. I tapped the notebook. "See—I'm keeping careful records—I have to analyze your case thoroughly."

I winced as he shook his head in that hopeless way. Perhaps, I rationalized further, this centering of faith in me was precisely what Grool needed. I urged him to that end.

"I'll be back—soon," I assured him. "You have food, money?"

He thumbed at an old vase. "The Butcher—he left money—"

An afterthought made me pause at the door. "If you have any more strange dreams—I mean," I added as Grool protested, "strange experiences, I wish you'd write them down and mail them to me—that is, if I don't see you before. Doing this, you see, will help me."

I left brusquely, welcoming the fresh outside air, my mind centered on nothing save that I had material for a story more fertile than I had ever hoped to unearth.

Dawn was not far off when I got to bed. My story was well under way. Grool and his horrendous uncle, altered but in name alone, were its protagonists. The opening scene was almost word-for-word as Grool had described that ghastly night when Morban had come home after the first crime. Motivation for the yarn was not hard. I made Grool inform on his uncle; at his trial, the uncle vowed revenge; and this revenge, from beyond the grave, became my story's

vital spark. This, I reflected sardonically as I fell into fitful sleep, made the story even more convincing than the real case of Eric Grool.

Grool followed my instruction to write to me; but the assistance my story received from his remarkably frank self-analysis was outweighed by the annoyance his pleading brought to me. A week passed, and by steady work each evening I had the story nearly finished. One night I was greatly disturbed by seeing Grool walking up the street toward my door. Luckily I reached my landlady in time; she sent him away saying I was ill.

The story, which had literally flowed from brain to script, seemed excellent on re-reading; but I felt a "punch" ending would increase its likelihood of acceptance. I hit upon using a third character, a teacher of psychology. Somewhat analogous to my own experience, Grool visits the teacher after reading the latter's article on psychic research. But (in my story) the teacher is an inconsistent person whose theoretical beliefs fade away before the skepticism induced by Grool's alleged experiences. In my story the teacher's skepticism literally backfires upon him in the end.

AN evening not many days later, I crossed the road to my house—there was Grool, waiting expectantly for me. I halted abruptly and must have shown my feelings in my expression. It was shocking enough to meet so unexpectedly one who has been with you in fantasy for so long; but there was the added mingled feeling of annoyance and infidelity.

He walked close to me as I fell back. He looked, though it seemed impossible, more haggard and emaciated than before. There was a quite unwonted boldness in his leer as he hissed:

"Don't say you're sorry for anything, Mr. Simms. I don't expect you to come to see me—or help me. You're busy—writing stories about the terrible inner world of the soul, using your fine mind and knowledge for your own profit. But nothing—can help me. I've found it!"

He stared almost savagely into my eyes as he said that.

Mustering my momentarily scattered energies, I snapped: "Fool! You're letting yourself fall into sheer insanity!"

"But it's so; it's true—" His voice broke; his boldness was gone like dew before a hot sun. His old whimpering self, he cried, "I woke, last night, again. There I was, up in the old loft. Somehow I had moved the ladder—climbed it—"

"Fool! Weak fool!"

"No, no, no! Weak—yes! But it's there, in there behind the white-washed wall. It's in there," he half screamed, "and I mustn't let myself fall asleep again because—"

I held him as he tottered, holding his nauseatingly thin arms. He mumbled as I reproved him, then at once he cried:

"You—you've got to do something! You said you'd help me!"

I bridled. "I don't *have* to do anything. You came to me of your own accord. I—well—you're just—crazy."

Grool's mouth went incredibly wide. He shook his head disbelievingly. Appeal yielded swiftly to deep dismay in his burning eyes, then something akin to contempt, mingled with anger and resentment, succeeded it. I spun on my heel and walked to my apartment.

The next day my story was ready, shortened in re-writing to about five thousand words. I mailed it to Franklin Bard.

When a week elapsed and the large self-addressed envelope did not come back, I felt the first wave of encouragement. Stories deemed unfitted to *Bizarre* invariably were returned promptly. But similar encouragement had been mine so many times before, and in vain.

My landlady met me as I returned expectantly from work toward the second week's end. She grunted, thumping upstairs:

"A man—I let'm into your room—"

"Didn't I tell you not to let him in?" I snapped.

"Not that fella," she answered; and a deep voice boomed from above on the landing:

"I'll do the talkin', lady."

An officious-looking individual, his wide-shouldered body framed in my doorway, eyed me with strange expectancy from beneath his low-brimmed slouch hat.

"Simms?" he rumbled, as I walked up the stairs. "My name's Naylan, Inspector Naylan."

What he added was lost on me, but the police badge my confused eyes glimpsed in his outstretched palm was sufficient.

But Naylan piled confusion higher by asking, in the same assured way he had asked my name, whether I knew Eric Grool; and adding, when I answered in the affirmative:

"Glad you take that attitude, Simms. Makes things lots easier for the two of us, Simms."

"Why—I don't understand—where is Grool?"

"In the morgue."

Naylan's tongue jutted into his cheek as I cried: "Grool—dead?"

The inspector shrugged deliberately and turned to lift a newspaper outspread on my desk. Coming home late the previous night I had scarcely glanced at the paper, leaving it on my desk. Calmly the detective rapped one ponderous fist across the front sheet.

"Interestin' readin'—heh?"

My gaze fixed on the bold headline, a scarehead I had barely noticed:

FIEND HUNTED IN MUTILATION OF GIRL

"Wh-why show me this?" I stared querulously at Naylan.

Again that omniscient jutting of Naylan's cheek. He answered, after I had questioned a dozen times more, and scrutinized his nails all the while he talked.

"Grool—he's been in and out of maybe eight station houses in the last month or so, sayin' somebody's been makin', forcin' him to kill—and with an ax—" He coughed and stared into my eyes. "I guess," he rapped the paper again, "we should've taken him serious."

"You mean—Grool did this?"

Naylan emitted a roar of laughter

that vanished fast. "You see, don't you?"

He added as I shook my head dazedly, "We passed him off as a nut. Bellevue had him and said he was harmless. We get hundreds like him every year. But we tailed him as routine. We naturally found out you and him was pretty close—"

"Why bring that up? Why all this?"

Naylan dropped the newspaper and lifted up my note pad and several carbon-copy sheets from my last story. "Been readin' while waitin', Simms. Very, very interestin', heh? Bloodthirsty, too. And funny you should write about Grool—name's here, too"—he tapped the pad—"and a nice story about ax killin's—"

"That's fiction," I cut in.

I got a full minute of Naylan's tongue-in-cheek treatment, then:

"Why don't you open up your mail, Simms?"

HE nodded at a long, awkwardly wrapped bundle on my table. I stepped toward it as though drawn by some force unseen. Undefinably I was feeling hopelessly enmeshed in some dark plot far beyond me, and hopelessly afraid.

The awkward bundle was crayoned with my name and address. Naylan seemed daring me to open it. With a sudden movement I slipped off the coarse twine, ripping off the several layers of brown wrapping paper. A cardboard box—an old florist's package, I think—broke loose, and there before me on the table the *thing* lay exposed to view!

On the broken cardboard—telling mutely its terrible tale—a bloody, grisly forearm. The appendage—the hand and forearm I finally learned—of that innocent girl whose murder and mutilation had been screamed forth in the paper's lurid headlines.

I didn't faint. Naylan attended to that. And when he was fully satisfied that I wouldn't, and that I had viewed that ghastly blood-stained remnant from a hundred different perspectives, he pushed before my harrowed eyes the note that had been enclosed in the unspeakable bundle:

My dear Friend:

It will, I'm sure, please you to know that tonight I found the ax. For this I owe you my eternal thanks. Before I take my worthless life as partial atonement for what I have done (see, now I no longer will need your valuable aid!) I send you the proof you so evidently had to have.

Your pupil,
Eric Grool.

"Stupid," Naylan's voice struck my dizzy senses like a harsh, knifing blast. "The postal men spotted this bundle no sooner'n it come through." He handed me my hat. "Now I guess you better come along with me, Simms."

I turned like one in a nightmare. At the door Naylan said:

"Here's a letter you can have." He handed me an envelope that had been on my table all the while.

I glanced at the small envelope as Naylan half dragged me through the door; and before I thrust it into my pocket I saw the neat letterhead of Bizarre in the upper corner. Irony seared like a dose of corroding acid into my very soul.

At last, after twelve successive rejections, I had put together a yarn convincing enough not to be returned!

When, hours that seemed days later, I was at long last able to meet my lawyer in the cell to which the police took me after their inquisition and routine, I learned the full gravity of my predicament. I was booked on a charge of murder—as

the "fiend of intellect." "Grool's inspiring genius," to quote the tabloid stories.

Now, the readers of this are doubtless aware, sentence has been passed; and in light of that which I have set forth above, with the inevitable furor aroused in the public and the press, I realize in my dispassionate moments that the jury's decision was unavoidable. But what I read that first night in my cell, when I opened my letter, in many respects capped all the ghastly irony and circumstance that coiled so inextricably about me. The letter from Bizarre read:

Dear Mr. Simms:

In your yarn, "Command to Kill," the teacher is skeptical enough to disbelieve the "obsessed" victim, yet encourages him by visits, etc. But, in your ending, he is actually jailed for complicity in the crime.

Sorry, but this and the whole tale smack of things that just don't happen. Unconvincingness spoils a very intriguing idea.

Sorry to say that in moving our offices your manuscript was somehow mislaid. It will, I'm sure, turn up soon, and we'll mail it along.

Sincerely yours,
Franklin Bard.

My lawyer, whose ingenuity and tireless pleading altered the charge to second degree murder, assures me that when popular passion cools the governor undoubtedly will pardon me before I serve out my twenty-year sentence.

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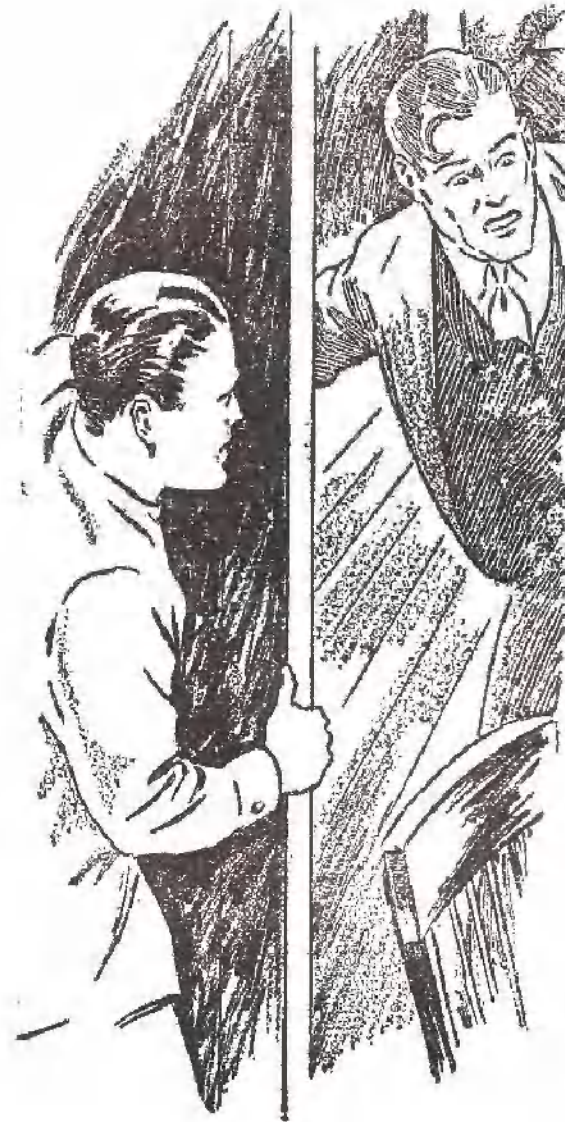
FICTION • SATIRE • CARTOONS

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The Room in the Annex

By
TALLY MASON

Author of "Mrs. Eltinge Does Her Part,"
"Lord of Evil," etc.



*She and the man
crumpled to the floor*

*Voices, Dusty With the Past,
Reach Across Time and
Space to tell Their Story*

I DROVE into Waiton late one afternoon in May of last year, entirely unprepared for the unpleasant occurrence which was to take place that night and cut short my geological investigation into Wisconsin Indian mounds near the town. I brought my car to a stop before the expansive white veranda of the Colonial House, situated in the heart of the town, and then walked into the lobby.

Two men, their feet propped up on the window sill before them, slept in wicker chairs. The clerk behind the desk dozed over a magazine.

"I should like a room with bath, please," I said, in a voice loud enough to draw him from his half-sleep.

He jerked up his head and blinked his eyes. Behind me I heard two pair of feet come to the floor with a banging noise as the two sleepers woke to attention.

"Yes, sir?" the clerk said, his voice blurred with sleep.

"A room with bath, please," I repeated.

He scratched his head for a moment. "We're almost filled up, sir," he began apologetically. "The painters are working on the third floor, and that leaves only the second floor rooms."

"Don't you have anything?"

"Well, there's one very small room on the second floor, but no bath."

I EXPLAINED the nature of my work to him, and the number of days I assumed the work would take.

"So you see, it is rather urgent that I have a room with bath. Can you direct me to another hotel?"

He blinked again and shook his head. "I'm sorry, but this is the only hotel in town."

I bent for my bags. "Perhaps I could find rooms in a private residence?"

"There aren't many people in town who take transients."

"Well," I said, "I shall have to look about."

"Now, maybe—" the clerk started.

"Yes?"

"Well, you see, sir, there's the annex." His tone was somewhat reluctant. "It's a wing with eight rooms, very good rooms they are, too, but we haven't used it lately."

"Rooms with baths?" I asked.

He nodded. "We haven't ordinarily had enough people to fill the rooms," he offered.

"Could I have one of those rooms?" I asked.

He seemed to hesitate. Then he nodded, and with an abrupt gesture, pushed the heavy registry book toward me. I signed my name.

"I'll take you down there myself," he said, picking up a ring of keys.

We left the lobby, the two men staring after us. The clerk led me

down a long hall and stopped abruptly before large double doors. He chose a key and inserted it in the lock. The lock creaked as he turned the key, as if from long disuse, and when he pushed back the doors and we started down the hall, I noticed a deep musty odor, suggesting that this annex had not been used for months.

The clerk stopped once more before another door, the second from the main doors on the right hand side of the hall. He turned another key, pushed back the door, and we walked into a room where the air was even more stuffy than the hall. The clerk flung open a window.

"This all right, sir?" he asked, putting my bags down at the bed.

"Quite satisfactory, yes," I replied.

"I'll send up the maid to fix the room. Tomorrow there ought to be an empty room on the main floor. We'll hold it for you if you wish."

I looked around the room, and then at him.

"Once this room is aired out and made up it will be as good as any, I'm sure."

"Only it's pleasanter to be with the other patrons, don't you think, sir?"

"Yes, I suppose so. But then, I'm really not a social creature," I said, thinking of the sleeping men in the lobby, "and don't mind being alone in the least."

He nodded. "You'll have to call down the hall or come to the desk if you want anything, sir. We don't have the bells installed here in the annex yet."

"Very well."

THE door closed behind him. It was clear to me that for some reason the man was not at his ease, but in a moment I had forgotten him. I drew the water for my bath, and my noisy splashings soon broke the extreme quiet of the annex, pushing from my mind all thought of anything save the Indian mound hunt of the morrow. When I had finished bathing, I dressed and made my way to the dining room for dinner.

Walton is not a town of tremendous social activity; so, after a short walk up and down one or two of its streets,

and a stop in a small store for a cigar, I returned to the hotel and my room in the annex.

It was approximately nine o'clock when I went to bed. I slipped in between the fresh sheets and decided to start a novel I had brought along. If nothing else, I always managed to catch up on my sleep in these expeditions to small towns, and as I pulled the sheet over me that night, I wondered vaguely how many pages of my book I should be able to finish before I fell asleep. I turned my back to the reading lamp on the bed table and opened my book.

I had not read five pages when I heard sounds from what at first seemed to be the hall. I listened. No, there was nothing. Yet, I had distinctly heard—ah, there they were again. It was as if someone were weeping. It sounded like a woman, and the sound came from some other room in the annex. I slipped noiselessly from my bed and opened the door leading into the hall; then I listened again.

It was unquestionably a woman sobbing. The sobs were choking, convulsive, unrestrained, breaking dully through the thin walls that separated her room from the hall. A woman alone, I thought. I wondered what I should do, whether I could help her in any way. The sound of the woman's weeping grew more horrible because of its isolation in the annex. The thought of going to her door and knocking occurred to me. I stepped into the hall, hoping to locate her room.

In a moment, I identified the room from which the sounds were issuing. It was the very end of the hall, on the left side, and it was easy to fix upon because of the thin band of light that came from beneath the door.

For an instant I thought of summoning the hotel clerk, but this idea I dismissed almost as soon as I had considered it. Silently, in my slippered feet, I made my way down the hall and stopped before her door. I knocked. The sobbing continued. I knocked again, this time loudly. Still there was no answer. Instinctively my hand went to the knob. I tried it. The door was not locked. I pushed it open.

A very dim light was burning inside. It seemed to come from a reading lamp by a bed much like mine, but it was so dim, that only the sound of the sobbing led my eyes to the body of a woman, huddled on the floor by the bed. She seemed exhausted by her grief and her shoulders shook spasmodically. I could not see the woman's face, for it lay in deep shadow, but I saw the mass of her dark hair, tumbled down over her breast and her neck.

My position in that case was an awkward one.

"Is there anything I can do?" I asked quietly.

There was no response. Her grief seemed to cut her off from all outer sensations. I wondered vaguely what to do. On the bed table I now saw a glass of water. Should I go to her and suggest that she drink a glass of cool water? No, that was hardly appropriate.

MY POSITION in the room was extremely unpleasant, and I turned to go. But just as I made for the door, it opened, and a man, fully dressed, entered quickly. He did not bother to close the door, so that my position behind it, flattened against the wall, was not noted by him. He walked into the room quickly, coming to his knees at the woman's side.

"Janet," he said huskily.

The woman looked up now. In the dim light her face showed faintly. It was plain, but pretty. She brushed the long hair away from her face, and looked at the man. Her eyes were pathetic.

"You've come back?" she said in a low, weary voice.

He muttered something.

"I'm all right," she replied.

Again he said something I did not catch. Then a few words came clear. ". . . put something around you . . . sitting on the floor like that . . . shivering."

She was shivering. That even I could see. She still sat there by the bed, crouching there, her hand holding back the heavy hair, and she was shuddering violently. The man pulled a robe from a chair near the bed and

wrapped it about her shoulders. She was wearing only a thin night-dress.

"Tell me you'll stay," she said.

The man was silent for a moment. He stood up, looking about him awkwardly. For a moment I thought he had seen me, but he had not. Fortunately the light was too dim. Then he shook his head slowly. An eagerness that had come into the woman's face fled suddenly.

"We've gone over all this before, Janet," he said. "In fairness to her, my dear, we've got to break this up. It's not that I love her. I don't. You know that you're the only woman I've ever loved. But the child was something we hadn't planned on—but it changes everything. It forces me—" His voice trailed off.

The whole situation was suddenly obvious. A man, her lover no doubt, deserting this woman, leaving her alone in a small town hotel, there to solve the whole problem herself. The woman loving him with all her heart, the man loving her not at all.

SHE was speaking suddenly, without energy or vigor, but in her exhausted tones was the greatest possible despair.

"You're leaving me for a woman you say you don't love. You're leaving me, yet you say you love me."

She began to laugh abruptly, as one might laugh when half-asleep, and yet there was more in that hollow chortle than weariness.

There was something ghastly in the laughter of this broken woman. Now I had no thought of getting away; the whole drama unfolding before me held me fascinated and paralyzed.

The man stooped suddenly and kissed her forehead. Then he turned and walked rapidly toward the door,

still not seeing me. Then it happened. The woman's hand slipped up under the pillow of her disturbed bed. It came out with a short revolver. Before a sound could escape me, she had fired, and the man had crumpled to the floor next to the door. Then she began to whimper softly.

I wanted to cry out, to run toward her, to wrest the revolver from her grasp, but I could do nothing. I was rooted to the spot by an inexplicable power. She dropped the revolver, rose slowly, and went to the bed table. She drank the glass of water, began to walk unsteadily toward the body of the man on the floor, then suddenly collapsed. The glass that I had thought contained water, had all along held poison!

Somehow I got out of that room, and somehow I got to the clerk's desk and shouted incoherently at him. The clerk ran ahead of me down the hall to the room in the annex. The door of the room I had left was still open, but the dim light had now gone out altogether, and there came from the stygian darkness an uncomfortable stuffy odor.

The clerk pressed the light button, and the room came into being. The room was empty! And there was a coating of dust on the furniture, undisturbed dust!

The clerk's apologetic voice seemed to come as from a great distance.

"You must have been dreaming sir, we haven't used this annex since a murder was committed here, and a suicide. A woman shot a man, and poisoned herself. It's given the hotel a bad name. We haven't used the annex since. People don't like—I'm sorry, sir."

But I was no longer hearing his voice.

●
NEXT ISSUE

THE MASK OF THE MARIONETTE

A Novelet of Mystic Control

By DON ALVISO



By LUCIFER

Famous Authority on Witchcraft and Superstition

SOOTHSAYERS, psychics, prognosticators, seers—men of vision, mysticism and occult science—ancient, medieval and modern pages of history are full of strange revelations, previsions and the foretelling of events long before they occur.

Who are these modern mystics? What do they possess? How do they differ from you and me?

"Psychics are dreamers," say the skeptics. "Once in a while they guess right—but only by chance, not by any occult power."

It is strange, however, to read of the power of soothsayers in the days of old. How every king or emperor had his seer to warn him of the future. Were it but a fad or fancy, those psychics of old could not have held their place for centuries.

Skeptics in 4,000 B. C. scoffed at Noah and his prognostication of deluge. Many scorned the pyramids built by mystics to foretell the future of the world in symbol and designs. The King of Egypt sneered at Moses, who predicted the seven plagues. Julius Caesar, warned by his soothsayer as to the Ides of March, laughed, only to meet death as predicted. And in 1431, Joan of Arc, the Maid of Orleans, at the age of 19, was burned at the stake because she dared reveal her occult power of vision.

Monuments of Power

True, time may have distorted the facts of history, but what of the modern psychics whose prognostications still stand as monuments of mystic strength?

Perhaps the most famous seer of the past generation was Cheiro of England. He passed away only several years ago, after an amazing life of foretelling historic events. For instance, in 1887 he met Lord Kitchener for the first time. Looking at Colonel Kitchener, then a comparatively unknown soldier, Cheiro said: "You will some day head the English army in its greatest war of history."

Did Kitchener Remember?

Kitchener smiled, of course taking little stock in a mystic's prediction—and forgot the matter. But seven years later, in 1894, Kitchener again met Cheiro who asked the great soldier for a signed impression of his hand. Kitchener gave it, always ready for the fun of conjecture.

Cheiro was serious. Looking Kitchener straight in the eye, the seer said: "Lord Kitchener—seven years ago I told you that

you would head the English army in a great war. I now elaborate and tell you what I see. You will have heavy responsibility in that war beginning in 1914. You will not meet death on the battlefield as a soldier might anticipate—but you will die by disaster at sea in your 66th year."

Was Cheiro right? He was! Lord Kitchener died at sea on his way to Russia, and in his 66th year. We wonder if Kitchener remembered the prediction, as the British warship *Hampshire*, went down in the cold waters of the North Sea, June 2, 1916, destroyed by German mines just off Scotland?

Astounding Predictions

During his life, Cheiro was consulted by prominent people throughout the world. He wrote many books, and traveled to far corners, ever ready to inform and advise. His power was natural. He did not abuse it for greed.

Many scoffed, but history records his astounding predictions. The editor of the London Publishing Company has documentary evidence to substantiate the Kitchener prediction, as well as many others, such as Cheiro's warning to W. T. Stead, the editor of *Review of Reviews*, made nine months in advance of Stead's death by drowning during April, 1912. Stead died on the *Titanic* along with 1,500 others, April 14, 1912.

Also, four years in advance, Cheiro informed Lord Russell of Killowen of the date when he would become Lord Chief Justice of England. And long before the events took place, when such things were not expected, Cheiro predicted the Boer War; the death of Queen Victoria; the Entente Cordiale between France and Eng-

land; the assassination of King Humbert of Italy; the attempt on the life of the Shah of Persia in Paris, 1900; the exact year, month and date of the World War "in the midsummer of 1914"; that "its duration would be about four years," and "its end will show the collapse of the Central Powers of Europe and the break-up of Russia as an Empire." Cheiro also predicted, seven years in advance, "the downfall of the Czar and his massacre together with every member of his immediate family."

Those in doubt are invited to secure a copy of Cheiro's World Predictions, published in 1928 by the London Publishing Company whose American office is 5040 Whitsett Avenue, North Hollywood, California.

The War of Wars

Even earthquakes are covered in the predictions, and the coming of future wars. Over 12 years ago Cheiro wrote as follows:

"Palestine and the surrounding countries will become the most fertile and one of the richest provinces in the world. Minerals and rare metals will be found there in abundance, and large deposits of coal and oil will be discovered in this part of the earth in inexhaustible quantities." (A recent news dispatch read: Unfathomed wealth of the Dead Sea and Palestine estimated at a thousand billion dollars by four great financial groups, British, American, European and Anglo-Palestinian, who are hankering after the concession to work huge mineral and chemical deposits found hidden in the depths of the Dead Sea.)

"The ancient boundaries of Palestine, which originally extended to the river of Egypt . . . will be restored. . . . This development will arouse antagonism from the followers of Islam; and Turkey, backed by Russia, will endeavor to recapture Palestine.

"This conflict will develop into the War of Wars. England will be attacked in all her Mohammedan possessions. She will give India her freedom, but religious warfare will rend that country from end to end until it becomes equally divided between the followers of the Mohammedan and the followers of Buddha and Brahma.

"All her colonies will again send large numbers of men to help the mother country. Italy and Germany will at the same period be at war with France; and Spain under a dictator will be engaged in a life and death struggle in North Africa.

"Later Germany and Italy (under French control) will become allies and pour immense numbers of troops into Palestine and Egypt.

"Russia will draw enormous masses of Chinese and Tartars with her, and all Mohammedan races will be brought into the conflict. The United States will be engaged in war in Mexico with Japan and will not take part until later in the Euro-

pean carnage. Great Britain will suffer terribly in the prolonged warfare, the most of London and towns on the East coast will be destroyed by fleets of airplanes from Russia and Russian allies.

"In Ireland there will be Civil War between North and South, and a new Irish Republic will inflict considerable damage by airplanes on such cities as Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and the west of England, before brought into the fold.

"But the life and death struggle will be fought in Palestine. The Islam allies will at first be successful, but Jehovah will come to the aid of His followers by earthquake, storm, flood, fire and plague."

Thus is the prediction of the War of Wars, and victory for the democracies. Will this prognostication of Cheiro come to pass? Who can tell?

Other Modern Mystics

Who are some of the other Modern Mystics? The World War produced one outstanding one—Lawrence of Arabia—the English colonel who was accepted by Arab tribesmen as a Prince of Mecca, unheard of status for an infidel.

Many people called Lawrence a reincarnated crusader doing penance for cruel deeds committed centuries ago in the desert, for it is true that his ancestors rode with Richard the Lion-Heart.

Lawrence had strange power over the Arabs, and he was able to organize them against the Turks. It has been claimed that his occult power won the World War, for had the Central Powers been able to have free reign in Asia Minor, they would have won the war. Lawrence prevented that. His psychic power won him respect of the Arabs and they followed him. They believed in his predictions of victory. No one could fool him. He was able to read the mind of another and foretell the future. As the great Shariff Abdullah said:

"It is useless to try and deceive this man—he sees the future."

Lawrence said he would live less than a generation after the end of the World War. He died in May, 1935, seventeen years after the Armistice.

A Crime Detector

But what of some Modern Mystics living today? Consider Dr. Thomas L. Garrett of New York City, well known as a hypnologist and consulting psychologist. Through his power he was able to solve the loss of \$17,000 by a Chicago bank which had been victimized. The following is quoted from a letter written to Dr. Garrett from the Hass Detective Agency of Chicago, to whom Dr. Garrett gave the startling information:

Dear Dr. Garrett: It is with the greatest pleasure that I take this opportunity to thank you for the information you placed in my hands regarding the identity of the one responsible for the shortage of \$17,000 which was lost by my client. It was most startling and astounding the results you

(Continued on page 122)

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(Continued from page 121)

obtained by hypnosis which certainly gives us something to think about as a new means of detecting criminals. This information was the means of saving the bank what might have been a greater loss in the future, and I assure you the directors join me in again thanking you for your splendid work.

One cannot deny documentary proof of this sort.

Instinctive Knowledge

Consider the modern mystic and psychic, Evan Shea of New York. More than 25,000 people have consulted him as to the future. Psychical power came to Evan Shea when he was a boy. He is able to pick up a trinket belonging to some individual and instinctively tell of the past, present and future of this person without ever having met the person. He actually sees that person before him.

During the war, Dr. Shea worked with the American Intelligence Department. Naturally, the files on his activity in that respect are not for the public. Who knows how many lives he saved or how much property he kept intact from enemies of America.

Let us watch Dr. Shea perform. This happened recently and can be substantiated by affidavit and other documentary evidence.

Two New Yorkers, Tom Dumont and Jerry Brown, were sitting in the grill of the Hotel Commodore recently. Brown was telling Dumont that he had received an offer of a position in Atlanta, Georgia, but he was undecided whether or not to accept it.

"I wish I could make up my mind," said Brown. "I hate to leave New York until I am certain that there is no chance of connecting here."

Uncanny Hunches

Dumont smiled. "I've got a suggestion, Jerry. A friend of mine, Evan Shea, is a pretty good psychic. His hunches are uncanny. He has given me and my friends some darn good tips when we have been at crossroads. Let me take you up and see him, just for a lark. You don't have to tell him anything. Just write a question on a slip of paper—hand it to him with some trinket of yours, your penknife for instance. He won't open it—just hold it in his hand and he'll tell you just what hunch he gets."

"Bunk," said Brown. "My own hunches are as good as anyone's."

But Dumont persuaded Brown—and a few minutes later they were at Shea's apartment. The three men had coffee together and then Dumont suggested that Brown ask a question.

"You're Not Going!"

Brown wrote this question on a slip of paper: "Should I accept the proposition?" He wrapped the slip of paper around his penknife and handed it to Shea. The

psychic held it in his hand and did not look at it. He gazed into Brown's eyes keenly. Brown could feel the power of the psychic's eyes. They were different—seemed to look right through you and beyond.

Shea spoke gently as he raised his eyes. "I feel that you have planned to go South on a matter of business. But you are not going. A letter is already on the way to you, which will change your plans. I see you standing on a rock looking into the distance. It means that you will remain where you are for a long time."

The Letter

And that was all. Brown was not convinced of anything unusual. At the most it was just a case of mind reading, and Shea had made a guess, knowing that Brown wanted to stay in New York.

Dumont and Brown left the mystic's apartment. They returned to the Commodore and decided to have a drink before retiring. As they walked past the hotel desk, Brown said: "Just a minute Tom while I see if there have been any phone calls for me."

Brown returned to Tom, reading a letter the clerk had just given him. Brown opened it, and then with a strange expression and with a smile, handed it to Tom. "Read it," said Brown.

(Continued on page 124)

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(Continued from page 123)

Dumont read it. It was from a large advertising concern of New York City: "Dear Mr. Brown: Several months ago, I told you that we did not have an opening at the time. But a resignation has created a spot for you if you are still available. Please call me at once, whether or not you would like to be with us."

Do Coming Events Cast Their Shadows Before?

Brown was convinced that Shea's power was not mind-reading, for it is impossible to read something in a man's mind that does not exist, for Brown had no knowledge of the letter and had forgotten the application which he had made months ago along with many others.

Shea has too many similar cases to his credit for them to be called mere coincidence or guess. Do coming events cast their shadows before them—and are some minds sensitive enough to tune in with these strange lines of force? Who knows?

Varied Experiments

Yes, there are many psychics today who have been able to develop strange power beyond scientific explanation. Experiments are being made, many of them by scientists in cooperation with so-called mystics.

Dr. Henry S. W. Hardwicke died only a few weeks ago after proving that the human mind had power of prognostication under certain emotional conditions. For many months Dr. Hardwicke appeared on the radio program "Mysteries Of The Mind," giving startling cases of extra sensory perception.

Otis Adelbert Kline of New York City beside being an expert in the practice of mental telepathy, has succeeded in projecting his astral form. He was "seen" by his wife miles away from where his body was at that moment. And the life of Ed Bodin, of New York City, was saved during the World War in France, when he saw a vision of a forthcoming explosion.

Soothsayers, psychics, prognosticators, seers—men of vision, mysticism and occult science? Who knows but that they are merely the advance guard of humans who have learned to use their extra sensory perception, even as you or I might do? Black Arts? Merely called "Black" because the full light of knowledge has not yet penetrated the mind of man.

—LUCIFER.

LETTERS FROM READERS

WE'VE had an exceptionally large mail bag since the last issue, and we're sincerely thankful to all of you for your suggestions and criticisms. Advocates on a

Black Arts Club will be glad to learn that plans have already been made for one. More about that further on in this column.

First, to the business of letters. We've had a number from new readers, and here are a few representative ones:

Yesterday I bought my first copy of your magazine, and while I don't have much time to write letters, I think the war-air story by Don Alviso deserves a word of praise. Ordinarily stories of this type leave me flat because they seem so impossible, but in DEATH IS FORBIDDEN the author makes it real. I hope you publish more of them, and I'll be a regular buyer of STRANGE STORIES. The story by Will Garth, HOUSE OF THE GRIFFIN, was also quite good.

Idell Wardwell.

Walla Walla, Wash.

After reading your magazine for the first time I think I have found my ideal magazine. There is only one thing I'm afraid might happen. In the past there have been magazines of this type started, and after a few issues their stories seem to have turned to science-fiction. I earnestly hope that STRANGE STORIES stays along that line of the uncanny that the first issues have contained.

I have seen several letters in the magazine expressing the wish to have fewer stories and have them longer. To this I say No!—a thousand times No! I hope STRANGE STORIES will stay exactly as it is, maybe with the exception of containing a few more Finlay drawings.

Concerning the Black Arts Club I think it would be a swell idea, and am hoping that it will be possible to get some kind of membership card or button of something to identify members.

Kenneth Elkin, Jr.

Hollywood, Calif.

Science fiction stories will be published only as they're related to the field of the uncanny. That's what we've tried to do in the past, and intend to do in the future. Fair enough? Here's a letter from an amateur devotee of the Black Arts:

Have been reading your department with a very great deal of interest for some months. Truthfully I leave that for the last, as I consider it the most interesting section of STRANGE STORIES. I'm interested in the subjects you discuss, particularly voodooism and black magic, only in a casual sort of way, because of what I've read. I wonder if you could send me a list of the books that you know of, written on these subjects. I'd like to get a little more accurate information that will give

(Continued on page 126)

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(Continued from page 125)

me a better idea of the customs, rituals, chants, etc. N. A. Macpherson.
West Vancouver, B. C., Canada.

There are so many books on the Black Arts and various phases of mystic science, that it would be impossible for anybody to read them in years. As a starter you might consult several of the following:

MODERN MYSTICS AND MAGIC, by W. S. Moses, published by Charles Scribner, N. Y. C.; THE ADVENTURES OF A MODERN OCCULIST, by Oliver Bland, Dodd-Mead Co., N. Y. C.; LIFE, DEATH AND DESTINY, by Robert Alexander, C. W. Daniel Co., London, England; MODERN CULTS AND MOVEMENTS, by G. G. Atkins, Fleming Revell Co., N. Y. C.; SECRETS OF BLACK ARTS, published by I. Ottenheimer, Baltimore, Md.; BOOK OF KNOWLEDGE IN PSYCHIC FACTS, by Nellie Beighle, Alliance Publishing Co., N. Y. C.

If you really want to make a hobby of mystic science, we suggest you visit your public library frequently and pick out books to your liking. You will find them listed under various divisions such as Black Magic, Voodoo, Mysticism, Apparitions, Ghosts, Gnosticism, Occultism, Witchcraft, etc. It may take you years to master the knowledge of mystic science, but there is no greater hobby—and it is one that gives you distinction.

Now for a few lines from a novelist and short story writer interested in the occult:

I have just bought a copy of your magazine, and I want to congratulate you on the good writing of most of them—all above the average of the so-called pulp magazines. Many of the stories in the pulps are so badly written that I can't read them, although I am interested in occult stories, detective fiction and adventure stories. Keep up the splendid work.
Katharine Metcalf Roof.
New York City.

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I heartily advocate a Black Arts Club. You see, I have been interested in the supernatural for a long time, and I have my own beliefs on the subject. Will write you a letter soon describing several incidents in my personal life where I firmly believe a spirit, ghost, or whatever you want to call it, came and saved me from the clutches of an evil force. By all means have a club, even if only to draw together those who like and have investigated such matters.

Preston Bates.

Lindsay, Calif.

And finally from a sideline watcher of the Black Arts:

I read in your magazine that you are forming a Black Arts Club and am sending my name in for membership in same. I cannot unfortunately claim any supernormal experiences; however, I would be very interested in hearing someone else's. I trust your club will be a success and will be glad to conform with whatever requirements are necessary.

Ralph Karlton.

North Charlotte, N. C.

Well, the Black Arts Club is really under way. In our next issue, the rules and regulations of the club will be given, and what you have to do to join. We want you to become actively interested, however, and we intend to have a special section devoted to active, Star Members, as distinguished from interested spectators. Accounts of experiences, observations, and arguments on the subject of the Black Arts will receive due notice, and those contributing them will be designated as Star Members. So keep your eyes open for the next issue for further details. Thank you for your letters!

—THE EDITOR.



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PASSING OF ERIC HOLM

(Concluded from page 104)

writing on the paper. Following this, he opened the ancient volume which he still held on his lap.

Then he looked up, swept the room with a nervous glance.

"I wondered about that, too," he said. "I thought that perhaps I had bungled it or something. So I looked it up in the book—the formula, that is, before I turned the book over to you.

"You see, Holm had written out the formula for me. It's on this piece of paper, just the way I recited it. Now, if you'll look at the book, you'll see that the original formula for summoning the beast is printed on page thirty-two, and that the formula for sending it back to the sea starts on the bottom of page thirty-three and is complete on page thirty-four. Then, if you'll look a little farther, you'll see that there's another formula started on the bottom of page thirty-five and finished on the top of page thirty-six. If you'll compare the formula started on page thirty-two with that started on page thirty-five, you'll find that they read exactly alike.

"When Holm copied that formula out of the book, he turned over two leaves instead of one. While the two formulæ start exactly alike, they don't end up alike. Gentlemen, they're altogether different.

"The formula he meant to give me was for sending the beast back to the sea; because in his haste he did not notice that he turned two pages, and because they read alike at the beginning. The formula he gave me was for sending the beast back upon the man who had first sent it out!"

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VOICES IN THE WIND

(Concluded from page 100)

note written by him on the day of his death. The note read:

Captain Joshua Ripley was master of this ship in 1910 and 1911. I was his mate, and I murdered him in his cabin, the same cabin, the same bunk that I now occupy. The medallion on the bulkhead is a likeness of him. Can anyone understand the hell through which I've been passing, sleeping on the very spot where I killed him, staring his likeness in the face, every hour of the day and night? Lord! have mercy on me!

"This explains many things," said Fanchley, "But not all. For instance, where is the medallion?"

For the medallion was no longer on the bulkhead, and not so much as a scratch indicated that such a thing had ever rested there.

Summerfield and Hogan, to whom Fanchley addressed his question had no explanation to offer.

They could only shiver.

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20x4.50-21	2.45	1.18	30x4	2.95	1.25	30x4
20x4.75-21	2.55	1.28	30x4 1/2	3.25	1.35	30x4 1/2
20x4.75-20	2.55	1.28	30x4 1/2	3.25	1.35	30x4 1/2
20x5.00-19	2.65	1.38	30x5	3.45	1.45	30x5
20x5.00-20	2.75	1.48	30x5	3.55	1.55	30x5
20x5.00-21	2.85	1.58	30x5	3.65	1.65	30x5
20x5.25-18	2.90	1.63	30x5 1/2	3.75	1.75	30x5 1/2
20x5.25-19	2.95	1.68	30x5 1/2	3.85	1.85	30x5 1/2
20x5.25-20	2.95	1.68	30x5 1/2	3.85	1.85	30x5 1/2
20x5.25-21	3.05	1.78	30x6	3.95	1.95	30x6
20x5.50-17	3.35	1.98	30x6 1/2	4.25	2.15	30x6 1/2
20x5.50-18	3.35	1.98	30x6 1/2	4.25	2.15	30x6 1/2
20x5.50-19	3.45	2.08	30x6 1/2	4.35	2.25	30x6 1/2
20x5.50-20	3.55	2.18	30x6 1/2	4.45	2.35	30x6 1/2
20x5.50-21	3.65	2.28	30x6 1/2	4.55	2.45	30x6 1/2
20x6.00-17	3.75	2.38	30x7	4.65	2.55	30x7
20x6.00-18	3.85	2.48	30x7	4.75	2.65	30x7
20x6.00-19	3.95	2.58	30x7	4.85	2.75	30x7
20x6.00-20	4.05	2.68	30x7	4.95	2.85	30x7
20x6.00-21	4.15	2.78	30x7	5.05	2.95	30x7
20x6.50-20	4.25	2.88	30x7 1/2	5.15	3.05	30x7 1/2
20x6.50-21	4.35	2.98	30x7 1/2	5.25	3.15	30x7 1/2
20x7.00-20	4.45	3.08	30x8	5.35	3.25	30x8
20x7.00-21	4.55	3.18	30x8	5.45	3.35	30x8
20x7.50-20	4.65	3.28	30x8 1/2	5.55	3.45	30x8 1/2
20x7.50-21	4.75	3.38	30x8 1/2	5.65	3.55	30x8 1/2
20x8.00-20	4.85	3.48	30x9	5.75	3.65	30x9
20x8.00-21	4.95	3.58	30x9	5.85	3.75	30x9
20x8.50-20	5.05	3.68	30x9 1/2	5.95	3.85	30x9 1/2
20x8.50-21	5.15	3.78	30x9 1/2	6.05	3.95	30x9 1/2
20x9.00-20	5.25	3.88	30x10	6.15	4.05	30x10
20x9.00-21	5.35	3.98	30x10	6.25	4.15	30x10
20x9.50-20	5.45	4.08	30x10 1/2	6.35	4.25	30x10 1/2
20x9.50-21	5.55	4.18	30x10 1/2	6.45	4.35	30x10 1/2
20x10.00-20	5.65	4.28	30x11	6.55	4.45	30x11
20x10.00-21	5.75	4.38	30x11	6.65	4.55	30x11
20x10.50-20	5.85	4.48	30x11 1/2	6.75	4.65	30x11 1/2
20x10.50-21	5.95	4.58	30x11 1/2	6.85	4.75	30x11 1/2
20x11.00-20	6.05	4.68	30x12	6.95	4.85	30x12
20x11.00-21	6.15	4.78	30x12	7.05	4.95	30x12
20x11.50-20	6.25	4.88	30x12 1/2	7.15	5.05	30x12 1/2
20x11.50-21	6.35	4.98	30x12 1/2	7.25	5.15	30x12 1/2
20x12.00-20	6.45	5.08	30x13	7.35	5.25	30x13
20x12.00-21	6.55	5.18	30x13	7.45	5.35	30x13
20x12.50-20	6.65	5.28	30x13 1/2	7.55	5.45	30x13 1/2
20x12.50-21	6.75	5.38	30x13 1/2	7.65	5.55	30x13 1/2
20x13.00-20	6.85	5.48	30x14	7.75	5.65	30x14
20x13.00-21	6.95	5.58	30x14	7.85	5.75	30x14
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20x14.50-20	7.45	6.08	30x15 1/2	8.35	6.25	30x15 1/2
20x14.50-21	7.55	6.18	30x15 1/2	8.45	6.35	30x15 1/2
20x15.00-20	7.65	6.28	30x16	8.55	6.45	30x16
20x15.00-21	7.75	6.38	30x16	8.65	6.55	30x16
20x15.50-20	7.85	6.48	30x16 1/2	8.75	6.65	30x16 1/2
20x15.50-21	7.95	6.58	30x16 1/2	8.85	6.75	30x16 1/2
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20x17.50-20	8.65	7.28	30x18 1/2	9.55	7.45	30x18 1/2
20x17.50-21	8.75	7.38	30x18 1/2	9.65	7.55	30x18 1/2
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20x19.50-20	9.45	8.08	30x20 1/2	10.35	8.25	30x20 1/2
20x19.50-21	9.55	8.18	30x20 1/2	10.45	8.35	30x20 1/2
20x20.00-20	9.65	8.28	30x21	10.55	8.45	30x21
20x20.00-21	9.75	8.38	30x21	10.65	8.55	30x21
20x20.50-20	9.85	8.48	30x21 1/2	10.75	8.65	30x21 1/2
20x20.50-21	9.95	8.58	30x21 1/2	10.85	8.75	30x21 1/2
20x21.00-20	10.05	8.68	30x22	10.95	8.85	30x22
20x21.00-21	10.15	8.78	30x22	11.05	8.95	30x22
20x21.50-20	10.25	8.88	30x22 1/2	11.15	9.05	30x22 1/2
20x21.50-21	10.35	8.98	30x22 1/2	11.25	9.15	30x22 1/2
20x22.00-20	10.45	9.08	30x23	11.35	9.25	30x23
20x22.00-21	10.55	9.18	30x23	11.45	9.35	30x23
20x22.50-20	10.65	9.28	30x23 1/2	11.55	9.45	30x23 1/2
20x22.50-21	10.75	9.38	30x23 1/2	11.65	9.55	30x23 1/2
20x23.00-20	10.85	9.48	30x24	11.75	9.65	30x24
20x23.00-21	10.95	9.58	30x24	11.85	9.75	30x24
20x23.50-20	11.05	9.68	30x24 1/2	11.95	9.85	30x24 1/2
20x23.50-21	11.15	9.78	30x24 1/2	12.05	9.95	30x24 1/2
20x24.00-20	11.25	9.88	30x25	12.15	10.05	30x25
20x24.00-21	11.35	9.98	30x25	12.25	10.15	30x25
20x24.50-20	11.45	10.08	30x25 1/2	12.35	10.25	30x25 1/2
20x24.50-21	11.55	10.18	30x25 1/2	12.45	10.35	30x25 1/2
20x25.00-20	11.65	10.28	30x26	12.55	10.45	30x26
20x25.00-21	11.75	10.38	30x26	12.65	10.55	30x26
20x25.50-20	11.85	10.48	30x26 1/2	12.75	10.65	30x26 1/2
20x25.50-21	11.95	10.58	30x26 1/2	12.85	10.75	30x26 1/2
20x26.00-20	12.05	10.68	30x27	12.95	10.85	30x27
20x26.00-21	12.15	10.78	30x27	13.05	10.95	30x27
20x26.50-20	12.25	10.88	30x27 1/2	13.15	11.05	30x27 1/2
20x26.50-21	12.35	10.98	30x27 1/2	13.25	11.15	30x27 1/2
20x27.00-20	12.45	11.08	30x28	13.35	11.25	30x28
20x27.00-21	12.55	11.18	30x28	13.45	11.35	30x28
20x27.50-20	12.65	11.28	30x28 1/2	13.55	11.45	30x28 1/2
20x27.50-21	12.75	11.38	30x28 1/2	13.65	11.55	30x28 1/2
20x28.00-20	12.85	11.48	30x29	13.75	11.65	30x29
20x28.00-21	12.95	11.58	30x29	13.85	11.75	30x29
20x28.50-20	13.05	11.68	30x29 1/2	13.95	11.85	30x29 1/2
20x28.50-21	13.15	11.78	30x29 1/2	14.05	11.95	30x29 1/2
20x29.00-20	13.25	11.88	30x30	14.15	12.05	30x30
20x29.00-21	13.35	11.98	30x30	14.25	12.15	30x30
20x29.50-20	13.45	12.08	30x30 1/2	14.35	12.25	30x30 1/2
20x29.50-21	13.55	12.18	30x30 1/2	14.45	12.35	30x30 1/2
20x30.00-20	13.65	12.28	30x31	14.55	12.45	30x31
20x30.00-21	13.75	12.38	30x31	14.65	12.55	30x31
20x30.50-20	13.85	12.48	30x31 1/2	14.75	12.65	30x31 1/2
20x30.50-21	13.95	12.58	30x31 1/2	14.85	12.75	30x31 1/2
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