

FEBRUARY

# Strange

## STORIES

15¢

13

STORIES IN  
THIS ISSUE!

### THE BAG OF SKIN

A Novelet of  
Sorcery's Eternal Lure

By DOROTHY  
QUICK

FEATURING

### THE MASK OF THE MARIONETTE

A Complete Novelet  
of Mystic Carnival

By DON ALVISO

A THRILLING  
PUBLICATION



# BANKERS LIFE AND CASUALTY COMPANY OFFERS THE NEW



*The Murray Family, 4712 Leamington Ave., Chicago, Ill.*

**GROUP LIFE POLICY  
THAT INSURES THE  
ENTIRE FAMILY**



## GRANDPARENTS, PARENTS, CHILDREN, AGES 1-75 ALL INSURED IN ONE SINGLE LIFE INSURANCE POLICY

**IF ANY ONE IN YOUR  
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ANY CAUSE, THIS POL-  
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\$1.00 A MONTH**

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There is no reason now why any member of your family should be without life insurance. One policy, costing only \$1.00 a month, can insure them all.

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The huge reserve of this strong, reliable company are all invested in United States Government Bonds, which are locked in the vaults of the State of Illinois.

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We want you to see the policy . . . then decide for yourself. So fill out coupon now for 10-day Free Inspection offer and guarantee. No obligation . . . no agent will call . . . no medical examination. ACT NOW!

**ACT NOW— AND RETURN COUPON AT ONCE**

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Bankers Insurance Bldg., Jefferson Sta., Desk 32  
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Please send details and tell me how to get the Family Group Policy for free inspection.

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Street or R. F. D. ....

City..... State.....

**ACT NOW • SEND COUPON!**

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## Big Weekly Cash Earnings Waiting Right in Your Locality

Over 500 more men and women will be started at once in a fine paying occupation right in their own home localities. Right now there may be an opening waiting for you in your locality. If so, this old-established company will furnish everything you

need to get started at once—give you all the help you require, and back you with its proven successful plan. This may be “the chance of your life” to be independent—be your own boss—engage in a pleasant, steady occupation—and make more than just a modest living for yourself and family.

for you in your own or nearby locality, mail the Application below. By return mail you will be notified whether we have an opening for you; and if we have, you will receive full information about our Local Dealer Plan. You don't send a penny—just mail the Application. There will be no obligation on your part. You can decide after you read the plan. But don't wait—send your Application at once.

**APPLY  
NOW!**

### Find Out If Your Locality is Open

If you want to know whether there is an opening

**E. J. MILLS, President**  
1542 Monmouth Avenue,  
Cincinnati, Ohio

**Clip Out and Mail TODAY**

### LOCAL DEALER APPLICATION

**(1) Write Your Full Name and Address Here:**

Name .....  
(State whether Mr., Mrs., or Miss)

Address .....

City and State.....

**(2) State Your Age, and Present or Former Occupation:**

Age..... Occupation.....

**(3) How Much Time Can You Devote?**

Mark with an "X" FULL TIME  PART TIME

**(4) Can You Start at Once? Mark with an "X" YES  NO**

If you cannot start at once, state about when you will be able to start.

**SEND  
NO MONEY!**

Just fill Out and Mail at Once to  
**E. J. MILLS, President**  
1542 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

« « « 13 Gripping Tales of the Uncanny » » »

# Strange STORIES

VOL. III, NO. 1

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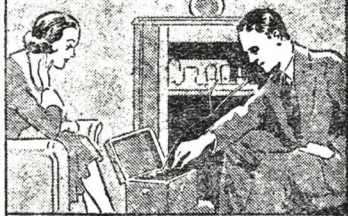


*I jumped from \$18 a week to \$50*  
*-- a Free Book started me toward this*  
**GOOD PAY IN RADIO**

**HERE'S**  
*How it*  
*Happened*  
 by S. J. E.  
 (NAME AND ADDRESS  
 SENT UPON REQUEST)



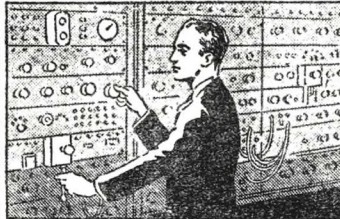
"I had an \$18 a week job in a shoe factory. I'd probably be at it today if I hadn't read about the opportunities in Radio and started training at home for them."



"The training National Radio Institute gave me was so practical I was soon ready to make \$5 to \$10 a week in spare time servicing Radio sets."



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**to BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN**

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

fixing Radios while learning and equip you  
 for full time work after you graduate.

RADIO IS A YOUNG, growing field with a future, offering many good pay spare time and full time job opportunities. And you don't have to give up your present job to become a Radio Technician. I train you right at home in your spare time.

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

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and service men. 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 other fields offering opportunities for which N. R. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your Course, I send plans and directions which have helped many make \$200 to \$500 a year in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL, ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make money

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Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my course in Radio and Television; shows many letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement, MAIL COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postcard --NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President  
 Dept. OB09, National Radio Institute  
 Washington, D. C.

**MAIL NOW - Get 64 page book FREE**



J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. OB09,  
 National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Send me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio" which points out Radio's opportunities and tells how you train men at home to be Radio Technicians. (Write Plainly.)

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ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....

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**PICTURE RING SELLS TO EVERYONE!**

**SAMPLE RING From Any Photo You Send Only**

**48¢**

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It's here! The hottest, most sensational, most gripping selling idea of the age! THE PICTURE RING—the ring men and women everywhere, rich and poor, young and old want to wear and keep their whole lives long. Why? Because on this beautiful ring is permanently reproduced any photograph, snapshot or picture of some loved one. Yes—reproduced clearly and sharply and made part of the ring itself so it can't rub off, come off or fade off. This sensational new idea is making an unbelievable hit. Men and women—even those without an hour's selling experience—are taking dozens of orders a day and making dollars of profit by the handful. And now, in your territory, YOU can cash in big, every day, with this exciting sure-fire profit-maker and earn money so easily, it will seem more like play than work.

**SELLS TO EVERYONE! A Treasure Remembrance Its Value Beyond Price!**

Once women carried pictures of their loved ones in lockets; and men carried them in watch cases. Those days are gone, but the desire to carry the portrait of a loved one is as strong as ever. Not until the amazing secret process for transferring pictures to rings was discovered, was it possible to revive this grand old custom and to satisfy the hunger of every human being to express again this grandest of all sentiments. How mothers and fathers will welcome this opportunity to wear a ring with the most precious setting of all—a picture of their beloved child. How happy every man and woman will be to keep alive the memory of a departed one by carrying with them always, night and day, this beautiful Picture Ring.

**Order Your Sample Ring Now! You Don't Risk a Penny!**

Never before has anything like this come your way. No competition from anyone—no looking for prospects (they are all around you)—no carrying a big stock or putting any money into goods. Simply showing your sample ring a few times a day, if you only start with your friends and neighbors, will be enough to give you an endless chain of orders. We cut away all red tape and are ready to send you a **SAMPLE RING** at sensationally low special wholesale price of only 48c. The minute you take it out of its beautiful Gift Box you are ready to go after the orders. Rush the coupon below for **YOUR** sample ring NOW! That's all the outfit you need. It will do all your selling for you. And we make it easy for you to obtain this sample **ABSOLUTELY FREE OF A PENNY COST** under our liberal offer.



**Beautiful Permanent Picture Ring Made From Any Photo or Picture**

For only \$1.00 retail—look what you offer. A made-to-measure onyx-like ring adorned with the most precious setting in the world—a reproduction of the picture of a loved one. The ring itself can't tarnish. It will wear forever with ordinary care. The picture of the loved one is clearly, sharply reproduced with surprising faithfulness and becomes an inseparable part of the ring. It can't wear off, rub off, or fade off.

**Make Pockets Full of Dollars Just Wearing Ring!**

Can you imagine a more novel, more unusual gift than the Picture Ring? How can any man or woman find a more beautiful way to express loving sentiment than giving a wife, a child, a parent, a friend, a sweetheart a Picture Ring with the donor's portrait expertly reproduced! What a surprise! 10 orders a day is an easy goal—20 orders a day are not too much to expect.

**SEND NO MONEY!**

Hundreds of customers write they wouldn't take a fortune for their rings if they couldn't get others. \$5.00 and even \$10.00 would be a small price for the PICTURE RING—but as a special offer we send you the beautiful PICTURE RING, made from any photo or picture you send for only 48c! Don't wait. Rush the coupon at once for the sample ring on our **NO RISK** plan and see for yourself what a whirl-wind money maker this is for you. **ACT RIGHT NOW!**

MOTHER

HUSBAND

BABY



**SEND YOUR RING SIZE NOW**

PICTURE RING CO., RING SIZE  
Dept. E-26,  
12th and Jackson Sts.,  
Cincinnati, Ohio.

Enclosed is photo. Please rush my individually made Picture Ring and starting equipment. Will pay postman 48c plus few cents postage. It is understood that if I am not entirely satisfied, I can return ring within 5 days and you will refund my money in full. Hand Tinted in Natural Life Like Colors. 10c Extra

Name.....  
Address.....  
City..... State.....

YOUR RING SIZE: Wrap strip of paper around second joint of finger, trim so ends meet. Measure strip down from top on this chart. Number at end is your size.

**PICTURE RING CO.**  
DEPT. E-26 12 TH. & JACKSON STREET CINCINNATI OHIO

**THIS MAN DIDN'T BELIEVE HE  
COULD LEARN MUSIC BY MAIL**



**THIS MAN DECIDED TO TRY THIS  
EASY, SHORT-CUT METHOD!  
(P.S. You should hear him play now!)**



# Do *You* Smile at the Idea of Learning Music by Mail?

*Here Are Some Facts That May Surprise You!*

**YOU HAVE** undoubtedly heard of the U. S. School method of teaching music by mail. This remarkable system of instruction has been in operation for over forty years and more than 700,000 people in all parts of the world have enrolled for it. Men, women and children of all ages and from all walks of life have taken up their favorite musical instruments this convenient, money-saving way. They have studied the piano, violin, guitar, accordion and, in short, every kind of popular instrument.

### *No Special Talent Required*

Many of these pupils did not know one musical note from another when they enrolled. Many had previously tried other methods of instruction without success. And not a few were frankly skeptical. They doubted whether it was possible to learn music by mail, just as you may doubt it.

To some of these "Doubting Thomases" it came as the surprise of their lives when they actually heard themselves playing. Simple popular melodies at first, then more and more advanced pieces, all the way to Grand Opera.

One after another, pupils testify to the amazing ease with which they learned, and the fascination and pleasure they found in the lessons. They say it was "easy as A. B. C."—"so simple that a child could understand"—that "with all the wonderful photographs and diagrams to guide you, you simply cannot go wrong"—that "it's really fun to learn music this easy, fascinating way."

### *Will You Accept This Challenge?*

The experience of thousands upon thousands of people should be proof positive that you, too, can learn to play your favorite instrument by the famous print-and-picture method of the U. S. School of Music. Is it not a pity, then, to deny yourself all the enjoyment, the good times and popularity that music offers? Do you not owe it to yourself, at least, to examine all

the facts, and to decide, once and for all, whether you can afford to pass by this opportunity to enrich your life with music?

If you really want to play a musical instrument—if you are willing to devote just a few minutes a day to learning, not through tedious, old-fashioned practice, but by actually playing real tunes, then you should mail the coupon at once. It will bring you an interesting illustrated booklet that tells all about this wonderful way to learn music at home—without any special talent—without any previous knowledge of music at amazingly little cost. Read it carefully and earnestly and act upon it. If interested, tear out the coupon now, before you turn the page. (Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.) Address: U. S. School of Music, 2941 Brunswick Building, New York, N. Y.

(Established 1898)

**CHECK THE INSTRUMENTS YOU'D LIKE TO PLAY  
HERE'S FREE PROOF YOU CAN LEARN!**

U. S. School of Music, 2941 Brunswick Bldg., New York, N. Y.  
I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument checked below. Please send me your free illustrated booklet, "How to Learn Music at Home."

- |  |                                   |                                   |  |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Piano           | <input type="checkbox"/> Cello    | <input type="checkbox"/> Cornet   | <input type="checkbox"/> Drums and Traps   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Violin          | <input type="checkbox"/> Hawaiian | <input type="checkbox"/> Trumpet  | <input type="checkbox"/> Ukulele           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guitar          | <input type="checkbox"/> Guitar   | <input type="checkbox"/> Harp     | <input type="checkbox"/> Organ             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flauto          | <input type="checkbox"/> Banjo    | <input type="checkbox"/> Clarinet | <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Elementary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plain Accordion | <input type="checkbox"/> Mandolin | <input type="checkbox"/> Flute    | <input type="checkbox"/> Harmony           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Saxophone       | <input type="checkbox"/> Trombone | <input type="checkbox"/> Piccolo  | <input type="checkbox"/> Voice Culture     |

Name ..... Have you  
..... (this instr.?)

Address .....

City..... State.....

# A Money-Making Opportunity for Men of Character

EXCLUSIVE FRANCHISE FOR  
AN INVENTION EXPECTED TO REPLACE  
A MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR INDUSTRY

Costly Work Formerly  
"Sent Out" by Business Men  
Now Done by Themselves  
at a Fraction of the Expense

This is a call for men everywhere to handle  
exclusive agency for one of the most  
unique business inventions of the day.

Forty years ago the horse and buggy business was supreme—today almost extinct. Twenty years ago the phonograph industry ran into many millions—today practically a relic. Only a comparatively few foresighted men saw the fortunes ahead in the automobile and the radio. Yet irresistible waves of public buying swept these men to fortune, and sent the buggy and the phonograph into the discard. So are great successes made by men able to detect the shift in public favor from one industry to another.

Now another change is taking place. An old established industry—an integral and important part of the nation's structure—in which millions of dollars change hands every year—is in thousands of cases being replaced by a truly astonishing, simple invention which does the work better—more reliably—AND AT A COST OFTEN AS LOW AS 2% OF WHAT IS ORDINARILY PAID! It has not required very long for men who have taken over the rights to this valuable invention to do a remarkable business, and show earnings which in these times are almost unheard of for the average man.

Not a "Gadget"—  
Not a "Knick-Knack"—

but a valuable, proved device which  
has been sold successfully by busi-  
ness novices as well as seasoned  
veterans.

Make no mistake—this is no novelty—no flimsy creation which the inventor hopes to put on the market. You probably have seen nothing like it yet—perhaps never dreamed of the existence of such a device—yet it has already been used by corporations of outstanding prominence—by dealers of great corporations—by their franchises—by doctors, newspapers, publishers—schools—hospitals, etc., etc., and by thousands of small business men. You don't have to convince a man that he should use an electric bulb to light his office instead of a gas lamp. Nor do you have to sell the same business man the idea that some day he may need something like this invention. The need is already there—the money is usually being spent right at that very moment—and the desirability of saving the greatest part of this expense is obvious immediately.

Some of the Savings  
You Can Show

You walk into an office and put down before your prospect a letter from a sales organization showing that they did work in their own office for \$11 which formerly could have cost them over \$200. A building supply corporation pays our man \$70, whereas the bill could have been for \$1,600! An automobile dealer pays our representative \$15, whereas the expense could have been over \$1,000. A department store has expense of \$88.60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over \$2,000. And so on. We could not possibly list all cases here. These are just a few of the many actual cases which we place in your hands to work with. Practically every line of business and every section of the country is represented by these bold returns which hammer across dazzling, convincing money-saving opportunities which hardly any business man can fail to understand.

## EARNINGS

One man in California earned over \$1,600 per month for three months—close to \$5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office; counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A Connecticut man writes he has made \$55.00 in a single day's time. Texas man nets over \$300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from \$5 to \$60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

Profits Typical of  
the Young, Growing Industry

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a \$7.50 order, \$3.83 can be your share. On \$1,500 worth of business, your share can be \$1,167.00. The very least you get as your part of every dollar's worth of business you do is 67 cents—on ten dollars' worth \$6.70, on a hundred dollars' worth \$67.00—in other words two thirds of every order you get is yours. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders—and you have the opportunity of earning an even larger percentage.

This Business Has  
Nothing to Do With  
House to House Canvassing

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation—whatever size the customer says he will accept—at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer—it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the installation without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer! While others fail to get even a hearing, our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They have received the attention of the largest firms in the country, and sold to the smallest businesses by the thousands.

No Money Need Be Risked

in trying this business out. You can measure the possibilities and not be out a dollar. If you are looking for a business that is not overworked—a business that is just coming into its own—on the upgrade, instead of the downgrade—a business that offers the buyer relief from a burdensome, but unavoidable expense—a business that has a prospect practically in every office, store, or factory into which you can set foot—regardless of size—that is a necessity but does not have any price cutting to contend with as other necessities do—that because you control the sales in exclusive territory is your own business—that pays more on some individual sales than many men make in a week and sometimes in a month's time—if such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, get in touch with us at once for the rights in your territory—don't delay—because the chances are that if you do wait, someone else will have written to us in the meantime—and if it turns out that you were the better man—we'd both be sorry. So for convenience, use the coupon below—but send it right away—or wire if you wish. But do it now. Address:

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Dept. 4047B, Mobile, Ala.

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Name.....  
Street or Route.....  
Box No.....  
City.....  
State.....



*Six-Guns Roar Over  
the Wyoming Frontier  
Country!*



AN EPIC OF AMERICAN  
PIONEER DAYS—

# BUFFALO GRASS WAR

Complete Novel

By **WILLIAM F. BRAGG**

—PLUS—

Grand Action Yarns by

**J. ALLAN DUNN**

and others in the Gala February  
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of ALL the  
Identification Bureaus  
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Send for complete list of our 600 Bureaus where our graduates have been placed in good positions as

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State of Massachusetts  
State of Illinois

State of Idaho  
State of Colorado  
State of Iowa  
State of Utah  
State of Ohio  
Boston, Mass.  
New York, N. Y.  
Pittsburgh, Pa.  
St. Paul, Minn.  
Mexico City, Mex.  
Augusta, Ga.  
Seattle, Wash.  
Omaha, Neb.  
Des Moines, Ia.  
Montreal, Can.  
Cedar Rapids, Iowa  
Elgin, Ill.  
Syracuse, N. Y.  
Tampa, Fla.  
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Havana, Cuba  
Miami, Fla.  
Birmingham, Ala.  
Columbus, Ohio  
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# The Mask of the



*A Curse Bestrides a Carnival When a Midget  
and a Puppet Make a Mystic Marriage of Evil!*

## CHAPTER I

### *The Warning of Nadji*

**I**T WAS Saturday night. The carefree carnival crowd swarmed along the gayly lighted midway of the Araby Shows playing the final night of three-day stand in Ransburg. Unnoticed among them was a young man with curly dark hair who carried two black traveling cases. One was neatly labeled, *Jerry Ravelle, Ventriloquist*, and the playful tumbling letters on the

other spelled out the name: *Chiquito*.

Jerry Ravelle followed the crowd along the midway, past bingo joints and pinwheel games. He nodded to the spieler on the platform before the Hawaiian dancer's tent, and went on, but presently he paused and looked up at a painted front which read: *Nadji —Past, Present and Future*.

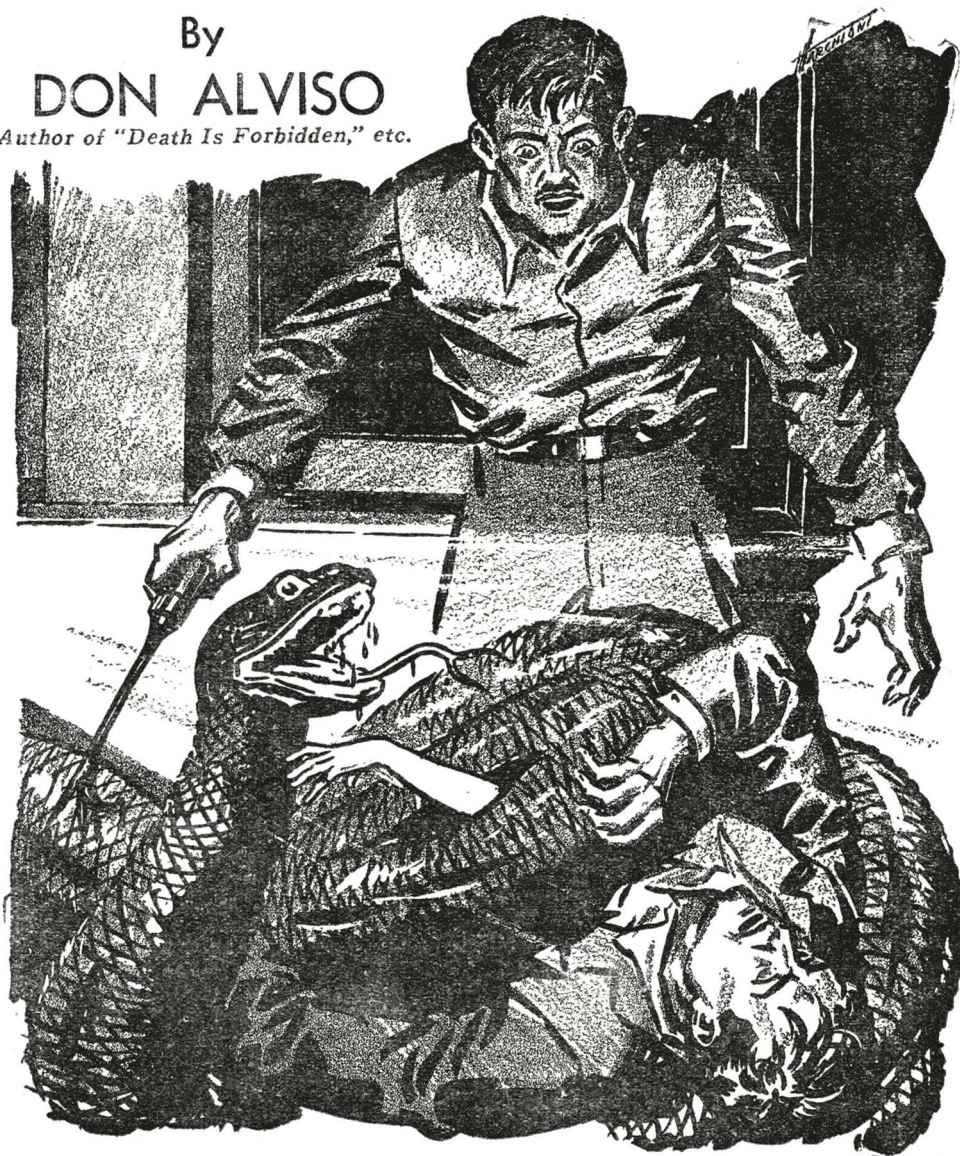
He approached the tent, stepped inside. His quick look flicked over the draped table behind which a dark old woman sat, clothed in gaudy Gipsy dress.

# Marionette A Complete Novelet

By

**DON ALVISO**

*Author of "Death Is Forbidden," etc.*



*The huge python wrapped his body around Ravelle, squeezing hard*

"Lo, Nadji," he smiled.

A glad friendly look flashed to the woman's beadlike eyes as she rose to welcome him.

"Jerry! It's good to see you back! We have missed you."

Ravelle stepped closer to the draped table, and dropped his gaze to the

crystal ball. "How's your girl, Zelina?" he asked, his hands toying with the ball.

"Still afraid," Nadji said sadly. "The fear haunts her always."

Ravelle leaned closer to the Gipsy woman.

"If you want to tell me what's trou-

bling her, maybe I can help. What's on her mind, Nadji?"

"Murder!" The word was uttered with scarcely a movement of her thin lips.

Ravelle blinked thoughtfully. "You Ghitanos don't leave your tribe unless there's plenty good reason. Zellina—did she kill someone?"

"Yes. Her husband. Listen, Jerry. I tell you this because you are a good friend. Zellina is not my blood daughter, and she is not a Gipsy. She is—well, it does not matter. Many's the unwanted child, who was taken in by my people and brought up to the Romany trail. But Zellina was not made for Gipsy ways. For example, when she was sixteen a husband was chosen for her—she hated him—twice she ran away, and twice he found her, brought her back, and whipped her with the lash. So—she knifed him."

"He had it coming," Ravelle said. "And it seems she got away with it."

Nadji shook her head. "I had no child of my own," she said sadly. "And Zellina has been mine since she was a baby. I helped her to escape from my people. Because I loved her I made of myself an exile. They have not found us, but she did not, as you say, get away with it. There is someone here with the Araby Shows who knows about Zellina. Someone whose dwarfed body and soul is as evil as the stench from a burning witch; a demon who taunts and threatens my Zellina. He has put a curse upon her and she is forced to obey his will."

"Napoleon Petty?" Ravelle asked, after a brief silence.

The Gipsy woman nodded. "He is the son of the devil. His lecherous eyes linger upon every girl with a pretty face. He delves in black magic; reads the gospel of Lucifer, and dabbles with strange rites and potions."

Ravelle's black eyes were suddenly intent. His thoughts skipped back a year to his unwilling departure from the Araby Shows and the reasons behind it.

"I know Petty think's he's quite a ladies' man," Ravelle said. "Offended vanity more than anything else is back of his hate of Delphine, for instance. He couldn't get to first base with her,

so—he hates her. Petty's queer. But this black magic stuff. You're sure?"

**N**ADJI stepped quickly to the front opening, fastened the tent flap securely, and returned to her place behind the table. Then from the ample folds of her skirts, she drew a frayed diary, opened it to a page marked by the dried skin of a blood-sucking leech. Pointing a bony finger to a passage scored in heavy blue pencil, she handed the book to Ravelle.

"This is the diary of the Great Modini, who died three years ago," she said. "You knew him well, and will know his writing. How Napoleon Petty came by the book, I do not know, but it fell from his pocket one night when he was prowling about Delphine's tent. Read, and you will know why Zellina, why all of us, fear the midget."

Ravelle's gaze focused on the pages, and hurriedly he read the precisely penned lines.

During part of the winter of 1917, Gamble, a fellow performer whom I had worked with through the previous carnival season, was my guest at my beach cabin on the Oregon coast. Gamble played the tent shows with a combination ventriloquy and magic act. However, his real interest was in spiritualism and other occult manifestations. For several years he had achieved phenomenal success with table tapping, and during the first part of the winter of 1917, he succeeded in causing what appeared to my skeptical eye to be automatic spelling on a ouija board.

Then, for two weeks Gamble tramped the hills and valleys in company with an aged water-finder; the two of them experimenting with wands from different species of trees as water-witches. From the results obtained with the table, the ouija board, and the water-witches, all of which were made of wood, Gamble evolved the plausible theory that *wood was definitely compatible with the manifestations of supernatural forces. There was something about wood.* . . .

So his next step was to attempt to induce what he called "spiritual animation" into the wooden dummy he used in his "vent" act.

Having previously witnessed in other performers the disastrous mental effect when they allowed their deep delving to mingle practical magic with occult investigation, I warned Gamble against further pursuit of the theory. However, he termed my advice cynical meddling, and moved to an abandoned lighthouse several miles down the coast. The next word I had of

him came from two Norwegian fishermen who testified before a coroner's jury as follows:

While fishing off the headland they saw a man dash from the abandoned lighthouse to the cliff edge and leap over. The water below was shallow and dotted with sharp and jagged rocks. The fishermen put in toward shore and at great risk retrieved Gamble's body, from which the last spark of life was ebbing. They carried Gamble up the steep trail to his abode, and as they neared the open door, excited chattering was heard; protestations uttered in a distinctly human voice. Then, according to the sworn testimony, a wooden dummy ran screaming to the cliff edge and leaped. In the same moment Gamble died.

Upon searching the lighthouse thoroughly, the fishermen found no human presence, and then, suddenly realizing what they had witnessed, they fled from the scene in panic. Leaving Gamble's body at the lighthouse, the two fishermen went in their boat to the nearest village and reported the affair to the constable.

Ravelle closed the book and handed it back to the Gipsy woman.

"Things are coming clear," he said. "I got a letter from Delphine asking me to come back. It seems that Petty has been hanging around Delphine's marionette tent, and while Delphine was vague in her letter, I could read between the lines. She too is afraid—terribly afraid of something."

"A fine girl, Delphine," Nadji said with a note of tenderness. "A woman worthy of your love, Jerry, and I can see you can hardly wait to go to her."

Ravelle nodded and turned to pick up his two traveling cases, but Nadji's voice suddenly dropped to a lower rasping note. The ominous tone held him, and he swung his head to see her gazing intently into the crystal.

"Wait! Jerry! There is something here—something I must tell you—"

**R**AVELLE faced her, listening. Like all carnie folks, Ravelle possessed his share of skepticism, but there was a sincerity in the Gipsy woman's manner he could not ignore. He waited, while Nadji's beadlike eyes probed the cloudy depths of the crystal, and tortured words came jerkily from her pale thin lips.

"I see—I see here a warning. I see our dark carnival train on its haunted flight through twisting mountain passes—I hear a voice. It calls for

help. There is—death—and a girl faltering on the brink of eternity. And there is a marionette—ghost hands pull at the cut strings!" The Gipsy's staring eyes bored deeper into the mysterious translucence of the crystal, and her voice came in a hoarse ragged whisper. "In the name of Delva! Who turned the snake loose to roam—"

The Gipsy's voice faded away. Her chin sank limply upon her thin bosom and with a shiver Ravelle tore open the flap and hurried from the tent, trying vainly to shut the echo of Nadji's warning from his ears. The persuasive voice of a spieler rose above the rhythm of hot music blaring from the bandstand, and Ravelle glanced up at the gaudily painted banner behind the bally platform where the spieler stood. He read the familiar inscription boldly traced upon the canvas.

NAPOLEON PETTY—WORLD'S  
ONLY MIDGET MAGICIAN!

As if he had been suddenly persuaded by the eloquence from the bally stand, Ravelle paused. A moment later he nodded to the ticket man and walked through the roped entrance into the tent. He edged up to the rear of the standing audience and his look went to the performer on the high platform.

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## CHAPTER II

### *The Statue of Chalk*

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**N**APOLEON PETTY was thirty-two inches tall, and all his fifty-six pounds were perfectly formed. His handsome face was surmounted by a sleek head of wavy blond hair, and having been spared that deformed look which is the curse of so many of his kind, Petty was egotistical, arrogant, and not a little vain. Basking in the protection of his small stature, he maintained an overbearing, insulting attitude toward his fellow performers.

Ravelle watched the midget now as he strutted through his act; heard Petty's voice, full and blustering. Im-

maculately dressed, wearing an emerald-set platinum ring on the third finger of his left hand, Petty played to the ladies in the crowd.

Now the midget magician approached the end of his routine. His closing effect was an illusion by which a chalk statue seemed to be imbued with life. Even to Jerry's practiced eye the act looked good, but the midget's fanatical insistence on the reality of the transformation brought a jarring note to the proceedings. It was as though to Napoleon Petty he, himself, gave the gift of life to the statue.

While Ravelle watched, Petty tapped the chalk figure with his cane and the resultant hollow sound left no doubt that the statue was really just that. But as Petty continued his tapping and patter, the hard lines of the chalk face slowly softened; the white set of the chalk eyes diffused with color, and the dead stillness of the rounded breast began to rise and fall with the breath of life. Then the tapping of Petty's cane no longer brought forth sound, and Ravelle could see the cane tip making visible dents in the white fabric of the girl's scanty costume; see it press against soft and resilient flesh. Then, with the transformation complete, the girl stepped down off the pedestal where three minutes before a chalk statue had stood.

She was tall and slim, and there was a statuesque quality to her pale flawless features. Petty took her by the hand and led her to the front of the platform, where she smiled and bade the customers good night before she left the stand. Ravelle took his gaze from the midget to watch the girl as she walked with the hesitant step of an automaton to the dressing compartment behind the main tent. He was remembering that the girl was known only as Marcia, and that she constantly struggled to hide a fear of the little man for whom she worked, never quite succeeding.

The crowd was leaving the tent and Ravelle drifted out with them. Linger- ing for a moment by the ballyhoo plat- form, he saw Petty, cane in hand, emerge and walk on down the midway.

The midget held a long, slim cigar clenched between his small, even teeth, and he walked with his usual purpose- ful stride. Ravelle picked his way be- tween tent stakes and guy ropes to the dressing compartment at the rear of the magic tent. The light within the smaller tent cast Marcia's motionless shadow against the canvas wall. Ravelle spoke the girl's name softly and stepped inside.

Her platinum head turned slowly and when her dull eyes focussed on him, a wan smile lighted her set fea- tures for an instant.

"Oh, hello, Jerry," she said. But even her voice was dead.

"How's it going, Marcia?" Ravelle asked, and then without waiting for her answer: "Just saw your act, and thought I'd drop back and say hello."

"When did you get in?" Marcia asked listlessly.

"Just now. Stopped in a minute at Nadji's, and now I'm on my way over to see Sam Valente. If my old spot is still open, maybe he'll put me back on."

"Have you seen Delphine?"

Jerry shook his head, covertly eying Marcia. The air of hopeless stupor which engulfed the girl swept Ravelle with a sudden wave of pity for her. She seemed to exist in a perpetual hypnotic daze, and Ravelle could not help noticing how she inwardly cringed when she was in the presence of the midget magician.

"I'VE got a friend doing sideshow illusions for Sells-Floto," Ravelle said. "Last time I saw him he was short an assistant. If you'd like to make a change, I—"

"No," Marcia interrupted. "I—I couldn't!"

"Then you're satisfied, working with Petty?"

For answer the girl only stared dully back at him. Ravelle studied her briefly.

"Maybe I got things wrong. Some- how, from watching you, I'd got the idea you detested Petty. If he's okay with you, just forget I said anything."

He saw tears welling up into Mar- cia's blue eyes. Her lips trembled when she spoke.

"I do detest him!" she whispered



hoarsely. "I hate him! I—I think I could—kill him!"

Ravelle nodded. "The midget has the hard eyes of a hypnotist. He's been working that stuff on you. Right?"

Marcia covered her face with trembling hands. "He—he—oh! I can't talk about it! Don't—don't ask me—please!"

A breath of night breeze came through the entrance flap suddenly pushed aside. A barking voice behind the ventriloquist rasped:

"Get out!" he cried.

Ravelle turned and looked down upon Napoleon Petty. The midget's greenish, piercing eyes were burning with rage and his cruel lips were pressed into a hard, thin line. He gripped the short, heavy walking cane menacingly and repeated:

"Get out, Ravelle! You've got no business here!"

Ravelle's disdainful gaze remained on the midget. "I wouldn't try to run the bluff too far, Petty."

The midget's lips parted in a mirthless smile. "Marcia! Tell him to leave."

"Go, Jerry—please. It would be better for—for me."

Ravelle shrugged, turned, and left the tent. As he proceeded along the midway there were nods and greetings on every side. It seemed as if word of his arrival had flown over the lot and all of his old friends were eager to welcome him.

But, like an echo of impending danger, the lines of the Great Modini's diary kept running through Jerry Ravelle's brain. A wooden dummy imbued with a semblance of life by some weird and hellish necromancy! Impossible, Jerry muttered to himself, but the thought persisted. After all, there was the case of Heddar Berglin, the ventriloquist who had been murdered in his stateroom on the Empress of Egypt. Ravelle had known Berglin and had heard the story from another trouper who was traveling on the Empress. Continued shrill cries emanating from the locked stateroom had prompted the stewards to break down the door. They found Berglin's dummy crumpled limply on the floor, and the ship's surgeon testified that

the ventriloquist had been dead for more than eight hours.

Ravelle glanced along the midway, swung his course abruptly, and started for the marionette tent. It was between shows and the spieler was exhorting a straggling crowd before the platform.

Ravelle passed the ticket booth. A moment later he was holding Delphine Delano in his arms. He was conscious of her slim body snuggling close to him, and the trembling of her small hands against his cheeks told him that here, too, was one who was afraid.

**D**ELPHINE had an alluring, child-like face, and a figure which would have spotted a girl of less intelligence in a strip or wiggle act. But Delphine had more than beauty. Standing behind the curtained stage of her marionette show, she exhibited an uncanny dexterity at the controls which put the capering figures through their paces. Adapting her smooth, rich voice to the four characters, one after the other, she held the rubes breathless, marveling that one slim, dark-haired girl could possess such a range of accent and tone. Her whisper drew Jerry's look to her lips.

"I'm so glad you're back, Jerry. I've been so—afraid."

"I've gathered that. Has the midget been—making passes?"

"It isn't that. I discouraged his attentions long ago. It's so strange, you'll think I'm foolish, Jerry. But Petty has been doing something to—Kim!"

Ravelle's gaze flicked to the marionette stage, strayed over the four sawdust stuffed figures and stopped on the freckled, snaggle-toothed urchin with fiery red hair. That was Kim, the effervescent prankster, Delphine's favorite and the star of her marionette routine.

"I won't think you're foolish," Ravelle said gravely. "What is this about the midget and Kim?" Strangely, he was again reminded of Modini's diary.

He felt a little shudder go over the girl's body before she spoke.

"It sounds wild when I say it, but several times lately Kim hasn't responded to the controls. He gets out of place on the stage, does things he

shouldn't, and each time I feel as if someone was behind me, peering through the back flap. Once I hurried to the flap and looked. No one was there, but I thought I heard the midget's laugh."

There was no more time to talk. People began streaming into the tent, a straggling group of late comers to see the last show of the evening. Delphine had to take her place behind the marionette stage, and Ravelle pushed through the back flap and started toward Sam Valente's office car.

The midway was almost deserted and the stake and canvas gang had already begun to strike the show. As Jerry Ravelle walked on he was regretting his year of absence from the carnival. He had always regarded such things as he had read in the Great Modini's diary with a skeptical indifference, discarded them as coincidence, or hallucination. But now there were Delphine's fears added to what Gipsy Nadji had already told him. Ravelle's brow was furrowed as he entered the office car.

Sam Valente was stowing the "take" into the safe when Ravelle stepped inside.

"Hi, Jerry. Heard you were back," Valente said.

They shook hands. "I got a letter from Delphine," Ravelle said. "Remember, I left you a year ago because I didn't want to be the one to cause you trouble. But Petty has started in on Delphine again. How about tearing up her contract and letting her go?"

"No," Valente objected. "Should I let Delphine Delano go, I'm giving up the best moneymaker on the lot. The carnie racket is tough these days, Jerry, and every dollar counts."

"Then get rid of Petty."

Valente shook his head. "I can't. His contract runs another season, and he'll stick to the last week. I've had other kicks on Petty, Jerry. Just what's the beef?"

**R**AVELLE moved closer and sat on the corner of the desk.

"Listen, Sam, I know that keeping peace among a bunch of troupers is no snap. But you're too shrewd a show-

man not to be wise that there's something plenty wrong with this midget magician. Look at Marcia, the blonde he uses in his statue illusion. She's only half alive, as if Petty exercises a continual hypnotic influence over her. He keeps her secluded in the compartment next to his in the quarters car. He goes around making sly remarks, dropping veiled hints that Marcia is but a beautiful soulless thing that lives and breathes only at the pleasure of his own mystery-haunted brain."

"All that may be so," Valente replied, "but I can't run the private lives of my performers. Petty's act is good. It brings the customers back for more, and as long as he lives up to his contract and don't harm anyone, what can I do?"

"One thing you ought to do," Ravelle said, "and that's keep an eye on him. The dangerous thing about Petty is that he's so twisted and conceited that he believes what he tells the customers—supernatural powers, and all that. I've seen other magicians go haywire the same way Petty is going. They get to digging too deep in their mysticism, and—"

"I don't just follow you, Jerry," Valente interrupted.

"Look," Jerry went on, his voice low with earnest sincerity. "In his compartment on the train Petty keeps a lot of books on Voodoo magic and tales of zombies. For years he's been studying spirit materialization and reincarnation. He believes he can use that stuff to get revenge on his enemies. Maybe you don't know it, but there's only a faint line between the 'miracles' of the past and the conjuring of some modern magicians. When an imp like Petty gets to delving too deep into necromancy, he crosses the barrier that separates legerdemain from what history records as black magic! Laugh it off if you want to, but if Petty reaches that point—anything can happen."

In twenty years of the tent show racket Valente had seen strange things. "You may be right," the Araby boss answered thoughtfully. "But until Petty gives me some tangible proof of what you say, there's nothing I can do."

Ravelle spread his hands in an impatient gesture. "Proof? Look at Zellina, the Gipsy snake girl! That midget bosses her like she was his slave. He's got Marcia mesmerized or something, and now he's starting on Delphine and her marionettes. Maybe you think he's just a harmless screwball; that it doesn't go any deeper; but you're wrong. He's too mean to get along with, and too small to smack down, so—"

"So what?"

"So, I'd like to stick around, if you've got a spot for me."

"Sure," Valente agreed. "I've always said you and Chiquito are the best vent act that ever hit a tent show. You can have your old spot at the end of the midway. We're due to open in Victorville tomorrow night."

Ravelle nodded. "Thanks, I think I'll drift over and see Delphine again."

### CHAPTER III

#### *Zellina*

**R**AVELLE left the office car and cut between the back tents to the midway. He entered the marionette tent from the front and his look darted through the shadows searching for Delphine. One single nitrogen bulb was burning on the tent's center-pole near the canvas top. Its glare was dissipated in the far spread of the tent, and only a dim ghost of its light strayed over the trampled sawdust and the black velvet of the curtained marionette stage. Delphine was not in sight and Ravelle stepped to the stage and shoved aside the curtains. For a moment his look strayed over the other figures, then centered on Kim lying limp on the velvet floor of the stage.

Ravelle stared. The black operating strings of the three other figures were still fastened to their various anatomical parts, but the eight cords designed to control Kim's antics had been broken, and Kim lay sprawled like a murdered gangster on the black velvet floor.

Ravelle's hands went out to lift the

crumpled figure, but as his fingers closed around the sawdust arms he thought he felt a movement as if Kim fought against his touch. Ravelle straightened the grotesquely twisted limbs and propped Kim's back against an upright of the stage's tube framework.

For a full minute Ravelle stood staring down into the strangely lifelike face of the marionette figure.

Even as Ravelle stared, something about the puppet's painted face seemed to change. The jovial lines of Kim's set grin seemed drawn and hardened, and from somewhere came a low, cackling laugh. Ravelle jerked tense; his hands shot out and gripped the marionette. He held it up before him, shook it, and noted the lifeless limpness of the dangling limbs. He shrugged, and set Kim back on the stage again.

"I'm spooky," he mumbled to himself. "Kim's just a doll; a lifeless thing of sawdust, rags and wood."

Then, as he was about to leave, Jerry was startled by a low moan from the shadows hovering over the deserted tent. He whirled and circled the marionette stage. The low, agonized sound was repeated, and a moment later Ravelle was bending over Delphine Delano, lying limp on the trampled sawdust behind the curtained stage. Garbled and almsot incoherent words came from the girl's lips, disconnected words which had no apparent meaning.

"Kim—oh, Kim! Why did you—why—oh, Kim!"

Ravelle gathered her up in his arms and left the tent by the back flap. The carnival train was spotted on the siding which skirted the showgrounds. Halfway to the train Ravelle saw Syd Fleet bringing his equipment from the midway. Fleet was the Araby tattoo artist, and rumor hinted that in better days he had been a surgeon in Australia.

"Syd!" Ravelle called.

The tattoo man followed the ventriloquist into Delphine's compartment on the carnival train.

Ravelle left the girl with Fleet and hurriedly retraced his steps to Valente's office car. He found Petty there talking to Valente. At Ravelle's en-

trance the midget slipped down off the chair by Valente's desk and turned to leave the car. For a moment the eyes of the two men met, and Ravelle saw the obsessed expression on the midget's small features, the demoniacal glare of Petty's greenish pupils. Then Petty laughed, an obscene and cackling sound which seemed to linger on after he had gone and closed the door.

**V**ALENTE nodded to Ravelle. "Well, Jerry, what's on your mind?"

Ravelle stepped up close to the Araby boss. "I just found Delphine lying in the back of her tent. Her uniform was torn away from her breast, and there are two punctures like the bite of sharp teeth on each side of her throat. I took her to her berth. She's white as a sheet. Looks like something had sucked her blood."

Breath whistled between Valente's teeth. "My God!"

"She's breathing," Jerry said. "I sneaked her behind the tents to keep out of sight, but a couple of customers were leaving that way and saw me carrying her. They might squawk. I think the sooner we get out of town the better."

"Yeah," Valente said. "We can settle our own troubles. Let the local cops get wind that something's wrong and we'll be tied up here till they're good and ready to let us go."

Valente stuck his head out of the car window. "Buck!" he called.

A moment later Buck O'Hara, the big Irish foreman of the stake and canvas gang stepped up to the window.

"Rush the packing and loading," Valente told him. "Send a call to the roundhouse to have a whistler all ready to drag us out of town."

Buck didn't need any explanations. Already trouble-scent had been wafted over the Araby lot. Valente turned to Ravelle.

Petty has just been telling me a very strange story," he said.

"Has he? My guess is that he'd better be thinking up some good ones."

"I think this is on the level," Valente countered. "For a long time I've suspected that Zellina wasn't Nadji's daughter. The girl doesn't look like a

Gipsy. Well, Petty cleared that point by proving to me that the Gipsy woman and Zellina aren't even related. In fact, the snake girl is Petty's sister! He says that she was stolen by the Gipsies when she was just a baby; brought up by them."

Ravelle's eyes widened. "But Zellina is dark, and Petty is a blonde."

"Bleached," Valente explained. "I've known that all along."

"Even so, I don't get Petty's idea of spilling all this to you."

"It's like this, Jerry. The Gipsies married Zellina off to one of them and she killed him. Petty is afraid the law will run the girl down and he came and told me. Says someone is bound to recognize the girl and she'll be picked up. Wants me to send her away. He sounded like he was really worried about it."

"Maybe," Jerry replied, "but if Petty is worried, it's himself that he's stewing about. I had a few words with O'Hara a while ago out on the lot, and it's pretty clear to me now why Petty is so bitter against Delphine. One night a couple of months ago she caught the midget in the baggage car fussing with the marionettes. She told O'Hara, and Buck turned the shrimp over his knee. Coming from Buck, I imagine it was quite a licking, and Petty being what he is, he's trying to hit back at Delphine. Whatever he does will be sly and under cover. It will be a good idea to keep a close watch between here and Victorville."

"Sure," Valente agreed. "We'll do just that."

"As for me, I'm taking the compartment next to Delphine's. I'll go over now and pack up her show."

Ravelle returned to the marionette tent and began gathering up the figures and placing them each in its special compartment of the open case behind the stage. He carefully examined Kim, and placed him along with the others. He slipped the black velvet curtains from their chromium rods, folded them and stacked them neatly into the packing case. Five minutes later the marionette stage was stripped, and Jerry pushed through the back flap of the marionette top and stood for a moment listening to all the

old familiar sounds of the carnival packing up for the jump to the next stopping place.

**T**HE droning words of Gipsy Nadji's weird warning nagged at him, and he tried futilely to establish some connection between the fortune teller's veiled hints and what had happened to Delphine.

Just as he started back to the carnival train, a girl's soft voice spoke his name from the shadows at the rear of the next tent. Ravelle paused and turned. The faint odor of an odd yet familiar perfume came to his nostrils over the strong smell of sawdust. He entered the tent and faced a voluptuous, olive-skinned girl who looked up at him from haunted obsidian eyes. It was Zellina.

"Lo, Zellina. I see you've still got your little pets."

Ravelle's glance went over to the big canvas snake pit which stood in the center of the tent. The floor of the pit was littered with scores of poisonous reptiles, their bodies still and sluggish now from the night's chill.

From the pit Ravelle's gaze drifted to the long, barred cage which held Gazu, Zellina's nineteen foot python. He stepped close to the cage and stood for a moment gazing down at the serpentine smoothness of the python's huge body. As he looked, a cold, clammy hand seemed to run skeleton fingers up and down his spine.

He could hear Nadji muttering—"In the name of Delva! Who turned the snake loose to roam—"

Zellina stood facing Ravelle, a strange light in her shining black eyes.

Abruptly the girl spoke. "I am glad that you are back, Jerry. But—you must be careful. There is danger here. The evil spirits have flung a curse upon us."

"Really, Zellina?"

"It is so," Zellina muttered. "I know it is your way to laugh at these things. But I saw you carry Delphine from her tent, and I followed. I went to see if there was something I could do, but Syd Fleet was already with her. Delphine has lost much blood through four little wounds on her slim

white throat. Four small stabs like the mark of sharp teeth. It is a vampire, no?"

"Nonsense," Ravelle said, and then as if struck by a sudden thought, he gestured toward the python cage. "Your Gazu hasn't been straying loose, has he?"

Zellina shook her dark head and a little hurt showed in her jet eyes.

"My Gazu eats things alive—he could swallow a child—but he does not suck blood."

The girl stepped close to him and Ravelle looked unwillingly down into her deep, haunted eyes—eyes whose eerie beam had such strange power over the poisonous reptiles. For the first time Ravelle recognized the facial resemblance between Zellina and the midget. The girl spoke, her low voice weighted with concern.

"You must believe me, Jerry. Whatever did that to Delphine, it was not my Gazu. With each new moon I give him a pig or a lamb. He is strong and if I feed him less, he might break from his cage to prowl. If he eats too much he sleeps all the time. I count the days, and now, it is near his feeding time again—"

"I'll take your word for that," Ravelle interrupted uneasily. "But listen. Have you seen Petty prowling around Delphine's tent tonight?"

Zellina shook her head, but her eyes evaded the ventriloquist's questioning gaze. When she tried to back away, Ravelle caught her wrist.

"If you had seen him there, you'd probably deny it," he said. "You're like Marcia, so afraid of him you can't call your soul your own and you won't let anyone help. All right. Have it your way, but your talk of vampires is just a blind. Whether it was your pet python, or something else, I'd bet you know more than you're telling."

"**S**OMETIMES, Jerry," Zellina said patiently, "you are stupid. What you cannot see with your eyes, you do not believe. When I lived with the Gipsy tribe there was an old man who was a *bulabasha*. I watched him for three days while he carved a wooden doll. I asked him if he was making it for me, but he only frowned

and shook his head. Then one night this *bulabasha* had a terrible quarrel with another man about a horse, and the *bulabasha* took his wooden doll and went far back into the woods. No one saw him all that night, but the next morning when we looked in the wagon of the man he had quarreled with, that man was dead and the wooden doll lay at his side.

"The *bulabasha* had sent it in the night to kill his enemy. Of course, you would not believe that. You do not believe about vampires, either, but let me tell you something. The marks on Delphine's throat are like the four sharp teeth of a vampire, and you should know that the python has no teeth!"

For a moment longer Ravelle stared down into her mysterious eyes, wishing that she could remove herself from under the dominating fear of the midget long enough to confide in him. But the strength of blood ties and Petty's black magic had conquered her soul. Ravelle stepped past her and hurried from the tent which was already swaying from slackening guy ropes.

On his way to the carnival train Ravelle tried desperately to shake off the heavy feeling of dread which had settled over him. Superstition thrives among a certain type of carnival folks and Ravelle would have gladly discarded the night's events with that explanation, but there were certain things which made that impossible. In the first place, he could not forget the eerie episode narrated in Modini's diary. Ravelle had known the Great Modini, and knew that he was above exaggeration or misrepresentation. And when Ravelle had touched Kim back there in the marionette tent, there had been something unearthly about the sawdust figure; something diabolical in the cackling laugh Ravelle had heard.

In Delphine's compartment on the carnival train Ravelle found Fleet bent over the girl's still figure.

"How is she, Syd?" Jerry asked.

"Weak as a kitten," Fleet replied. "I've disinfected the wounds and got some hot broth down her. She's sleeping now, and barring the effects of

mental shock she ought to pull through okay."

Ravelle's worried look remained on the girl's pale face. "Who—what do you think did it?"

Syd Fleet shrugged. "The Gipsy snake girl had her look at those four stabs and went away mumbling about vampires."

"Hooley!" Ravelle said. "Between Zellina's superstitions and Petty's mumbo-jumbo, this outfit is going ga-ga! You ought to be able to get some idea from the appearance of the wounds. Ever seen a case like this before?"

Fleet gestured a thoughtful negative. "No. Those wounds might have been made either by a large animal with four sharp teeth, or by a very small animal which bit her four different times. Your guess is as good as mine."

Fleet repacked his black kit bag and left the compartment. Ravelle sat silently beside Delphine, anxiously watching the gentle rise and fall of her breast as she slept. Once she seemed to struggle weakly and mumbled in her sleep.

Ravelle heard her whisjer: "Kim! What has happened to you? You—you're—alive!"

Then she was quiet again. Ravelle's gaze went to the gauze pads about her slim throat, and after a moment he shut his eyes as if to exclude some ghastly sight from his vision.

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## CHAPTER IV

### *Chiquito*

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**T**HERE was a slight bump when the locomotive coupled onto the carnival train; then the heavy roll of car wheels on the steel rails. After a while Ravelle left Delphine's compartment, closing the door softly behind him. Zellina was standing in the corridor, and her manner told Ravelle that she had been lingering there waiting to speak to him. She stepped close.

"Just now I have come from the

baggage car ahead," she whispered. "I go to see if my Gazu is all right, and—Jerry—there is a bump in his middle—he has been fed!"

With no further words the strange girl turned and went gliding along the passageway toward the head of the train. The door of the compartment next to Delphine's stood open, and glancing inside, Ravelle saw that his two traveling cases had been brought there and placed by the berth. He entered the compartment and flipped open the cover of the case marked *Chiquito*. He lifted his dummy from the case, stepped to the berth and sat down, holding the wooden figure on his knee.

It had been almost a month since Ravelle had exercised that other voice which was Chiquito's, and tomorrow night when the Araby Shows opened in Victorville, he would again take his place on the midway. His fingers slipped into the control loops at Chiquito's back and he absently fell into an old habit of impromptu dialogue with the wooden figure. After years of close association the dummy had almost come to seem Ravelle's other self.

He spoke softly, so as not to disturb the sleeping girl in the next compartment. "How are you tonight, Chiquito?" he asked.

While Ravelle's fingers worked the controls, Chiquito's head turned and the sharp, clear voice which had made his character nationally famous accompanied Chiquito's moving lips.

"I feel terrible! You've kept me shut up in that trunk for a month, and I feel mean enough to murder my grandmother."

"Since your grandma has been tooth-picks these many years," Ravelle suggested, "how would you like to assassinate a midget instead?"

"Fine!" Chiquito answered. "And I've got one all picked out. I'd like to cut off his head and throw it in his face!"

A knock sounded at the door. "Come right on in," Chiquito said.

Sam Valente entered the compartment and his quick glance took in the ventriloquist and the dummy.

"Hiya, boss," Chiquito said. "Come in and set."

Valente smiled, turned to Ravelle. "You know, Jerry, you make that bag of kindling wood seem almost human. You—"

"Human?" Chiquito interrupted, swinging his look from Jerry to Valente and back to Ravelle again. "Say, who gets all the laughs in this act? Him or me?"

Sam Valente hunched his broad shoulders. "He's almost—alive! It gives me the creeps sometimes."

Ravelle nodded. "I've worked with Chiquito for years, creating his voice and his personality. It seems that the continual contact and association has imparted to Chiquito some of my own life and feeling. I've tried working with other figures and my act went flat. When I went back to Chiquito it came alive again. It's as though he was part of me—my other self. It wouldn't be hard to imagine him going on—moving and talking—without me, but"—Ravelle shrugged—"now I'm talking like Petty. I guess this hoodoo business is getting in my blood."

"I've heard of such things," Valente remarked, as he turned to leave the compartment. At the door, he paused and said, "Drop back to my car after a while, will you, Jerry?"

**A**FTER Valente had gone, Ravelle set Chiquito on the berth, leaning him back against the paneled wall of the car. Then Ravelle left the compartment and went forward along the corridor. He traversed the length of two quarters coaches and came to the door of Napoleon Petty's compartment. He rapped sharply and waited, but there was no answer. After half a minute, Ravelle knocked again, and receiving no reply from within, he turned to retrace his steps. Suddenly there was a burst of taunting laughter, and Ravelle quickly swung back to the door.

"Petty! I want to talk to you!" he cried.

But the evil of the midget's cackling laugh was all that came back to him. Ravelle grasped the knob and flung the door open. The lights burned in the midget's compartment, but the small room was empty. Ravelle's look strayed over the collection of **musty**

books in a rack on the wall. Two grinning human skulls served as bookends, and Ravelle hurriedly read some of the faded titles: *The Living Dead of Haiti—Professional Hypnotism—The Secret of the Totem Pole—The Talking Idol of Burma*. Hanging from a hook on the wall there dangled a grotesquely carved wooden doll and the room was littered with amulets and mystic charms.

Thoughtfully, Ravelle turned from the compartment and closed the door. He went back to the office car and found Syd Fleet and Buck O'Hara talking with Valente. The boss motioned Jerry to a chair, an obvious look of worry on his face.

"Now look: hoodoos of one kind or another have put better shows than this on the rocks," he said. "One hint of scandal and the local John Laws will be down on us in the next burg we hit. We land in Victorville at nine tomorrow morning. We set up and make ready for the night routine."

Valente paused and his look held on the ventriloquist. Ravelle nodded and remained silent as the Araby boss went on.

"I know that Petty has been the cause of most of the trouble among the troopers. I'm not denying that he's a locoed little rat, but for the present I think his influence is eliminated."

"You mean he's scammed?" Buck O'Hara cut in hopefully.

Valente wagged his head. "I don't know. He was around the lot just before we left Ransburg. Nobody seen him leave, but after we pulled out I checked through the train. Everybody present but Petty."

Ravelle was on the point of mentioning that he had heard the midget's laughter after the train was moving, but he checked himself.

"Maybe he's hid out somewhere," he suggested.

"That's possible," Valente agreed. "Then again he might have missed the train. Petty's black magic talk has got everyone restless. Tonight we'll be traveling through some pretty lonely mountains. Just to be sure nothing happens, I suggest that the four of us stay awake and keep a watch."

The three men nodded silent agreement, and Valente went on:

"Syd, I want you to take the compartment up ahead, next to Petty's. If he's hid out somewhere on the train, he'll eventually go to his quarters. You watch for him, and if he shows up, let me know. Ravelle will look out for Delphine, and Buck will stand guard on the animal and equipments cars at the head of the train. I'll keep a watch at the rear end here, and I figure with that set-up we can pull into Victorville without anything more happening."

**F**LEET, O'Hara and the ventriloquist left Valente's car to go to their designated quarters. Ravelle looked in upon Delphine and found her sleeping quietly. He remained for several minutes watching her, and a jumble of confused and disconnected thoughts ran through his mind.

Valente believed that Napoleon Petty had missed the train, and yet Ravelle was certain it had been the midget's derisive laugh that he had heard after the train was moving. The sound had come from Petty's compartment, but Ravelle had found no one there.

Then, a faint noise as of someone passing along the corridor. Ravelle turned out the light over the head of Delphine's berth and left only one dim-shaded bulb burning by the compartment door. He stepped outside, closed the door, and listened.

Stifled sounds as of a silent struggle came from somewhere nearby. Ravelle flung open the door of his own compartment and groped for the light switch. There was a sudden movement within the room and a small figure flung madly from the berth and darted past Ravelle and through the door. Over the hum and clatter of wheels on rail there came again the taunt of the midget's jeering laughter. Then Ravelle's fingers found the switch and the cubicle was flooded with light.

Some impulse made Jerry's gaze seek out the figure of Chiquito. The dummy was slumped in the corner of the berth, his clothes askew and his hair awry. Chiquito's glass eyes were rolled strangely upward in their sock-



ets and his jaw hung open. The incongruity of these things gave Chiquito a grotesquely human look, and the sight sent a chill along Ravelle's spine.

But Ravelle shrugged away the sudden start the dummy's strange expression had given him, and advanced toward the berth. He was jittery, he told himself. He mustn't get excited because something had gone wrong with the insides of a mechanical dummy. The controls had jammed, and that alone accounted for the twisted expression of Chiquito's face. It could be nothing more.

Ravelle sat on the edge of the berth and his practiced hand went toward the row of metal loops at Chiquito's back. But, before he touched the controls, Chiquito's mouth snapped suddenly shut. His eyeballs came down to normal position, and then eerily swung to focus on Ravelle.

Ravelle gasped; his hand dropped limply to the blanket and for a minute he sat still, trying to convince himself that some trick of vision had deceived him. He gave up such reasoning as useless. He had discarded the account of the macabre Heddar Berglin episode and the revelation contained in Modini's diary as things that happened to someone else but could never happen to him.

However, he could not doubt that someone—or something unhuman and unearthly—had been in the compart-

ment a moment ago, and even now as he stared back into Chiquito's lifelike eyes he had the sinister feeling of another presence near. Involuntarily Ravelle's sharp gaze searched the compartment; swung this way and that and then stopped on a red disc almost at his feet. He picked it up, turned it between his fingers, recognizing it as a scarlet button like those on the jacket of Kim, the marionette. Then Ravelle heard small scuffling sounds from the passageway outside, and he heard Delphine moan and toss in her sleep.

**R**AVELLE sprang through the door. There was no one in the corridor, dimly illuminated by a row of small bulbs overhead. He opened Delphine's door softly and peered inside. The light was still burning. The girl had turned over on her side, but was sleeping soundly.

Ravelle hurried forward along the passageway. From the lurch and sway of the cars he knew the train was crawling up a steep mountain grade, following a twisting uneven track. The passageway ahead became obscured by the snakelike form of the moving train. Then, for a moment the track straightened, lining the coaches so that Ravelle could see along the passageway. He blinked against the shadows of the dim-lit corridor, and his eyes focussed on a moving form

[Turn Page]



**MR. WRIGHT FOUND OUT HE WAS WRONG!**

**MR. WRIGHT:** Gee, this stuff is awful! Why do all laxatives taste so bad?



**MRS. WRIGHT:** All of them don't. Ex-Lax tastes like delicious chocolate.



**MR. W.:** Ex-Lax? That's O.K. for you and Junior, but I need something stronger!

**MRS. W.:** No, you don't! Ex-Lax is just as effective as any bad-tasting cathartic.



**LATER!**

**MR. W.:** I sure am glad I took your advice. It's Ex-Lax for me from now on.

**MRS. W.:** Yes, with Ex-Lax in the house we don't need any other laxative!

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.

**10¢ and 25¢**



ahead. There was time for only a quick glimpse before the cars took another curve and the passageway was again obscured from view; but in that instant Jerry saw plainly the outlines of a small, black-clad figure, moving at a shambling run toward the head of the train.

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## CHAPTER V

### *Before Dawn*

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**R**AVELLE dashed after the ghostlike figure, but it eluded him as with mysterious cunning. At the door of the last quarters car, Ravelle met Buck O'Hara. The crew foreman's broad face was pale and a look of consternation strained at his features.

"Did you see—it?" Buck asked in a hoarse whisper.

Ravelle nodded. "It looked like—"

"Yeah! Like Kim!" Buck interrupted. "And begorra, that's what it was! I ain't no believer in fairy tales, Jerry, but when I'm sober I got faith in what I see with my own eyes!"

Feet wide apart to brace himself against the sway of the train, Jerry stood studying the big man before him, wondering at the genuine look of fear in Buck's eyes.

"Sure, and I was up in the baggage car when it happened," Buck was saying. "I hears that midget's crazy laugh and then the lid of Delphine's marionette box swings open. There's a flutterin' of them velvet curtains as they're thrown out onto the floor, and then this Kim pops out like a jack-in-the-box. I gets one look at his face and for a minute I couldn't move. It wa'n't Kim's face, Jerry. It were the face o' the devil himself."

"Listen, Buck," Jerry said. "Petty must be on this train somewhere, and we've got to find him. You search ahead. I'll start here and work back."

The big Irishman shook his head. "Faith, an' the imp o' satan may be on the train, but you'll not find him alive. If he was livin' how could his spirit be in the marionette thing?"

Yesterday Ravelle would have scoffed at this reasoning, but the eerie events of this night had converted him to the belief that almost anything might happen before dawn.

"Anyway, we'd better look, Buck," he said. "I'll start with this baggage car and you go on ahead."

Reluctantly, Buck went forward. In the center of the car where Ravelle stood was the packing case which held Delphine's marionettes. The hinged cover was open and all about the case were strewn the velvet curtains of the miniature stage. Ravelle peered down into the case and the puppet faces of three marionettes stared blankly up at him. They were there, just as he had placed them, but Kim was gone!

Quickly Ravelle flung aside the litter of velvet. He searched among the other cases in the car, but neither the missing Kim nor the midget was there. At the far end of the car stood the long python's cage. As Ravelle approached it, his step abruptly faltered; then he stopped dead still. A cold sweat dampened his forehead as he gazed through the open doorway, into the emptiness of Gazu's cage!

The faintest odor of Zellina's strange perfume hung on the close, still air of the car.

Ravelle glanced cautiously around him, and then whirled and ran back along the passageway. He came to the door of Syd Fleet's compartment and flung it wide. After a moment his fingers found the light switch and flipped it up. As light flooded the compartment, Jerry's eyes set on Fleet's surgical kit, lying open on the floor. Beside the black kit bag there was Syd's hypodermic syringe, its sharp needle stuck into the carpet, its glass cylinder swaying on the spring of the needle with the lurching motion of the coach. Fleet lay sprawled across his berth, unconscious in a deep, drugged sleep.

Again, here in Syd's compartment, there lingered the haunting odor of the snake girl's perfume.

**S**OMEWHERE a woman screamed and Ravelle went running toward Delphine's compartment, his step quickened by the thought of a mad

midget's ghost wreaking evil through the figure of a sawdust marionette; haunted by the vision of a slinking python silently prowling among the shadows. Quickly Ravelle covered the length of one car, and then he stumbled over something sprawled across the vestibule.

The obstruction catapulted him against the heavy steel framework of the car end, and the impact sent him dazed and stunned to the floor. Half conscious, he crawled back along the passageway. His groping hands reached out and felt a warm body. Then his sight cleared and in the dim light he saw the mangled form of the snake girl, Zellina.

Her legs were oddly twisted as though all the bones had been broken. Her arms lay limp, close to her side, and her head slumped away from the shoulders at an awkward angle. One glance at the purplish tinge on the rounded throat, at the dark eyes bulging from the discolored face, and Ravelle knew that the girl was dead. He knew that she had been murdered, horribly, by something which had strangled and crushed her. For a moment Ravelle's gaze lingered on Zellina's face, twisted into a ghastly death mask. Then he struggled to his feet, and went on toward the rear of the train.

Once, past the snake-line curving of the carnival train's progress, he thought he saw the shambling form of the ghostly marionette. The sway of the coaches flung Ravelle from side to side, beating his body against the walls of the passageway. Still a little dazed, he rushed madly on, his gaze boring into the shadows ahead.

Then, as he neared Delphine's compartment, he saw the door swing slowly open. A small shambling figure stumbled out into the passageway and Ravelle brushed a hand across his eyes in a disbelieving gesture. It was the figure of Kim, the marionette, moving awkwardly on sawdust stuffed limbs, shuffling, but upright and animate. Momentarily stunned, Ravelle's eyes widened, and his hands went to the wall for support.

For, as he stared at the marionette, it was not the genial painted puppet-

face of Kim that stared back at him through the dim light of the corridor. Instead, there were the smirking, malevolent features of Napoleon Petty. The unbelievable power of the apparition's greenish eyes held Ravelle motionless. The marionette's lips parted and a ghostly voice made an obscene laugh. It had the same sound as the midget's evil cackle, and it echoed eerily in the paneled passageway.

Ravelle jerked himself from his momentary lethargy and started for the ghoulish figure. But even as he plunged forward, a piercing scream sounded from Delphine's compartment, and suddenly the whole train was plunged into darkness. Ravelle's hands closed upon the haunted marionette.

The thing writhed and struggled in his grasp as with the strength of a pygmy Frankenstein monster. One of its arms wrenched free and Ravelle felt a sharp blade slash across his throat. Then, with a mighty effort the puppet-thing broke loose and with the speed of an imp of hell, it darted past Ravelle and went scurrying forward along the corridor.

Ravelle burst into Delphine's compartment and worked the light switch. Only jet and hovering darkness rewarded his efforts. He felt his way to the berth where he could hear the girl's labored breathing. His hand found her forehead and he shuddered at the clammy coldness of the soft skin. His fingers passed over her frigid cheeks, on to the icy throat, and then something warm touched his wrist. It was spongily soft as a bladder filled with fresh warm blood.

**R**AVELLE snatched at the thing, but it clung to the girl's breast as though tiny teeth were fastened to the skin. Then it broke reluctantly away and Ravelle flung the soft, fetid mass from him and his exploring hand went back through the darkness to Delphine's breast. His groping fingers encountered another moist warm form—another—and then another.

He tore them loose and flung them to the far corner of the compartment, then bent and pressed his ear over

Delphine's heart, listening. Her pulse beat weakly and she still breathed.

Again, over the rumbling of the heavy car wheels, Ravelle heard a sound like small shuffling feet in the corridor. He remained quiet, his ear tuned to the sound. There was the indistinct creak of an opening door, and then the slithering abrasive passage of a heavy body over the corridor floor.

Ravelle whirled from Delphine and sprang into the corridor. The door to his own compartment was unlatched and it swung on its hinges with the sway of the train. As Ravelle moved through the darkness something bumped into him. There was the quick scampering of light footsteps and the ventriloquist groped downward to grasp the hellish marionette which he knew was parrying to elude him in the narrow passageway. An abrupt lurch of the coach slammed Jerry against the wall, and again the thing escaped him.

He heard the taunting laughter of the mad midget, and then the shambling shuffle of the marionette figure speeding away. All doubt as to the material and spiritual identity of that tiny scampering demon had left Jerry's mind. Like kaleidoscopic images a sequence of horrific scenes were projected upon the screen of his memory.

It was as if he could see that episode narrated in Modini's diary—the magician, Gamble, driven mad by his own black sorcery, leaping from the cliff to his death on the rocks below, only to be followed by the ghastly wooden image whose demoniacal animation had crushed his sanity.

And the business of the murdered ventriloquist in the stateroom on the *Empress of Egypt*; Jerry could almost hear the dummy's screams, almost see him clawing frantically through a welter of blood while his master lay dead upon the floor. And the wooden doll of the Gipsy *bulabasha*.

Suddenly Jerry's thoughts flashed to Chiquito and his weird actions earlier in the evening.

"Buck! Sam!" Ravelle called through the darkness.

From somewhere far back in the

trailing cars there came to him the muffled sound of a frantic voice, then quiet. Ravelle thought of Chiquito, of the flashlight in his luggage case in the compartment. He groped his way through the door, bent over and felt for the open case. Something slapped against the door and it slammed shut, latching.

A slinking gray shadow moved in the darkness. A huge thing, cold and scaly, reared from the berth and Ravelle felt its creeping body encircle him. He fought at it with flailing arms and doubled fists, but with twisting, lightninglike lashing the thing coiled further around him. It pinioned his arms and crushed his body in a contracting embrace.

Once, just before his lungs seemed to burst, Ravelle's look flashed toward the berth—toward Chiquito. He tried to cry out, but his words came only in a strangled whisper.

"Chiquito — help — call Sam — Buck—" and then there was no more breath in him.

He exerted his last tortured strength, heaving with arms and body, but the effort only brought the gripping serpentine monster tighter around him.

**H**IS ebbing consciousness seemed to record the rattle of obscene and mirthless laughter. The sound seemed hollow and far away. Then a dull, numb blackness. Vaguely, he experienced the sensation of drifting away from his tortured body; moving a few feet away from the death struggle going on by the compartment door. It was as if he was sitting where he had placed Chiquito a little while ago; sitting there in a terrified paralysis while he watched his own flesh being mangled in the python's writhing coils.

Then Ravelle knew no more. His only knowledge of the next quarter hour of that chaotic interlude came to him, after it was over, in the words of Syd Fleet and Sam Valente.

Fleet staggered up from his berth and groped for the light switch. A long minute passed before the futility of that effort penetrated his still numbed mind. Another minute and

his fumbling fingers had found a small pocket flash. He played the tiny beam over the compartment. A curse passed his stiff lips and he stumbled out into the passageway. Far back along the carnival train he could hear excited voices. Somewhere back there in the darkness a light showed intermittently. Fighting the lingering effects of the opiate, Fleet struggled back through the compartment cars. He heard Valente's voice, calling to him.

"Syd! Come and help me get this damned snake off Ravelle!"

Then, ahead in the corridor, Syd saw the twisted form of Jerry Ravelle held in the coiling death grip of Zellina's python. And from the compartment came the shrill clear voice of Chiquito, a garbled and protesting chatter. A battery lantern lighted the corridor.

Valente had passed a loop of strong rope over Gazu's head, and now he cinched the loop tight about the throat, choking the serpent. Valente handed the end of the rope to Fleet, and with a sharp snake hook Valente began jabbing and prodding at the python's flesh. The crushing coils held in a tenacious death grip around the ventriloquist, but after a minute of torturing and slashing from the barbed snake hook, the python's embrace began gradually to loosen.

And all the while from Ravelle's compartment came the strangled, protesting cries of Chiquito. Once Fleet flashed the beam of his pocket torch through the open doorway, and what he saw made his face turn suddenly blank, his eyes staring. The dummy sat on the berth, his back propped against the car window. His eyeballs rolled wildly, and his borrowed voice shrilled through the coach in time with the movement of his lips.

"Syd! Buck! Help! Gazu is killing Jerry! They've killed Delphine and Zellina, and now they—"

"They?" echoed Fleet.

"Petty and Kim!" Chiquito shrieked. "They've been planning this. I've heard them talking!"

"We left Petty back at Ransburg," Fleet said, and in that horrific interlude there seemed no incongruity in

holding a conversation with a wooden dummy.

"No!" Chiquito protested. "Petty's on this train—body and soul!"

Buck O'Hara came running heavily toward them. He took one look at Ravelle's purple face and then his gaze went questioningly to the chattering Chiquito. A wild look came into Buck's eyes. He crossed himself and muttered something under his breath.

As though imbued with a semblance of life by the soul of his master who hovered on the brink of eternity, Chiquito chattered on. The choking noose around the python's throat had sapped its strength. The ripping attacks of Valente's sharp barbed hook had freed Ravelle from the serpentine coils. Valente picked up the battery lamp from the floor and played the beam upon a deep gash in the snake's belly.

Valente's breath gushed out in an awed sound.

"God! Look, Syd. Look!"

**B**UCK and Syd swung their eyes to the spot of light. From the butchered entrails of the huge python a *small hand protruded*. Upon the third finger of that hand, obscured but not hidden by digestive slime, there was a platinum ring with an emerald setting! Fleet passed his hand before his eyes and backed away. The big Irish crew foreman gasped.

"Lord! So that's why we couldn't find him!"

Valente and Buck lifted Ravelle from the floor and carried him to his berth. Freed of the crushing embrace of the python, Ravelle's lungs groped for air. His chest heaved and his eyes fluttered open. Abruptly, with Ravelle's returning consciousness, the chattering of the dummy ceased.

"You stay here with Jerry, Syd," Valente said. "Buck and I will drag that thing out of the corridor before someone sees it."

Valente and Buck left the compartment. Dragging and carrying the limp form of the dying python, they proceeded toward Valente's car. Ravelle looked up at Syd Fleet. Struggling for speech, he could only whisper,

"Fleet—you go—see—about Delphine—"

While Fleet was gone, Ravelle lay still upon the berth, breathing deeply. As suddenly as they had blanked out, the train lights came on again. A moment later Fleet returned to Ravelle's compartment, and he held four shapeless, paunchy things in his hands.

"Well," Fleet said, "there's Zellina's vampire."

Ravelle blinked against the brightness of the sudden light and stared.

"Leeches!" he exclaimed. "God! Four of them!"

Fleet nodded, looking down at the four fat leeches in his hands, their parchment skins bloated to bursting with Delphine's blood.

"These were what made the marks on Delphine's throat. Petty must have sneaked into her tent last night between shows and started his devilish work with Kim. That probably frightened Delphine, and she fainted. Then Petty set these things on her."

"But," Ravelle objected, "they weren't on her when I found her lying in her tent. How could they get there the second time, unless you can believe that Kim—"

"I don't know," Fleet replied. "I heard a noise up in the baggage car. I went in there and started looking around, but it was dark. And then Zellina got me with the needle, and I barely got back to my berth before I passed out."

"Delphine?" Ravelle asked. "She—she'll be—all right?"

Fleet nodded. "Fright, and the loss of blood—that's all that's wrong with her."

Ravelle suddenly remembered Zellina, lying in the corridor in the forward car. "You'd better go move the body out of sight," he said. "It's near morning and we can't leave her lying there for the whole crew to see."

After Fleet had gone, Ravelle felt his strength returning. He struggled to a sitting position and his dazed eyes peered out into the shadows of the corridor. He braced himself with his arms against the swaying motion of the speeding train and tried to piece together some reason from the macabre scenes of the night's maelstrom.

At thought of the midget's body inside the huge python a shudder of hor-

ror swept over Ravelle. Whoever had planned that, the thing must have been done before the train left Ransburg. It must have been Zellina who slipped into the baggage car and released the python from its cage. Fleet almost discovered her, but she had come prepared.

But—even though she feared and hated him, Zellina would not have murdered Petty by forcing him between the python's jaws. Whether the snake girl was a willing accomplice of the midget, or was still acting under the spell of his evil influence, neither mattered now. Ravelle tried to thrust away the vision of her crushed and lifeless form lying in the vestibule.

**A** STIFLED scream sounded from the cars ahead. Ravelle jerked to his feet and lurched to the doorway, grasping at the frame for support. The choked cry came again, and he staggered along the corridor toward the sound. Far ahead on the train a door swung open. Vaguely, Ravelle realized it was the door to Marcia's compartment.

He gritted his teeth and pressed on. As he neared the compartment of Petty's blond assistant, the weird figure of Kim edged into the passageway. Ravelle saw the twisted features of the midget surmounting the shuffling figure! He saw the marionette's arm swing up and back, and the glint of a shiny blade flash in its flight toward him.

Again the rattle of raucous laughter, and the sing of sharp steel through the air. The blade arced upward in its passage and the hilt crashed against a light bulb on the corridor ceiling. Amid the tinkle of falling glass, the knife fell at Ravelle's feet.

He snatched it up and advanced toward the marionette, who darted back into Marcia's compartment, slamming and latching the door behind him. A moment later Ravelle's shoulder crashed into the thin paneling of the door. It splintered open and Ravelle burst into the compartment. His hand found the switch and he snapped on the light to see Marcia crumpled on the berth, struggling in the fiendish grasp of the mad marionette. The

thing's fingers were at her white throat and its uncanny strength silenced her frantic cries.

Her flailing arms sank limply to the berth and then Ravelle was upon the haunted thing of cloth and sawdust.

He grasped the puppet figure and dragged it from its victim. The long slim blade of the knife sank into Kim's chest, and Ravelle ripped it free and slashed again. As Ravelle stared down at the lifelike face, the lips parted and its fiendish cackle echoed in the compartment. The knife in Jerry's hand ripped and stabbed at the struggling figure, but the slashing had no more

within the marionette. Only blood will banish the midget's evil soul."

The old fortune teller came close and took the knife from Jerry's hand. As she held it poised over the marionette Ravelle saw that in her other hand she held one of the blood-bloated leeches.

Slowly Nadji's thin lips moved in a weird incantation. With the sharp point of the knife she pricked the parchment skin of the blood sucker. As the gore dripped down over the twisted features, a horrific death cry welled from the lips of the marionette. The leering expression of the midget

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effect than a bullet through the wraith-like form of a phantom.

Dimly, Ravelle realized that Gipsy Nadji had entered the compartment, and that Sam Valente stood in the doorway. Hateful, unbelievable words, in Napoleon Petty's voice, came from the writhing marionette.

"Marcia—you forced me into Gazu's cage—you thought by murdering me you could break my hold over you. But even in death I come back—to strangle the life out of your beautiful white body—"

Again the knife in Ravelle's hand flashed downward, but Nadji's voice sounded at his elbow.

"The knife will not harm the demon

faded from the features, leaving only the painted puppet face of Kim. A moment later the thing's struggles ceased. Ravelle let it slip limply to the floor of the compartment, a lifeless sawdust figure, defying the fact that it could ever have possessed even a semblance of life.

And indeed, an hour later, they would still be asking each other: "Did you really see? Was it true? Did it really happen?" and look at each other in wild surmise.

Marcia rose very weakly from the berth. "Was that true?" Valente asked. "I mean what Petty—what it said about feeding the midget to the python?"

The girl's dazed eyes went from the riddled marionette to Ravelle, and then to Valente. Up ahead the whistle of the engine blasted a signal. The first light of dawn stole through the windows of the carnival cars. Marcia's heavy lids drooped and she sank back upon the berth.

She nodded. "Yes, I did it. I knew as long as he lived I would have no

freedom. I couldn't stand it any longer. I—"

"That's enough," Valente cut in. "In a couple of hours we'll be in Victorville, and I'll have to report the— the accident. Gazu got loose and killed his mistress. He swallowed the midget. That's the way it was." Valente shrugged wearily. "Well, I'm glad it's over."

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# The Immortal Voice

*When Vile Kettle Boils,  
Double, Double Toil and  
Trouble Destroy the  
Body and Render  
Free the Soul!*

By  
JAMES MACFIE



*A hellish brew seethed from  
the iron cauldron*

WELL, that's how it started. There I was, alone in the house, and there was this Voice—a voice without a body—talking to me as though it had known me all its life.

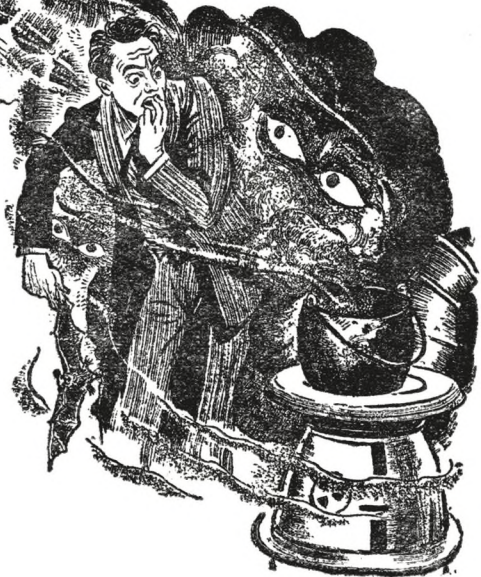
"Good evening, Mr. Stewart," it said, and I dropped the book I was reading and looked at the radio. Yes, it was switched off, all right. But—

"Please don't be alarmed," continued the Voice.

I jumped, genuinely startled this time. For the Voice had spoken from a space midway between myself and the fireplace. Before I had time to think, it went on.

"Please don't be alarmed. I'm not a ghost. Honestly. I'm just a human being."

Even now I can recall the exact memory of that mysterious Voice—human words tinged with bitterness, self-pity, pleading. There was nothing sinister about it, in spite of the



fact that it spoke from the empty air. I braced myself.

"Who—who in the name of God are you?" I demanded.

And then it sighed; sighed with relief, and told me that it had been shunned by its fellow men for the last two years. It pleaded with me

to listen to a story—the story of how it lost its body!

I think I was stunned into submission. I nodded my head weakly, thanked heaven that my wife was staying with an ailing sister. The soft voice began its tale, and reality sank into the background of my consciousness as I discussed the unreal with the intangible.

His name, he said, was Albert Fothergill. Two years before, he had been a normal, middle-aged man, a teller in a small branch of the First National Bank. He was married—or rather, shackled—to a tyrant. His wife, Alice, had been a veritable amazon. Tall, overbearing, her suppression of her husband's interests had resulted in his pursuit of quiet, secret hobbies unknown to her.

Albert Fothergill became a worshiper at the shrine of the second-hand book shops. He would spend hours poring over dusty volumes, shiver in a draughty shop rather than go home to his shrewish wife. Yet to buy books was to waste money. Literally; for Alice would only burn them or throw them out. All books, whether literature or trash, were rubbish to her material mind.

And then one day Albert Fothergill found a small thin volume, bound in well-worn leather. There was no title on the once gold-blocked back binding. Anything which may have been embossed on the cover had been worn off long ago, together with the surface of the leather. Even the title page and several of the early pages of the book were missing.

So that Albert Fothergill never knew the name of the book which was to alter the whole course of his life, nor the name of the person who wrote it.

**I**T WAS an old book and it fascinated him.

"You know the sort of thing," he explained, still speaking from his invisible position in mid-air. "You know—the letter 's' printed as an 'f' in old English. And the old type of spelling. 'Ye olde' and so forth. It intrigued me from the beginning. I just had to buy it. I wish now that

I'd never seen it. Because—it was a book on witchcraft."

He grew silent. Throughout the telling of his story he was forever breaking off, or running off the main thread into another subject.

When he continued, he told me of the subterfuge with which he had sneaked the book into the house. It had lain in his drawer at the bank for weeks before the opportunity arose. Then, when the spring was approaching, Alice told him to buy some grass seed and resow the lawn. He consented readily.

"I bought the seed the next day," Fothergill's voice went on, "during the lunch hour. That afternoon in the bank, when everybody else had gone home, I stuffed the book well down into the middle of the seed. And when I reached home, I took the seed bag straight down the back garden into the shed."

"What did your wife say?" I asked bluntly.

"Wipe your feet," he replied, mirthlessly. He paused again. Then, "No, I knew she wouldn't be suspicious. She once led me a dog's life for weeks because I brought some bulbs into the house. Well—I told her I'd bought the seed, and gave her the change, which she counted. That's the way she was, you know."

But he managed to find time to look at his precious book, sneaking down to the shed, ostensibly to tend some potted plants. There were a few "spells" in that book. Some of them were curses, others recipes for healing or changing one's appearance—even flying. But there was one which fascinated Albert Fothergill most of all.

It was headed "IMMORTALITYE."

The spell itself was written in the form of a verse. Fothergill could not remember it completely; which, he said, was fortunate.

"God forbid that I should be responsible for anybody else falling into my predicament," were his actual words.

He told me some of that verse, however, giving me the spelling as far as he could remember it.

Take ye Herte of ain Tode, of ain Beetel  
 ys Wynges.  
 Ain Snaele and ain Slugge, sefon Waspes  
 yeyre Stynges.  
 Ain Ader, ys Skynne, ye Eyne of ain  
 Batte,  
 Ye Clawe of ain Owle, ye Bludde of ain  
 Catte.  
 Boyle yem and Boyle yn ain new iron  
 Potte.  
 Droppe yn ye Bladder when smokyng  
 hotte.

**T**HE "bladder" referred to in the last line was a piece of stretched and dried pig's bladder on which the necromancer—he who was to practice those weird rites—had to trace a design. This design took the form of a border composed of cabalistic symbols, a space being left in the center of the bottom edge. The verse, together with several "magic" words, had to be written in the middle of the parchment.

"It was a long and complicated business," Albert Fothergill said. "The bladder was no good unless it came from a young sow. Best results could be obtained with a male toad, and so on. Everything so that the parchment was dropped in on the instant of high noon. I was lucky in that respect. Or perhaps unlucky."

"Why?"

"Well, I rather expected it to be midnight. These things usually are, you know. But the fact that it said noon meant that I could do it all without Alice's knowledge. You see, Sunday was my only day off, and Alice rarely got up before twelve on Sundays.

"I became obsessed with the idea of immortality. So I began collecting the indicated ingredients. Somehow, without actually thinking about it, I had made up my mind that I was going to become immortal.

"It was a difficult task, and it took me close on to ten months. The snail, the slug and the bat's eyes I had to preserve in little bottles of alcohol. Perhaps it was the alcohol that made the spell go wrong. That 's, if it did go wrong—"

The Voice trailed off again. I waited patiently for a few minutes, thinking he would go on. Eventually I began to think I had been dreaming

it, after all, and that there was no such thing as a Voice that had been Albert Fothergill.

"Tell me," I urged to test the reality of that Voice. "Why did you have to leave a space in the border of the design?"

And Fothergill replied: "That, of all the things I had to do, nearly put me off. I had to write in that space the name of an enemy. I don't know why, even now. But I hesitated, because I had no enemies that I knew of. Finally—" His Voice dwindled into silence.

"Yes, yes!" I pressed. "What did you do?"

"I—wrote—the—name—*Alice*," he replied slowly.

I think I shuddered at that. But I had to keep urging him on, bringing him back to the point where he had left off, to reassure my own senses.

My mind was uneasy.

"I had the bottles and things hidden in the shed in the garden," Albert Fothergill continued, after a pause, "under some old sacks. I could hardly wait for Sunday to come. When the day did arrive, I took Alice her breakfast in bed. Only, I purposely delayed it to make sure that she would stay in bed. She did, more's the pity—"

**I** WAITED for him to go on. "Well, at half-past eleven I took the new iron pot I had bought for Alice—as a surprise—and went down to the shed. There was an old coal stove in there, which I had cleaned out and filled with coal during the week. I dropped in the ingredients in the order in which they came in the verse, wiping off the alcohol on my handkerchief.

"The beetle's wings and the wasp stings were in a matchbox under a sack of leaf-mold. At first I couldn't find it, and nearly upset everything in my panic. And then, finally, the cat's blood. It was in an old milk bottle."

He paused again. "I was always squeamish about such things," he went on. "How I ever managed to kill that cat and drain its blood, I

can't imagine. Even the handling of the snail almost made me sick.

"But at last the revolting mess was in the pot. I set it on the roaring flame of the coal stove, which was working for once. The stuff began to boil at ten to twelve. It was too early, so I banked the flame."

The Voice became more tense. "Believe me, I was in an absolute fever of excitement. I kept darting glances toward the house to see if Alice was up. I could hear the man next door mowing his grass, and I was terrified in case he should see me or hear the stove boiling.

"The smell from the pot was nauseating, overpowering. And all the while the flames were roaring and that lawnmower outside chattering—a fit accompaniment to the working of a spell. Time after time, some streak of caution in me urged me to give the whole business up. But I had to go on. I had gone too far now to halt. It seemed as if I were in the grip of something I could not possibly control.

"Then, at two minutes to twelve," said Albert Fothergill, "I shoveled in more coal, making that stove into a miniature furnace. The horrible red brew frothed and swirled and came rushing up the sides of the pot in little pink, steaming bubbles. Clouds of sickening vapor enveloped my head.

"As if in a dream, I dropped the piece of bladder bearing Alice's name into the bubbling middle. The hellish brew seemed to come flooding up over me then, blacking out everything—

"Well, that's all I remember," the Voice murmured.

Neither of us spoke for some time. The ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece was like a death knell. I was the first to break the silence.

"When you woke up—" I prompted.

"When I woke up," Albert Fothergill continued in a low voice, "I found myself staring into the hub of a huge garden roller. Everything was hazy, and it took me several minutes to realize that the roller was where my body should be. Some sort of mental reflex made me attempt to

push the roller away. It was then I found that I hadn't any hands."

**T**HE Voice shuddered. "No hands, no arms, no body—*nothing!* Oh, my God!"

I was so tense, I could not say a word.

"It all came back to me then," Fothergill went on presently. "The whole thing. All that filthy, bubbling witch-broth in the pot-cauldron. This, then, was the result. And this the price I had to pay! My mind still worked as it had done before. It thought in terms of the old order of things—hands and feet and legs.

"I tried standing up, found that I could move in space by the mere effort of will. Just like you can drive a car without realizing the co-ordination of mind, eye and muscle."

"What had happened to the boiler and all that other stuff?" I found myself asking.

"That was another thing," he replied. "It was all gone. Everything was gone! Not only the experiment, you understand—*everything!* All my tools and plants and things. And that roller wasn't mine. There was a brand-new lawnmower, too—a thing I had never possessed. Only the shed itself was the same."

The Voice paused a moment. "I walked into the garden and found everything altered there, too. And then I realized that I had walked through the solid wall of the shed. Not walked. You know—*passed through.*

"Well, I went into the house. Here again it was all so different. This wasn't my dining room, nor this my hall. The same place, you understand, but different furniture, new decorations. And in the kitchen—well, the pleasant young woman who sang as she baked her cakes certainly was not my wife.

"I forgot myself and spoke to her. I don't recall now what I said. It doesn't matter—anything would have had equally disastrous results. She screamed and dropped a dish full of eggs, and ran hysterically into the garden."

Fothergill spoke unhappily. "I left

her there and looked around the house. The whole place was altered. Only the shape remained. And in one corner of the lounge there was a calendar. You see, I worked that spell on January the ninth. And the date on the calendar was January the tenth. Not only that, but the year was wrong. I had slept for a year and a day—"

That was the main part of Albert Fothergill's story. When I persuaded him to continue, he told me of the despair with which he had gone around, all day, all night—sleep was now impossible and unnecessary—speaking to people he only succeeded in frightening. Strangely enough, he found that scientifically minded intellectuals were the hardest to approach; idiots and drunkards the easiest. And then he discovered me.

"But," I demanded, "what made you tackle *me!* I'm neither idiot nor drunkard—nor, for that matter, an intellectual, with or without scientific mind! I'm just an ordinary human being."

**M**Y PROTEST did not go unanswered. "I've been following you about for weeks," the Voice said simply. "Everywhere you went—even to bed. You crossed my path by accident. I kept you under observation just as I have done with everybody else. In your case I was lucky, thank God. After two whole years of wandering."

The idea of his following me for so long without my being aware of it was extremely uncomfortable, but I made no comment.

We discussed his intangibility then at some length.

"But how on earth," I remember saying, "can you speak without a mouth, without lungs? How can you see without eyes, hear without ears—do any of these things without a brain?"

He sighed, and I could imagine him forlornly shrugging his invisible shoulders. "Heaven alone knows," he replied sadly.

I suggested to him some fourth-dimensional theory along the lines that he might be halfway into a world

of four dimensions. We argued over that for a long time. Until long past midnight, in fact.

The fire had gone out now and I felt chilly. I thought again how fortunate I was that my wife was staying with her sister. I made another fire and brewed a small pot of tea. And all the while we talked. Talked, talked, talked.

And then he told me what he wanted me to do. With a note of irresistible desperation in his voice, he pleaded with me to make some attempt to find his wife. To find, through her, the book.

"But why?" I demanded. "What good can it do you now?"

"The antidote. Another spell to reverse all this. To bring me back to normality. Oh, please, *please* say you'll do it!"

"But how can you work the spell as you are?"

Fothergill had become desperate. "You can do it for me. You can be my savior. Please, *please!* I'll do anything you ask!"

I could not resist the pleading note. I told him I would do it. He made me take a Bible and swear to do anything he asked me, on condition—this was my qualification—that I was not endangered in any way.

The clock struck seven as I swore the oath, my left hand on the book, my right upraised. It was morning. I opened the curtains and let the sun stream in, yawned my excuses and toiled wearily up to the bathroom for a cold shower.

I shall never forget that day. I felt tired and emotionally all in. And Albert Fothergill's voice came with me to my office. He kept murmuring to me close to my ear; whispering. At times he was as excited as a child at the circus—and at such times he spoke too loud.

**W**HEN that happened, my companions looked at me strangely. Worse still, the boss heard. I went out for a smoke, waited until I was alone, and then told Albert Fothergill that it wouldn't do. It wasn't good enough. As it was, I felt I couldn't face the other men.

I stayed out for some time and when I went back I went straight over to the boss, pleading sickness and asking to be allowed to go home. I must have looked pretty low, having had no sleep, for the boss regarded me keenly and told me I could go, muttering something about "go to bed early."

I thanked him, put on my hat and coat, and left. I did not go home, however, but crossed the road to a café and sat in a secluded alcove with a large cup of black coffee.

As soon as the waitress was out of earshot, I took my courage in hand. "Now," I said to Albert Fothergill, speaking very softly.

"I'm here," he replied.

"You *must* speak quietly," I almost hissed. "Or you'll have me arrested. Where is it you want me to go?"

"You mean—"

"I mean, I want to get this business over and done with," I snapped. "A few days of this would drive me crazy!"

He was silent for a few seconds before giving me the address. I wrote it down in my notebook and added particulars regarding him and his wife. We arranged everything before leaving, and I managed to extract a promise from him that he would not speak to me until I spoke first to him.

He lived—or he *had* lived—out in the suburbs. The house, when we reached it, proved to be one of many semi-detached bungalows. I stood at the gate and murmured a reminder of his promise. Then I opened the gate, walked up the garden path and rang the bell.

I felt extremely nervous, and only my vow to help Albert Fothergill prevented me from running away. Waiting there for the door to open was one of the worst experiences of my life.

And then I heard footsteps along the hall, the sliding of the lock. A tall young man, about thirty years of age, opened the door. He stood there, holding it open, his other hand deep in his trousers' pocket, a query in the gray eyes behind the horn-rimmed glasses.

"Er—Mr. Fothergill?" I asked, feeling every inch a hypocrite. "My name is Matthews."

**H**E hesitated, licked his lips.

"Well—I—I— Won't you come in?"

"Thanks. I'm Mrs. Fothergill's cousin, you know," I said as he showed me into the lounge. "Jack Matthews. From Canada."

He was still uncertain. His mouth worked over possible things to say. His wife saved him. She came in, smoothing her shapely hands down a gingham apron she had obviously just put on.

"This is Mrs. Fothergill's cousin, Ethel," the young man explained. "From Canada."

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Ethel, looking at me with genuine concern.

She was very pretty and had wide brown eyes. I felt like a heel, lying to them both like this. But the lie had to be kept up. I had to break this awful silence.

"But aren't you—" I began.

"Well," Ethel replied. "Well—we—you see— Oh, this is awful! You tell him, Frank."

"Well, I'm afraid we've got pretty bad news for you," Frank commenced, biting his lip. He became even more awkward, toying nervously with his glasses.

"I—Mr. Fothergill and his wife don't live here now, you know."

I could only stand and wait for him to continue, avoiding their eyes.

"You see," he went on, "Mr. Fothergill disappeared about three years ago. It was in all the papers," he added lamely.

"Indeed?" I replied. "I didn't see it." This part at least was true.

"Oh, yes. It was really a mystery. The man next door saw a cloud of black smoke hanging around the shed. He jumped over the fence and rushed into the shed, but there was nothing there. Only an old coal stove which smelled as if it had just gone out, and an empty coal scuttle."

"An empty coal scuttle!" I echoed.

"One of those things like a boiler. Apart from that, there was nothing, except for the usual tools and things

and a few odds and ends. Bottles of—well, alcohol, it turned out to be. So Mr. Graham—that's the man next door—Mr. Graham dashed into the house and heard someone screaming upstairs."

I could hear the sound of hoarse breathing close to my ear, and prayed fervently that Albert Fothergill would not say anything now.

"It was Mrs. Fothergill," Frank explained nervously. "She was sitting up in bed, screaming. There were breakfast things all over the place. Of course they called the doctor in."

**A** GAIN he hesitated. "Go on," I urged him. "Tell me."

"Well—you see, they don't know what *is* the matter with her. After she calmed down, she became sort of—well, quiet." He laughed uncomfortably. "Unnaturally quiet. She hasn't spoken a word since."

"You mean she's dumb?" I demanded. "Without speech?"

"Not that exactly. She doesn't do anything but sit and stare. If you speak to her, she doesn't hear you. She doesn't speak at all. She's not blind. If you hold a match before her, she follows it with her eyes. But there's no expression in them. She's somehow—empty."

"Ethel and I have been to see her. We used to live across the road."

He seemed eager to change the subject.

"You see, after the accident, nobody would take the house. And Ethel and I—well, we hadn't much, and we got it cheap. But there's nothing wrong

with the place, believe me. Although Ethel thought she heard something once. I told her—"

"But my cousin!" I exclaimed. "Where is she? I must see her!"

Ethel came and stood before me, taking both my hands in hers.

"I'm sorry for you," she murmured. "You must be brave. She's in a mental home. It's better for her there, you know. And if I were you, I should like to remember her as she was. I shouldn't go to see her."

"But why?" I asked. "She's my own cousin."

Frank joined his wife. "She—" he began. "She's like a woman without a soul," he blurted out.

I heard Albert Fothergill sob. I think the young married couple thought it came from me. They asked me to have some tea, but I declined, acting as grief-stricken as I could. They sympathized and gave me the address of the mental home, and I left that house immediately. . . .

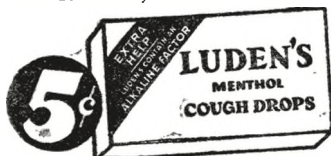
That sob was the last I ever heard of Albert Fothergill. I did not speak until I reached home. And he did not answer me. I addressed him several times then, but with the same result. I think now that he left me when I heard him sob.

But of this I am certain. Somewhere in this world Albert Fothergill roams at large. Perhaps he is in that insane asylum, pleading with his speechless wife. Perhaps he wanders here and there, immortal, lonely, a voice without a body.

At this moment, for all I know, he may be reading these very words I have set down over my shoulder.

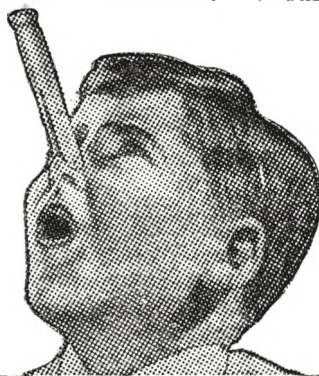
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# The Man Who Knew Everything

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of  
"Dead Man's Trap," "The Purple Head," etc.



*His brain was like a receiving set*

*George Bain Found He Could Read Anybody Else's Mind—but Couldn't Understand His Own*

**H**E SEEMED, over a long period of time, to be thinking that something terrible must have happened to him. Then he remembered the crash—his car and the

other roadster as they burst into light and roaring sound when they smashed into each other. Since then there had been only soundless darkness. But now he could hear a roaring in his head. He knew he was lying somewhere and there was a pressure on his left wrist; something was holding it. After another long interval he tried



opening his eyes. In a moment he was sure he had them open, but there was nothing to see except a blur of light, and shadows that swam before him.

It was strange that he knew so little of everything about him. He decided to wait before trying to move, because the blur of light and shadows seemed to be steadying a little.

Then he heard a soft, soothing voice. "You're quite all right now, Mr. Bain. Just lie quiet."

He knew, after awhile, that the voice was a hospital nurse who was sitting beside him with her fingers on his pulse while he came out from under the anesthetic. And then he remembered that after the accident he had had to have an operation. . . .

The full strangeness of the thing that had happened to him did not come to young George Bain until more than two weeks later. The day he was discharged from the hospital. But he had had warnings of it. From the beginning he had vaguely sensed that something was wrong. It grew on him, so that for the last several days of his convalescence he had been increasingly puzzled over something queer in his head.

His thoughts seemed confused. Once or twice he had almost believed that he was trying to think about two or three things at once. Quite different things, as though he had two or three brains simultaneously working, mixing him up.

That had frightened him. Was something wrong with his mind? It was particularly alarming because the operation he had just had was to relieve—as he vaguely understood—some sort of bone pressure and congestion of the circulation in his brain, a result of the accident.

George Bain was a big, quite handsome fellow, six feet one, blond and athletic. Now, at twenty-six, he was still a bachelor. Fate had bereft him of most of his relatives. He had none, here in New York.

But he had a host of friends and few money worries, because he had inherited a very comfortable fortune from his dead father and mother. It struck him now that it would be a great tragedy if anything went wrong

with his mind, just when he felt that he had everything to live for.

Bain said nothing to his nurse about being frightened. But in reality he was horribly apprehensive. There was something absolutely wrong with his thoughts. He couldn't escape them. When he was alone it was all right; but when he talked to people he seemed instantly to get mentally confused.

Instinctively, he concealed it. And that frightened him more: insane people always tried to hide their abnormality, and he knew that sometimes they showed extreme cleverness in doing so. An abnormal cleverness.

Was he going insane?

He decided, that last day at the hospital, to question his doctor. But he would do it carefully, so that the doctor would suspect nothing.

**B**AIN was fully dressed, in his wheel-chair, ready to leave.

"Good job you did for me, Doctor," he smiled. He stretched his big arms. "I'm really feeling fit as a fiddle, you know."

"You will be, in a week or two more when you get your strength back," the doctor said.

"And tell me, doctor—an operation like that—wasn't it really dangerous?" He tried to laugh lightly. "Now that it's all over, you might as well tell me the truth, eh, Doc? That was pretty ticklish work you did on me, wasn't it?"

The physician chuckled. "It could have been damned dangerous. But in your case, as it turned out, it wasn't."

"The old bean, then, is okay?" Bain said jocularly. "Not a chance that—something might go wrong with me later on?" He held his breath.

"Not a chance," the doctor said.

"*We hope!*"

The two words leaped at Bain, so startling him that he sucked in his breath and his knuckles whitened as he tightened his grip on the wheels of his chair. It was almost as though a third person had spoken. But there was no one else there!

Then he realized that they had been soundless words; that he hadn't heard them in his ears—but in his brain! A sudden knowledge embodied in those

two words had reached his mind by a more direct route than through his ears.

He knew then that he had heard the doctor's *thoughts!*

That was the beginning. Young George Bain was an intelligent fellow. His mind ordinarily was logical, analytical. At first the utter confusion of the weird thing terrified him. It became immediately worse, after that conversation with the doctor, because now that he had recognized it for what it was, he found outside thoughts coming into his head in such profusion that his mind was in utter chaos. It was somewhat like a radio tuned softly to all the stations on the dial at once.

But Bain was too intelligent to let himself get stampeded by his fright. It made him feel almost hysterical, but he fought grimly against it. Alone in his luxurious little apartment in his New York club, with all the alien thoughts shut out, he sat down to ponder his situation.

He understood fairly well now the conditions under which his strange gift was operating. People's thoughts were reaching him with a clarity almost comparable to spoken words heard with the ears. But distance affected this strange telepathy. Several times, in the public rooms of the club when they were comparatively empty, Bain had practiced this new mental power.

And it was a weird, mysterious thing indeed. Beyond ten feet, the thoughts were like a little murmur in his head, and he soon got so he could ignore them. He found, too, that the angle of his head, upright or tilted, or turned a trifle sideward to the source of the incoming thoughts, affected the strength of the reception. That, too, Bain practiced.

Within a week or two he was proficient in handling his gift. The strangeness of it—the confusion in his mind—was very nearly gone now. He could mingle with people, shutting out the thoughts of most of them, tilting his head to get just those he wanted.

How amusing it was to hear the club's headwaiter talking to the manager—obsequious words, with the

waiter's thoughts so profanely contemptuous that the manager would have fired him in ten seconds if he could have known what his employee was thinking about him!

**WHAT** a gift was this which had been bestowed so mysteriously upon George Bain! A wonderful gift, indeed. *The man who knew everything!*

Bain's terror had long since passed now. There was within him only triumph. He felt exalted. Omnipotent. A mortal apart from all others. Superior, with a gift that would give him a power to accomplish heaven knew what.

Mingled with Bain's triumph there was only one little blighting thought. His physician had said that his mind was in no danger of becoming unbalanced, after the accident and the successful operation.

But the doctor's thoughts had added: "*We hope!*"

Memory of that disturbed Bain a little. Was this the preface to insanity? He flung away the idea. Certainly his mind had never worked more clearly than now. There was nothing in this telepathic ability of his that had anything to do with insanity.

But how, actually, was the weird thing working? He went, finally, to a professional expert on mind-reading.

"Tell me how a person goes about reading another person's thoughts," he demanded.

"It is the power of personality," the Swami said smoothly. "A gift which we of the Orient have developed. The strong mind that absorbs from the weak."

The impressively garbed Hindu talked of things occult in big words for a long time.

"You understand me?" he finished.

"Er—yes, I guess I do," Bain declared.

"*The hell you do,*" the Swami thought. "*If I don't, how could you?*"

After that, Bain went to a scientist.

"The secret of telepathy was really discovered by Sir William Crooks many years ago," the scientist explained, "at about the time he was perfecting the fluorescence—the bom-

bardment of electrons—in what we now call the Crook's tube.

"It was just about then, as I recall, when Crooks announced to the world of science that thoughts are actually vibrations. Infinitely tiny—infinately rapid—but nevertheless tangible vibrations somewhat akin to light and sound, the radio, the X-ray."

"And all you would need is a receiving station," George Bain said.

"Exactly, Mr. Bain. There is much talk of people who love each other—or who know each other very well—being naturally telepathic. That is a coincidence of thought, not a transference. They think alike, so they have a chance of guessing correctly what the other might be thinking.

"The real facts are in line with Sir William Crooks' discovery—that thoughts are vibrations. If we could receive them—which we cannot—"

"Maybe, some day, somebody will come along whose head is just naturally a receiving station for those vibrations," Bain said gravely.

"Maybe," the scientist agreed. "It's an old platitude, that everything is possible."

"Is this fellow a nut?" the scientist thought. "Why does he tilt his head at me like that?"

**B**AIN said little more, and presently he departed. More than ever now he was pleased with his heaven-sent gift. And he realized that it was time he was putting it to some good use. Why not make a huge fortune? That would be easy. He had, so far during his experiments, kept away from all his friends and acquaintances.

But he knew casually several financiers. Multi-millionaires. The big boys. He'd play the market. Why not? That was simple and quick. A tip from any captain of industry would do the trick. Not the kind of tip you got by asking for it. Oh, no. With this heaven-sent gift of his, he could probe a lot deeper than that!

"I'm thinking of taking a little flyer," he said confidentially to J. Wellington Reeves, multi-millionaire speculator. "Just a few thousand, you know. What should I buy?"

"Well, let's see, Bain." The big speculator pondered impressively. Then he began explaining pompously about European crises, governmental handicaps upon business, the stalemate in the Far East, and yet the general optimism that he said pervaded the whole American buying public.

"You see, really, everybody believes that Hitler's licked and he knows it," the big speculator explained.

"So the market in general is due for a rise?" young Bain said.

"Well, yes—and no," the big man elucidated. "You see, a war would boom American business. But I don't think there'll be a war. However, for a real quick killing, buy American Buttons, common." He winked. "I've a reason. You can't lose."

But he was thinking: "*I hope I'm right!*"

"Thanks," Bain said.

So he didn't buy American Buttons.

"It's easy!" another of the big men exclaimed. "Glad you came to me, Bain. We have a little pool—isn't known, of course. Won't go into the details. But I don't mind telling you that Consolidated Bread Twist is going sky-high in another week. Just a new concern—just a curb stock yet. Now a few hundred thousand shares at a cent a share—"

And the big speculator was thinking: "*Jones, Dugan & Co., with what they've got in it, will certainly jump Bread Twist to ten cents.*"

Bain bought eight thousand dollars worth of Bread Twist. But his heaven-sent gift of mind-reading ran into a snag. There is no human being independent of all others in this world. Bain knew what the speculator knew—but that didn't include what Jones, Dugan & Co. subsequently did.

Bread Twist went to ten cents, all right, but Jones, Dugan & Co. and most of the others in the little pool dumped their holdings at ten cents so fast that Bread Twist was down to a quarter of a cent before Bain could make up his mind to sell. He lost some six thousand dollars, plus commissions.

Queer, it wasn't so easy to get fabulously rich by reading other people's minds as he had thought! What an

intricate world this was! George Bain went back to his club that night and brooded over it. He was alone now more than he used to be. Little things had happened that were—well, unpleasant. . . .

*The man who knew everything!*

There was that night at the club when George Bain had given a dinner to ten of his friends. It was a little enlightening, not to say disillusioning, when Will Green stood up to propose a toast to him. The glasses had clinked, then they had all lustily sung: "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow!"

*"Good and rich."*

*"Flatter him an' he'll throw a party every night."*

*"Wonder if I could get him drunk an' borrow fifty."*

These words—and others that made him shudder—were popping from different heads to Bain's. And these were his best friends! For the rest of that evening he tilted his head alertly, and he learned many things. . . .

**H**E was getting a bit lonely now. What the devil, he certainly wasn't cut out to be a sucker; and one by one his so-called friends had revealed themselves in a fashion horribly disillusioning. And other things happened, too.

Bain had always thought himself a handsome fellow. It was annoying to hear girls *thinking* of him as a collar ad. He had thought himself decently intelligent; but several of his friends didn't think so. And three girls were trying to marry him for his money, despite their apparently low opinion of him.

Bain's self-respect began to weaken. He found himself now walking with a furtive air. As though he were a criminal, he seemed afraid to look people in the face. Then the club manager one night thought some unpleasant things.

So Bain moved to another club. That was a relief—getting away from those people who knew him, whom he had believed were his friends; getting away from those damned waiters who were polite only so that he would tip them bigger.

What a vast difference it made when you knew what the other fellow was really thinking! The whole world was a pretense! Humanity a fraud! For hours at a time now Bain would be lost in hopeless brooding. Was no one on the level?

Everybody he touched seemed suddenly to be a cheat and a liar. Or was he becoming super-sensitive? Yes, that was it. Peter Franklin's thoughts yesterday about Bain's looking like Hamlet, the Melancholy Dane—that wasn't exactly insulting.

Normally, if that had been said to him, Bain would just have laughed and retorted with a snappy wisecrack. Franklin just meant it as a joke. Bain was too touchy now. Damn this telepathy, anyway! Nothing was worse than utter disillusion. . . .

Alone in his bedroom, Bain sat up abruptly, startled. Damn this telepathy? Why, that was absurd! It was his great gift. It was the thing which made him so superior to other people. He was *the man who knew everything*. . . .

Then Anita came back from visiting her aunt in San Francisco. Bain had always been sure that some day he would propose to little Anita. He had known her for years. She was only just eighteen now. He would propose this year, and she would accept him. He had always felt sure of that. But would she?

Somehow he couldn't feel so sure of it now. Whatever of conceit, or self-assurance George Bain had had, was oozing away from him. People's opinion of him was very different from what all his life he had believed. Or if Anita did say she loved him, would her thoughts belie it?

He cursed himself for being so suspicious. Surely Anita James wasn't just a grafting little gold-digger like those others.

He took her out to dinner, the evening of the day she arrived.

"Why, George, how you've changed! You're not ill, are you?"

"No," he said. "No—I'm all right."

The lights of the restaurant terrace were soft. Beyond a little balcony the moon was shining on the city rooftops. Anita James was small, slim

and dark, and exceedingly pretty. She had always seemed ready to fall in love with him. And Bain was so lonely now—so depressed and really miserable—that his heart was pounding with the sudden realization that he loved her very much.

"Anita—"

"Yes, George—"

**R**ESOLUTELY he held his neck stiff. Somehow he was afraid to tilt it to the angle that would bring her thoughts to him.

"Anita—I was thinking—I was afraid you were thinking, and I didn't want to listen in—"

"My Lord—he's crazy as a bedbug, just like they said!"

He hadn't wanted it, but despite his efforts he had caught her thoughts!

"Anita—" He sat stiff, stricken of ability to say anything.

"George, what's the matter with you?" she demanded. "You talk so queer. You—you frighten me."

"Matter with me? Why—why nothing—"

"Dear God, is he crazy? That horrible operation— Oh, George!"

He caught the thoughts. With a rush of anguish to spare himself this last disillusionment which now he knew would be all-important to him, he had tried to blank out his mind. But they came again, those thoughts.

"Oh, George—my darling—and I love you so—"

She loved him! With a little gasp of fear she was staring at him, clutching his hand. His own gasp mingled with hers.

"Anita! Pay the check, will you? I—I'll go get our car. Meet you downstairs."

"George—wait a minute."

And her thoughts said: "*His mind is wrong since his operation. How can I dare trust myself—*"

"My mind isn't wrong!" he gasped. "Don't you say that! I'm *not* crazy—not a bit of it!"

"George! My God!"

"I can't tell you now," he pleaded. "There's something weird has happened to me. I'll tell you in the car—"

He was aware that people at the nearby tables were staring at them.

With his head cocked to shut away everybody's thoughts, he dropped a bill on the table, told Anita to pay the check and meet him downstairs. Then wildly he dashed from her.

He was glad of the darkness of the car. As he resolutely faced front, with Anita beside him, he did not get her thoughts. Just her murmured words.

"George—you feel better now?"

"Yes. Oh, I'm all right. Damn it, I tell you I'm all right!" He laughed sardonically. "Wait till we get out into the country, away from traffic. I've got enough to distract me, heaven knows."

"You—you be careful to drive slowly, George."

Then at last they were in the pale moonlight, with trees about them and a lonely road stretching ahead.

"Don't you want to tell me now?" she murmured. "What is it? You're so different—like a different person."

"And not so nice?" he demanded caustically. "That's what they all think."

Anita James was a forthright girl. "Well, yes—not so nice," she admitted.

"You—you won't believe this that I'm going to tell you," he began unsteadily. "But it's easy to prove I'm telling the truth. After the operation, Anita, I found that I had a great gift."

That was funny, his calling it a "gift" still, after what it had done to him.

"After the operation—" she prompted tremulously.

"Yes," he nodded. "Mysterious thing, can't understand it, but I've got it. It's a question of vibrations of thought, Anita. Perfectly rational, perfectly scientific, except that how my brain came to be a receiving station of thought-vibrations, I'm damned if I can tell."

"George—what are you talking about!"

**H**E steadied himself. As soon as she knew why he acted so queerly, everything would be all right between them. He drew a long breath and with a rush he told her.

For a moment she stared at him with blank incredulity.

"You—you can read my thoughts, George?"

"Yes, sure I can." He turned his head, and cocked it over a little.

"*This is what they call delusions,*" she was thinking. "*A doctor would know the technical name. I must be careful to humor him.*"

"You don't have to humor me at all," he said calmly. "Don't speak. Just think questions. I'll answer you."

She couldn't help being convinced when he showed her how simple it was. Everything was all right now.

And suddenly he had stopped the car and reached out his arms to her.

"Anita, I want to marry you!"

"You—*what?*" She was looking at him as though he were something less than human.

"You don't have to tell me you love me," he murmured. "I heard you thinking it a while ago. You don't have to tell me anything you're thinking about me. I know it all. We'll be married right away—"

But Anita was pushing him from her. The moonlight through the windshield reflected on her face, glinted in her eyes which he saw now were staring at him with horror.

"George—let me go! Don't you dare touch me!"

"What's the matter? You know I'm not crazy now. We'll be married—"

"*Married!*" Then she was laughing wildly, hysterically. "You want me to be frank with you?" she demanded. "Why wouldn't I be—you could read my thoughts anyway if I tried to lie. Marry you?"

She tried to hold her hysteria in check. "That's—why that's impossible, George. Marry you and have you know everything that ever was in my mind? My God, there's nobody who could stand that! We'd hate each other in a week."

"Anita!" His voice was vibrant with anguish.

"It's true. There's nobody in the whole world who's so perfect that they could have all their innermost thoughts paraded in front of somebody else. Why, George, there isn't any man or woman on earth who'll associate with you, once they find it out! It's—it's against nature."

Against nature! How bitterly he had come to know that!

"And you, George," she was murmuring, "you, poor dear—yes, yes I did love you—"

She had been sitting away from him as though revolted, but now her hand went out and touched his arm. "Oh, George, how *terrible* it must be for you! Oh, can't something be done about it? Another operation—"

He had started the car. Had he gone mad? Everything she said was true. He knew it. A wild desperation was on him.

He felt his foot pressing the accelerator down to the floorboard. And in his anguish he cried out.

"God, you're right, Anita! It's a curse, and I—I thought at first it was such a wonderful gift. It's wrecked my life! Oh God, it's wrecked my life!"

He was only vaguely aware that the car was going fast. He hadn't intended any recklessness; bringing danger to Anita was the last thing he intended. It was merely that he felt savage, indignant, outraged; and he was translating his bitter frustration into action subconsciously by jamming his foot on the accelerator.

**T**HE car leaped crazily forward on the lonely dirt road.

"George! Be careful! *Stop!*"

He was trying to get the rear wheel out of the shallow ditch. But the car skidded. He heard Anita scream as it went off the road. And ironically her thoughts came to him.

"*Just a madman—trying to kill—*"

The crash as they struck the tree blotted out her words and the cursed thoughts. Bain knew that the car was rolling over, sliding on its side. Then his head crashed against the interior of the car door and everything went out in a burst of light.

There was empty soundless darkness then, out of which he felt himself emerging after a while. He opened his eyes.

"You're all right? Speak to me; George!"

It was Anita's apprehensive voice; and he could see now that she was beside him in an old-fashioned room.

"What happened, Anita?" Then he remembered. "You didn't get hurt?"

"No, not much," she said. "The car turned over—I fell on you. And you struck your head. I've been so frightened—"

Dizzily he was sitting up. He found he was on a couch in a farmhouse parlor. The farmer and his wife were there, concerned and helpful.

"The ambulance ought to be here pretty soon," the farmer said. "Only eight miles over from Summerville, an' I phoned twenty minutes ago."

"We won't need any ambulance," Bain said. "I'm all right."

There was a bump and a cut on his head, but it seemed only a scalp wound. And then he remembered—

"Anita," George Bain murmured. "Think hard—and pray. Pray for us!"

He tilted his head to get her thoughts, with his heart pounding and his breath stopped. But he

"heard" nothing. His eyes brightened.

"Again, Anita. Come a little closer. Now, think hard—"

Still, no matter how he turned his head, nothing registered.

"It's gone!" Bain cried triumphantly. "I didn't hear you think anything. My accursed affliction's gone! I'm not *the man who knows everything* any more! I'm just a regular mortal. Anita, what were you thinking? I couldn't hear anything at all."

"I was thinking that I—I love you," she stammered, blushing furiously.

Thank God he could take her word for it! He flung his arms around her, drawing her to him, and his eyes were wet.

"Harumph!" The farmer cleared his throat noisily. "Martha, don't we have to get something to eat for these young folks?"

Quietly the man and his wife stole from the room.



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*A Woman's Personality Is  
Altered by Strange Forces  
Far Beyond the Ken of  
Mere Mortals!*

*A strange, brooding atmosphere flooded her brain*

# Vengeance by Proxy

By JOHN BEYNON

*Author of "Sleepers of Mars," "The Secret People," etc.*

**A**S FAR as Dr. Linton was concerned it began with the arrival of the messenger boy.

*Telegram from Walter Fisson, Hotel Princip, Beograd (Belgrade), Yugo-Slavia, to Dr. Leslie Linton, 84 Nelson Court, London, W. I.:*

**CAN YOU RECOMMEND MENTAL SPECIALIST BELGRADE LETTER FOLLOWS WALTER**

*Telegram from Dr. Leslie Linton, London, to Walter Fisson, Beograd:*  
**IF ESSENTIAL DOCTOR BLJED-OLJE BUT WHY NOT COME HOME LESLIE**



*Letter from Walter Fisson to Dr. Linton, by Air Mail:*

Hotel Princip  
Beograd,  
Yugo-Slavia.  
3rd May, 193—.

Dear Leslie:

Sorry if I alarmed you with the telegram, but something had to be done quickly. It's about Elaine. Shock, I think. I wanted to get her back home at once, of course, and booked seats on a plane, but she refused and still refuses to leave here. I can't understand it at all and am worried to death about her. The only thing seemed to be to get a professional opinion at once.

She's—well, I hardly know how to put it—but she's not herself. I don't mean that in the usual sense of the phrase. It's something much more literal than that. Heaven knows what's happened to her, poor darling, but it frightens me. And I'm cut off from her, too. I can't even talk to her properly and try to understand what the trouble is, nor she to me beyond a few essentials. She can grasp only the simplest sentences, spoken slowly and carefully, and she herself replies only with a few words in broken English.

Leslie, it doesn't seem possible. I have heard of rare cases of loss of memory making one forget his own language. But this is worse than that—it's taught her another! Honestly, there have been times in the last few days when I have wondered whether she was not all right and I was going mad. I'd better tell you the whole thing and see what you make of it.

**I**T WAS last Tuesday that it happened. We'd come from Venice via Trieste and Fiume right down the Dalmatian coast to Dubrovnik. Instead of continuing along the coast into Greece, we decided to go up through the mountains to Serajevo, on to Belgrade and on along the Danube towards Bucharest, giving Greece a miss altogether.

The journey wasn't too bad, except for the roads, and we got along finely until just when we were some ten

miles short of a place called Valejo, about sixty miles from Belgrade itself.

We came round a blind corner. We weren't going fast, but the road was loose-surfaced and steep, and to make it worse there had been a light shower just before. Just round that corner was a man crawling on all fours almost in the middle of the road. I braked and pulled across.

I think I'd have cleared him on a decent road, but as it was the back of the car swung round and hit him. Why we didn't turn over on a slope like that I don't know, but we didn't, and I was just pulling out of the skid when the front offside wheel fetched up smack on a mighty boulder.

We got out and ran back to the man. He was lying sprawled out now, on his face. Between us we turned him over and found he was in a nasty mess, poor chap.

His clothes were rough and covered with mud, but he was clearly a cut above the usual peasant, and his face, what we could see of it for his beard, was intelligent, but those were things we only noticed afterwards. What we saw first was a gash on his forehead from which the blood had run down into his eyes, and another patch of blood which had spread about the front of his shirt and coat.

None of that was our fault. The blood from his head had already dried and caked, and that on his clothing had soaked in for some time.

Elaine ran to the car and came back with a flask and a bottle of water. While she bathed his head with a wet handkerchief I started loosening his clothes. Suddenly she gave an exclamation which made me look up. She was staring down at his forehead.

The wiping away of the blood had revealed no ragged gash, but a shallow cut which had now ceased to bleed. The thing was neat and clean. It reminded me of a Greek lambda more than anything. No one could have had a moment's doubt that it had been done deliberately.

"That's queer," Elaine said uncertainly.

It was. I guessed what was in her mind. The vendetta still exists in

those parts. Almost instinctively I raised my head to see if there were anyone around watching us. I hadn't any wish to get involved in a business of that sort, but at the same time we weren't going to let a man die before our eyes if I could help it.

I ripped open the man's shirt.

**WE WIPED** off the mess, and found the blood still welling slowly from a bullet wound in the chest, one which had missed the heart by a narrow margin, I'd say.

Elaine fetched a shirt of mine out of the car and we tore it up to make a bandage. When we'd got it fixed we gave the man a shot of brandy.

It was a minute or more before anything happened, then his eyes opened slowly. At first they seemed blank and almost unconscious, but after a second or two they met mine and came suddenly alive.

That was a most extraordinary sensation. I felt somehow as if they had fastened on mine. Almost as though our mutual gazes formed physical rods linking us together. More than that, it seemed that the rods were being tugged, pulling me down to him.

That sounds fanciful, but it was really a most uncanny sensation though it lasted only a few moments. It snapped abruptly, as his face contorted with a twist of agony and his eyes closed again.

Between us we got him to the side of the road and laid him on a rug. Then there was the problem of what to do next. The car was out of commission with the steering rod gone and the front axle badly bent. Either we had to wait until someone should come along, or one of us would have to go for help.

The last hamlet was miles away behind us, and hopeless at that. The obvious course was for me to start walking on in the direction of Valejo. I didn't relish the idea of leaving Elaine in a lonely spot like that, but we could scarcely leave the man unattended in the state he was, and that settled it.

I had to walk all the ten miles into Valejo before I could find a car. I

managed to hire a machine and, with the help of my bad German and the equally bad German of a native, make the driver understand what was wanted. By a series of miracles we got to the place where I had left Elaine.

I could see her as we came up the road. The man still lay where we had put him. She was kneeling beside him, looking down. It was odd that she didn't look up as we rattled into view. As soon as we stopped I got out and hurried across to her. She might have been a statue.

"Elaine!" I said.

The man on the rug turned his head. For a moment his eyes met mine. This time there was something desperate and pathetic in them. Then they closed, his head rolled and his mouth fell open. Unmistakably that was the end.

"Elaine!" I repeated.

She did not move until I touched her shoulder. Then it was to look up at me with a bewildered, uncomprehending expression. I took hold of her arm and helped her to her feet.

"He's dead," I said.

**SHE** nodded, but said nothing. I led her to the hired car and then set about fetching our cases from our own. Finally when they were all aboard, I explained to the driver by signs that we must take the dead man as well. He wasn't pleased. I could understand that, but one couldn't leave the poor chap's body out on the road like that, and he reluctantly agreed.

We went over together to carry him, but a couple of yards short of the corpse the driver stopped dead. I walked on, got ready to take the man under the armpits and looked to him to take the feet. He was standing frozen, with an expression of veritable terror on his face. As I bent down he called suddenly.

"*Ne,*" and again. "*Ne, ne.*"

Rapidly, he crossed himself in the manner of the Greek church. Then he stepped forward, caught my arm and dragged me back. He was jabbering excitedly. Of course I couldn't understand a word of it. But he was

pointing vehemently at the mark on the dead man's forehead and he was as genuinely scared stiff as a man could be.

Nothing I could do would bring him to touch that corpse, and I believe he would have fought me rather than let me handle it. There was no budging him. In the end I gave in, and we set off in his car back to Velejo. It was my determination that our first call there would be on the police to clear things up. I had no wish to find myself accused of the murder of an unknown Yugoslavian.

All the way Elaine said nothing. Mostly she sat staring ahead, though once I caught her glancing side-long at me in an odd manner, and twice I saw her look down at her hand, flexing the fingers and examining it as if it somehow surprised her. I asked her what was the matter for she was somehow unlike herself and made me feel uneasy, but she shook her head without replying.

At the police station my driver held forth to the man in charge with what appeared to be a wealth of passionate detail while I stood by unable to understand a word. There were successions of concern, incredulity and alarm on the policeman's face.

Eventually he went to fetch another man in uniform to whom I was able to give my version in stumbling German. Not until the man was asking me the name of the dead man did Elaine take any part in the conversation.

"Kristor Vlanec," she said suddenly.

The man turned and asked in German how she knew. Then the thing happened which took my breath away. She answered him fluently in Serbo-Croat.

My astonishment must have been ludicrous to anyone who saw it. I stared at her, open-mouthed and speechless.

Leslie, I swear by anything you like that that very morning Elaine had not known three words of Serbo-Croat, and now she was talking it like a native.

That must have puzzled the police as well. They asked for our pass-

ports. While they looked at them I demanded of Elaine what it meant—why she hadn't told me she knew the language.

She looked at me as if trying hard to follow my words and when she answered it was with such a thick foreign accent that I could scarcely understand what she said.

What it amounted to was for me not to make a fuss in front of the police, and that she would explain later.

Of course, she hasn't explained. She hasn't even attempted to. Anyway, how can you explain a thing like that?

When we'd finished with police, I gave instructions for the car to be towed in and repaired, and we came on here by train. That was two days ago, and I'm more bewildered now than I was then.

I can scarcely talk to her. She deliberately restricts all our conversation to necessities. But she talks to other people, jabbering away to them in this Serbo-Croat as if she had known it all her life.

**A**NOTHER thing, Leslie, Elaine's changed in herself. Little characteristic habits she had are gone. And the way she dresses and holds herself is different. I can't describe just how, but it is. She's not Elaine any longer in the things that matter. It's like being with a stranger.

I can understand the shock of seeing that man die, but this language business gets me. I just don't know what to make of it. Of course, I wanted to bring her back to London at once, but she refused to move. There was no argument, just a flat refusal.

By the time you get this I shall have had your answer to my telegram, and shall, I hope, have got some medical opinion—if she will consent to visit the doctor.

As it is, I'm half-crazy with worry over her, but, worse than that, Leslie, I'm scared. This is queer. Nothing out of the text books. It's uncanny.

I'll let you know any developments as soon as I can.

Yours ever, Walter.

*Memo from Captain of Police, Valejo to Chief of Police, Beograd. (Translation).*

English tourists, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Fisson, today reported finding man, Kristor Vlanec, shot ten miles out on Serajevo road. Inquiries and circumstances confirm their statements as made to us. Nevertheless there is something unusual about the woman, who speaks Serbo-Croat fluently. They left here for Hotel Princip, Beograd. Suggest inquiries at the British Consulate.

*Memo from Chief of Police, Beograd, to Captain of Police, Valejo. (Translation).*

Consulate vouches for Mr. and Mrs. Fisson. All in order. We have no information regarding Kristor Vlanec.

*Letter from Dr. Leslie Linton, London, to Dr. Frederic Wilcox, Poste Restante, Budapest, Hungary.*

Dear Fred:

Sorry to butt in on your holiday like this, but look upon the enclosed copy of a letter from Walter Fisson. Is he cracked, or is Elaine? How could a sane person make that mistake about languages? What can it be but a mistake?

I wondered if you, being fairly handy to the place, could drop in and see them. You meant to go on towards Belgrade anyway, didn't you? And if either of them has been to see Dr. Bljedolje there, can you get a word with him? I expect Walter used my name as an introduction.

I hope you won't curse too steadily at having this wished upon you, but you must admit that it looks as if one of them needed a bit of investigation. One doesn't like to see friends of one's youth headed straight for the nut-house.

Yours fraternally,  
Leslie.

*Memo from Captain of Police, Valejo to Chief of Police Beograd.*

Understand that there was a feud

between deceased Kristor Vlanec and Beograd man called Petro Zanja.

*Memo from Chief of Police, Beograd, to Captain of Police, Valejo.*

Petro Zanja and brother, Mikla Zanja, found shot here. Investigation proceeding.

*Letter from Dr. Frederic Wilcox, Hotel Princip, Beograd, to Dr. Leslie Linton, London.*

Dear Leslie:

Lord knows what you've let me in for, blast you. Everybody in this business seems to be pretty rocky except me—and I'm beginning to wonder if I've been hearing right.

To begin with, you didn't put us out. Mary wanted to come here anyway.

It was quite clear from the start that the hotel people think there's something odd about the Fissons from the look which the man at the desk gave us when I asked about them. And right away I want you to know that all that Walter said in his letter is, as far as I can tell, absolutely true.

Elaine is as fluent as a native in this local lingo; and to all appearances she knows only a few words of English, of which her pronunciation is execrable. Walter is worried to death. He looks as if he'd put on years in a few days. He's scared, too. I may be wrong, Leslie, but I distinctly got the impression that whatever may have been his state when he wrote that letter, he is now not so much scared for her as scared of her.

**E**LAINÉ did not recognize me or Mary, but Mary did her best to have a kind of "all girls together" with her in spite of that and the language difficulty. She thought that out of one of those showing-one-another-clothes affairs it might be possible to get something.

Walter was about as much help as an oyster. He seemed annoyed that I'd read your copy of his letter, and he just wouldn't talk much about it. I did discover, however, that he'd

been to see that doctor about it, but he hadn't been able to get Elaine to go. However, I thought it worth while to go around to see what the doctor had made of him. What an interview!

Doctor Bljedolje may have earned all the letters he has after his name, but if you ask me he's as crazy as a coot. The man's medieval. What do you think he lectured me on? Transferred personality!

Of course I thought he was getting at divided personality, Jekyll and Hyde stuff at first, but not he. That, it appears is elementary, kid stuff, to him. He seems seriously to believe that there are personalities of such hypnotic and dominating power that they can in certain circumstances project themselves into other minds—can actually drive out the former occupant of a body, so to speak.

According to him, this man who was shot, Kristor Vlanec, must have had such a personality. It is, Bljedolje says, the nearest thing to immortality. That personality may have inhabited a dozen or more bodies before that of Vlanec. The points he makes about this case in particular are these. (He had, by the way, got much more out of Walter than there was in the letter.)

Firstly, Elaine is not just suffering from loss of memory or obsessions. She had become a different person with different mannerisms and different language. That many of her mannerisms were now masculine.

That I can confirm from my own observation. Elaine has a kind of uncertainty of movement and gesture which can easily be interpreted as a conflict of conscious intentions with unconscious physical habits. It is rather as though she has to watch and study herself the whole time—akin perhaps to the very active self-regulation of a tight-rope walker.

Secondly, Bljedolje figures Vlanec was evidently a man of disturbing and unusual personality. As evidence of this he points to the cut made on the man's forehead by his assailants, and the car driver's fear when he saw it. It was undoubtedly, he says a sign formerly much used in these parts

to ward off the evil eye and discourage witchcraft in general. Something in Vlanec's nature must have caused the attackers to put it there. Otherwise, its presence is senseless.

Thirdly, he is of the opinion that Vlanec first attempted to transfer his personality to Walter himself—you remember Walter's own description of the strange, hypnotic effect—but that was interrupted by his own physical pain.

Later on, still according to Bljedolje, the man must have rallied again and have succeeded in forcing his spirit from his dying body into the only person on hand, Elaine.

**F**OURTHLY, he makes some play with this. You recall that Walter says that as he came back he spoke to Elaine and that she took no notice, but the dying man did. Well, Bljedolje maintains that, though it was Vlanec's body which lay by the road, it was Elaine who actually died at that moment. Vlanec is alive, in Elaine's form!

Now what do you make of that? From a man, mind you, with high degrees from Vienna, Berlin and New York. He must have seen pretty clearly how I felt about it, but he didn't take offence.

"All right," he said with a smile. "Then you try a little test. Sometime when she is at ease, quite unsuspecting, you understand, address her suddenly as 'Kristor' and watch her very carefully, my friend."

Leslie, I did that later on. And she responded to the name! It was several seconds before she recovered herself.

Look here, this must be all rot, mustn't it? But, rot or not, I can't see what there is to be done about it.

We have decided to hang on here a few days on the chance that we may be of some use. I don't at all like the way Walter's got the wind up. It looks as though there's something more he's afraid of and has held back from you and from Bljedolje.

I'll let you know the moment there's anything more to tell.

Yours in a baffled condition,

Fred.

P.S. I think Mary is arriving at something like the same conclusion on her own. She keeps saying in a puzzled kind of way that Elaine doesn't seem to know how to wear clothes any longer and that she looks to her like a man dressed up.

*Report Chief of Detective Bureau, Beograd to Chief of Police, Beograd (Translation).*

Marthe Kanjiki was taken to lounge of Hotel Princip as suggested, and there identified the English tourist, Mrs. Fisson, as the woman she saw leaving the Zanzas' house at the approximate time of the murder of Petro and Mikla Zanja. Identification was positive.

*Telephone conversation between Dr. Frederic Wilcox, Hotel Princip, Beograd and Dr. Leslie Linton, 84, Nelson Court, London, W.1.*

"**H**ULLO, Leslie? This is Fred speaking from Beograd—Belgrade, to you. You got my letter?"

"Yes. What's happened now?"

"The police arrested Elaine, right here in the hotel."

"What on earth for?" demanded Linton.

"Well, it seems that some chaps called Zanja whom the police suspected of bumping off this Kristor Vlanec were bumped off themselves two or three days later, and the police prove Elaine did the shooting."

"But why in God's name should she?"

"She wouldn't, of course. It's absurd unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless Dr. Bljedolje was right."

"Good God, Fred, you don't really believe that transferred personality stuff? Vlanec taking his revenge on them in Elaine's body. You must be crazy."

"It—well—oh, damn it, then I am crazy! Why else should Elaine—I

mean, they don't arrest foreign tourists on a charge like that without good evidence."

"You mean you think she did do it?"

"Well, physically, yes. What's more I think Walter knew. That's why he was so windy."

"Where's he now?"

"Vanished. Cleared out."

"And left Elaine—like that?"

"He—well, old boy, I don't think he is Walter any longer."

"What the devil are you talking about?"

"Well, I was in the lounge when they brought Elaine down. The moment she saw me and Mary she tore herself free from the police and ran across to us. And she spoke in English as good as yours or mine. She said: 'Fred, for God's sake get me out of this. Get Dr. Bljedolje, he'll understand'. That's all she could manage before they came up and took her away."

"Did you manage to get hold of Bljedolje?"

"Yes. That's why I called you. He thinks Vlanec's done it again, and got away with it."

"Meaning just what?"

"To put it simply: just as Vlanec, when his own body was in trouble, forced Elaine's spirit to change places with his; so, now that he's got Elaine's body into trouble he's forced another transference and taken over Walter's body. In fact, that if we do find what appears to be Walter, it will actually be an individual who talks Serbo-Croat and knows only a few words of English."

"And the consciousness now in Elaine's body—"

"Is Walter's."

"Good Lord! There must be something about those parts that sends you all crazy, if that's what you think."

"Well, what the hell else is there to think? They're executing Elaine in the morning."

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**13 GRIPPING STORIES EVERY ISSUE**

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# Me and My Shadow

By ERIC  
FRANK RUSSELL

*Author of "Seeker of Tomorrow," etc.*

**L**ITTLE TRIMBLE lowered a shaking spoon, blinked his weak, apologetic eyes.

"Now, now, Martha! Don't be like that!" he quavered.

Resting a beefy arm athwart her end of the breakfast table, Martha spoke slowly and viciously. Her voice was harsh with emotion, her features red with wrath, her expression venomous.

"For fifteen years I've lectured you, instructed you, commanded you. For seven hundred and eighty weeks of seven days each I've tried to do my duty as a wife by knocking some spark of manhood into your miserable body." She slammed a huge, horny hand upon the table, made the milk jump in its jug. "And what've I got?"

"Aw, Martha!"

"What I've got," she bellowed, "is exactly what I had right at the start—a crawling, quivering, undersized, cowardly, spineless and gutless little worm!"

"I ain't as bad as that," he protested feebly.

"Prove it!" she shouted. "Prove it! Go and do what you haven't found the nerve to do in fifteen shivering years.



*A huge shape emerged from the vial*

*The Shade of Trimble, Though it is Only a Fair  
Weather Friend, Proves to be a Friend Indeed!*

Go and tell that boss of yours you've got to have a raise."

"Tell him?" Trimble blinked at her, aghast. "You mean ask him?"

"I said to tell him." Her voice was biting sarcasm, and still loud.

"He'll fire me."

"Of course, you would think of that!" Down came the hand again. The milk went over the top with fixed bayonets, flopped, made a spatter in No Man's Land. "Let him fire you. It'll be your chance. Tell him you've waited for it fifteen years, then hand him a poke in the gizzard. Find another job."

"What if there ain't another job?" he asked, almost tearfully.

"There're plenty. Dozens of them." She stood up, her mighty bulk still awing him despite years of familiarity. "Unfortunately, they're for men!"

He flinched, reached for his hat.

"I'll see," he murmured.

"You'll see! You were going to see a year back. And the year before that."

Her voice followed him out the front door and a hundred yards down the street. "And the year before that, and the one before that. Pfah!"

**H**E MIRRORED himself in a window farther down. There he was, well under average height, paunchy, flabby, insignificant. Guess everybody was pretty well right about him. Just a fat little slob.

A downtown bus came along. He reached the door, got boosted in by a brawny hustler behind. The hustler rough-housed past him while he stood dumbly tendering the driver a quarter.

Trimble didn't say anything when a hard, heavy elbow dented the flabbiness over his ribs. He was used to it.

The driver slapped five nickels into his hand, scowled, shoved his machine into gear. Dropping a coin into the box, Trimble wandered to the back.

There was a vacant seat blocked by a blue-jowled individual. The sitter undressed Trimble with one contemp-

tuous rip of his eyes, made no attempt to move.

Stretching himself, Trimble inserted pudgy fingers in a swinging handle, hung on without remark.

Dismounting ten blocks down, he crossed the road, his path including a deep safety curve around the backside of a policeman's horse. Trotting along the sidewalk, he reached the office.

Watson was already in. Trimble said, "Good morning!" and Watson growled, "Humph!" Every day their exchange was the same—good morning, and humph.

The others came in later. One replied to Trimble's greeting with what might have been, "Marn!" or "Garn!" The rest grunted, snorted, or grinned as if at a secret joke.

At ten, the boss made his advent. He never just turned up, or arrived, or landed. He always made an advent. This time was the same. The boss entered with the air of one about to lay a foundation-stone, or launch a battleship, or something. Nobody greeted him. They tried to look extremely respectful and very busy at one and the same time. Except Trimble, who managed to depict servile idleness.

He gave the boss an hour to get through the morning mail, then prayed for strength, knocked, went in.

"Excuse me, sir."

"Hey?" The bison head came up, savage eyes transfixed the petitioner. "Well, what d'you want?"

"Nothing, sir, nothing," assured Trimble, his blood turning to water. "It wasn't important, and I've forgotten it."

"Then get out!"

Trimble got out. Twelve o'clock came, and he tried to steel himself once more. There seemed to be a shortage of steel. He sat down again wearily.

At ten minutes to one, he tried for the third time, stood outside the boss' door, lifted his knuckles, and then changed his mind. He'd leave it until after lunch. The food would fortify him.



**T**HERE was a bar on the way to the cafeteria. He'd passed it a thousand times, but had never gone inside. This time, it struck him that a shot of whiskey might help. He'd heard it called Dutch courage, and any sort of courage—Dutch or Zulu—was something he could do with aplenty.

Warily, his gaze went up and down the street. If Martha caught him in this sink of iniquity she'd fell him in his tracks. Yes, another Indian would bite the dust. But there wasn't any Martha. Greatly daring, he entered the bar.

The clients, or inmates, or whatever they're called, stared at him with open suspicion. Six of them were propped against the lengthy counter, their eyes summing him up as a barley-water addict. He'd have gone back if it hadn't been too late.

A bartender came along, said curtly, "What's yours?"

"A drink."

Somebody's snicker brought home to Trimble that one couldn't very well ask for a drink. One had to be more specific. For the life of him, he couldn't think of anything but beer. He didn't want beer.

"What's good?" he asked, brightly.

"It depends."

"Depends on what?"

"Whether you've got a thirst, a yen, or a woe."

"I have," said Trimble fervently, "got a woe!"

"Leave it to me." With an assured flick of his cloth, the bartender went away. He did things with bottles, came back, placed before the customer a glass of cloudy, yellow liquid. "That'll be forty."

Trimble paid, sat and stared at the glass. It fascinated him. It frightened him. It was as full of invitation and terror as an uncoiled cobra. He was still looking at it five minutes later when his neighbor, a hefty six-footer, casually put out a hairy hand, took the glass, drained it at a gulp. On no one but Trimble could such a breach of saloon etiquette be perpetrated.

"Always glad to help a pal," jeered

the speaker's mouth, while his eyes said, "Well, d'ya want to make anything out of it?"

Offering no retort, no protest, Trimble went out. The contempt on the bartender's face was a hurtful thing. The others' raucous laughter was a dancing flame that scorched his neck and ears.

Safely outside, he communed with himself. What was the matter with him that he should be at the receiving end of all the kicks and butts? Could he help it that he was not a rip-roaring tough? Wasn't it the way he was made? Most important of all, what could he do about it—if anything?

There were these something-analysts to whom one could appeal. But they were doctors of a sort. He was terrified of doctors with their background of hospitals and operations. Besides, he feared appealing to anyone lest his reward be ridicule. He'd had plenty of ridicule ever since he was a kid. Was there a thing he didn't fear—just one, single thing of which he wasn't scared?

Somebody spoke close by him.

"*Now don't be frightened. Maybe I can help you.*"

**T**URNING, Trimble saw a little, white-haired man with a shriveled form topped by a parchment face from which peered eyes of the clearest blue. The clothes this man wore were old-fashioned, curious, but his general appearance served to strengthen his expression of amiable understanding.

"I saw what happened in there." The little man nodded toward the bar. "I appreciate your position."

"Why should it interest you?" asked Trimble, at once on his guard.

"I'm always interested in people." His friendly hand took Trimble's arm and they walked along side by side. "People are infinitely more interesting than things." The blue eyes twinkled gently. "It is an iron rule that everybody has one outstanding fault, or, if you prefer, one fundamental weakness. The commonest one is fear. The man who fears no man may yet fear cancer. The dictator fears

hidden thoughts. Many people fear death, and those who don't, fear life."

"True," conceded Trimble, thawing in spite of himself.

"You are a slave of fear," went on the ancient. "Your case is made malignant by your own consciousness of it. You are too aware."

"Don't I know it!"

"That's exactly what I'm telling you! You know it. And it is always with you. You cannot forget it."

"I wish I could," said Trimble. "Maybe someday I shall. Maybe I'll get guts. Heavens knows I've tried!"

"I'm sure you have." The wizened one smiled happily. "All a trier needs is the support of an ever-present friend. He craves encouragement, and, if need be, assistance. Every man has a friend of his own."

"Show me mine," challenged Trimble lugubriously. "I'm a hell of a pal to myself."

"You shall have the support gained only by a favored few," promised the other.

He looked around very cautiously, then felt in the depths of a pocket.

"You shall quaff from a fountain in nethermost Tibet."

He produced a long, thin vial filled with liquid of iridescent green.

"This," he whispered, "will give you ears to hear the voice of darkness, a tongue to talk in tones of a ghost."

"It'll what?"

"Take it," urged the other. "I give it because it is the law of Shan that grace shall beget grace, and strength shall father strength." Another gentle smile. "You have now only one fear to conquer—the fear to drink!"

He was gone. How he went was a mystery to the astonished Trimble. First, the little man was there, the next instant his wraithlike form had merged with distant pedestrians. Trimble stood, stared up the street, then at the vial clenched in plump fingers. He put the thing in his pocket.

**T**EN minutes to spare outside the time required to get back to the office. Trimble exited from the cafeteria, his stomach only half filled,

his soul troubled. The choice lay between a scene with the boss or a scene with Martha. He was between the devil and the deep sea and the fact had spoiled his appetite.

Detouring around a block, he found a vacant lot free from scurrying people. Seeking the comparative privacy of the space's farthest corner, he took out the shining vial, had another look at it.

The contents were brilliantly green and looked oily. The stuff might be a drug, or even poison. If a drug could make gangsters hold up banks, what could it make him do? Or, if it was a poison, would it make him die peacefully and without pain? Would Martha weep when she saw him lying stiff and cold, a saintlike expression upon his waxen face?

Uncapping the vial, he put his nose to it, got a whiff of dreamy, elusive odors. He stuck in the tip of his tongue, licked it around his mouth, absorbed the flavor. Strong, aromatic, enticing. Putting the vial to his lips, he swigged the contents to the last drop. It was the first chance he had ever taken, the most reckless thing he had ever done.

"And about time, too!" commented an eerie voice.

Trimble looked around. There wasn't anybody near him. He threw away the empty vial, decided he'd been deluded.

"Down here," hinted the voice.

"Uhn?" Trimble stared in a circle. Nobody! Gosh, that must have been a potent brew—he was imagining things already.

"Down here," urged the voice with sudden impatience. "On the floor, you barrel-shaped lump of stupidity!" A pause, then complainingly: "I'm your shadow."

"Oh, suffering snakes!" mouthed Trimble, covering his face with quivering hands. "I'm talking to my shadow! I've got the rats on one drink!"

"Don't be such a damned dope!" reproved the shadow. "Every man's got his black ghost, but not every guy can use or understand shady language." Silence, while the shade pondered,

then the blunt command: "Come on—we're going places."

"Where?"

"We're going to beat up that bum in the bar."

"What?" yelled Trimble, at the top of his voice. A couple of pedestrians stopped dead on the sidewalk, gaped across the lot. Trimble took no notice. His mind was a whirl of wild confusion, his whole being tormented by fear of the strait-jacket and the padded cell.

"Don't be so all-fired noisy."

**T**HE ghost faded slightly as a cloud crossed the sun, then came back at full strength. "Now that we can pow-wow, I reckon I'd better have a name. You can call me Clarence."

"Cl . . . Cl . . . Cl . . ."

"Sure! Anything wrong with it?" demanded the other aggressively. "Shut up! Get over here, nearer the wall—that's right! See me sitting up? See me big—bigger'n you? Now bend that right arm. Okay, take a look at mine. A humdinger, huh? What wouldn't Dempsey give for a limb like this!"

"God!" groaned Trimble pitifully, his arm bent, his eyes turned appealingly to the sky.

"You'n me," went on Clarence, "can now cooperate. You do the aiming, and I'll hand the wallops. You've got to make sure you get the right side of the light to make me big and strong, then we'll lash out together. Just take good aim, remembering that I'm with you. Every time you hand a guy a prod, I'll paste him one that'll hang him on a ledge twelve floors up. D'you understand?"

"Y-yes," admitted Trimble, his voice almost inaudible. He cast a leery glance at his rear, saw that the number of onlookers had increased to ten.

"Turn around so's I'll be behind you," ordered the shadow. "Take a swipe by yourself, then another one with me. You'll be surprised at the difference."

Obediently, Trimble turned, faced the grinning audience, plunged his pudgy fist into thin air. It was a

futile effort, and he knew it. Drawing back, he swung again, using all his strength and weight. His arm shot out like a piston, dragging his body off balance. He stumbled forward. The spectators laughed.

"See? What did I tell you? Not one guy in ten knows his own strength." Clarence permitted himself a ghostly chuckle. "Now we're all set. How about laying those kibitzers in a row, just to get our hand in?"

"No!" shouted Trimble. He wiped perspiration from a crimson, half-crazed face. The audience went up to fifteen.

"Okay, have it your own way. Now let's get back to the bar, and remember I'm always with you!"

With his feet dragging more and more reluctantly, Trimble reached the bar. He stood outside, knees knocking, while his bellicose shade gave quick instructions.

"Nobody can hear me but you. You're one of the favored few who can hear and speak the language of the dark. We'll go in there together, and you'll do what I tell you to do, say what I tell you to say. Whatever happens, don't get scared—I'll be with you, and I could flop a bull elephant."

"You b-bet," agreed Trimble with total lack of enthusiasm.

"All right. What in hell are you waiting for?"

**L**IKE a condemned criminal pacing the thirteen fateful steps, Trimble moved through the doors and into the bar. The same gang was still there, the same beefy hijacker lounging at the nearer end.

The bartender took one look at the entrant, smirked, then jerked an informative thumb. The hijacker sat pat and scowled. Still smirking, the bartender came up.

"What can I do for you?"

"Switch on the lights," gasped Trimble in an unearthly voice, "and I'll show you something."

Now he'd done it! He'd committed himself beyond withdrawal. He'd have to go through with the whole

whacky affair right until the internes came and bore him away.

The bartender considered. Whatever was going to be shown, it could be twisted into something that would add to the day's fun. He decided to oblige.

"Sure!" he said, and switched them on.

Trimble looked around, absorbed a sudden dose of confidence. It was the sight at his side. There was Clarence, towering up the wall like a mighty djinn.

"Go on," commanded the tremendous shadow. "Do your stuff!"

Taking one step forward, Trimble snatched up the hijacker's glass, flung its contents into the fellow's face.

The recipient arose like one in a dream, gasped, mopped his streaming features, gasped again. Then he removed his jacket, folded it carefully, placed it on the counter. He spoke to his opponent very slowly, very deliberately, and very politely.

"I ain't rolling in money, but my heart is bursting with charity. I'll see that you get a decent burial!" With that, he released a pile-driver.

"Duck!" yelped Clarence.

Trimble pulled his head into his boots, felt an express locomotive rush across his hair.

"Now!" screamed Clarence frantically.

Popping up, Trimble slammed out a fist, concentrating on his aim, but putting all his weight and strength behind the blow. He tried for the Adam's apple, got it, and for a moment thought he was going to stick his arm through the bum's neck. It was something like walloping the sixtieth floor of the Empire State, and the effect was just as spectacular. The fellow went down like a poled ox. Oh, boy, had he got power!

"Again!" raved Clarence. "Lemme soak him another as he gets up."

The smitten one was struggling to rise, an expression of absolute incredulity upon his face. He got halfway, making uncertain motions with his arms and legs.

Trimble wound up his right arm until he could almost hear it whiz.

Then he let his fist fly, this time trying for the other's smeller. He got it with a loud swack like the sound of a skied baseball. The victim tried to throw his head clean off his shoulders, then collapsed and slid a foot along the floor.

"G-g-gosh!" stuttered an awed voice.

**S**HAKING with excitement, Trimble turned his back on his supine opponent, went to the counter. The bartender came up, his features wearing an expression of deep respect. Trimble licked his own forefinger, drew a spit face inside a beer-ring on the counter.

"Put curls on that!"

The bartender hesitated, looked around with a beseeching air, swallowed hard. Meekly, he licked his finger, added the curls.

Reaching across the counter, Trimble snatched the fellow's cloth.

"This is what'll happen next time you pull faces at me." He rubbed out the face.

"Now, mister, don't get tough," pleaded the bartender.

"Nuts!" It was the first time Trimble had used the word as a retort. He shied the cloth back, had a look at his snoring victim, walked out.

As his plump little form passed through the doors, a customer said, "That guy sure is dynamite! Looks to me like he's full of dope, and ripe for a killing."

"I dunno." The bartender was both subdued and sheepish. "You can't never tell from the looks of them. Take Slugs McKeefe, he's a world-beater at his weight, but he's only a fat little guy. I didn't like that feller's looks from the first—he might be Slugs' brother."

"He might," conceded the critic thoughtfully.

Down on the floor, the stricken one's bubbling snore ended in a gasp, a gulp, and an oath. He stirred, tried to sit up.

"Now for the boss," said Clarence, delight in his voice.

"No, no, not that!" Trimble's apologetic face was crimson from the

strain of his recent adventure. His eyes kept flickering back, searching for the murderous pursuit that he thought was inevitable. It was hard to believe that he'd actually done what he had done, and he couldn't understand how he'd escaped alive.

"I said now for the boss, you animated pumpkin!" repeated the shadow, with much asperity.

"But I daren't batter the boss." Trimble's voice grew to a loud, protesting wail. "It'll get me in stir."

"What'll get you in stir?" demanded a passer-by, stopping and staring at the distracted speaker.

"Nothing—I was talking to myself." Trimble stopped as his irritated shadow snarled an interruption. He was reluctant to take the offered advice, but it looked as if he had to. "Hey!" he called. His questioner came back.

"Mind your own damn business," said Trimble, rudely.

"Okay, okay, keep your hair on!" The other was startled, hurried away.

"See?" chortled Clarence. "Now for the boss. We won't get hard unless we hafta."

"Have to," corrected Trimble.

"Hafta," Clarence persisted. "We'll talk first. If he won't appease us, we'll resort to force." He was quiet for a moment, then added: "And don't forget the lights—I like to grow powerful before I slap 'em."

"Oh, all right." Trimble began to feel resigned to a course of events that eventually was going to dump him in a cell, if not in the morgue. With a sigh of martyrdom, he entered the building, went upstairs to the office.

"Afternoon!"

"Humph!" said Watson.

Switching on the office lights, Trimble looked around, located his shady partner, then walked up close to Watson, and spoke in a very loud voice.

"I don't expect anything from a pig but a grunt. Might I remind you that I bade you good afternoon?"

"Eh? . . . ah! . . . huh?" Watson was both scared and thunderstruck. "Ah! . . . very well . . . good afternoon!"

"That's right! Remember it in future." With numb feet and a whirling brain, Trimble went across to the boss' door. He raised his knuckles to knock.

"Don't!" swore Clarence.

Trimble shuddered, grasped the door-knob, turned it gently. Taking a deep breath, he gave the door a tremendous thrust that sent it back with a crash. The thing almost flew off its hinges. As the boss shot up from behind his desk, Trimble walked in.

"You," roared the boss, vibrating with rage, "you're fired!"

**T**URNING, Trimble went back, closing the maltreated door behind him. He didn't say a word.

"Trimble," bellowed the boss, his voice reverberating behind the door, "come here."

Trimble entered for the second time. Closing the door on extended ears in the outer office, he scowled at the boss, then went to the wall, switched on the lights. After that, he fooled around until he got a position that made Clarence ceiling-high. The boss squatted and watched all this, his face purple, his eyes popping.

They stared at each other awhile, their silence broken only by the boss' heavy, asthmatic breathing. Finally, the latter spoke.

"Have you been drinking, Trimble?"

"My taste in liquid refreshment is not a matter for discussion," said Trimble, flatly. "I came in to tell you that I've resigned."

Stark horror filled his soul as the fateful words fell from his lips. He'd done it now! Which menace was the worse, Clarence or Martha? He didn't know—but he sure had burned his boats!

"Resigned?" parroted the boss, mouthing it as if it was some new, outlandish word.

"Sure! I'm fed up. I'm going to offer my services to Rubinstein and Flanagan." The boss shied like a frightened horse, and he went desperately on: "They'll pay me well for what I know. I'm sick and tired of my lousy salary."

"Now Trimble," said the boss, gasping for breath, "I've no desire to part with you after your many years of service. I would not like to see your undoubted talents wasted on a gang of pikers like Rubinstein and Flanagan. I'll give you another two dollars a week."

"Lemme wipe his face off his neck," suggested Clarence, eagerly.

"No!" shouted Trimble.

"Three dollars," said the boss.

"Come on—just one crack," Clarence persisted.

"No!" yelled Trimble, sweating at every pore.

"All right. I'll give you five." The boss' face contorted. "And that's final."

**M**OPPING his brow, Trimble felt as if he was nearing the end of an hour upon the rack. Perspiration trickled down his spine, and his legs felt weak.

"I've been grossly underpaid the last ten years, and I wouldn't stay with you for a raise of less than twelve bucks. I'm worth an extra twenty to you, but I'm willing to take twelve, and let you have eight for cigars."

"C c-cigars."

"Rubinstein and Flanagan'll raise me twelve. You can do it—or do without."

"Twelve!" The boss was dumbfounded, then annoyed, then thoughtful. Eventually, he reached a decision.

"It seems, Trimble, that I have been guilty of underestimating your abilities. I'll give you the increase for which you ask"—he bent forward and glared—"in exchange for a fidelity bond."

"Okay. I'll stay." Making for the door, he opened it, said, "Thanks!"

"See?" said Clarence.

Without answering his nagging shade, Trimble took his seat at his desk.

In tones audible all over the room, he spoke to Watson.

"Nice weather we're having."

"Humph!"

"Eh?" Trimble bawled.

"Very nice," replied Watson, meekly.

**H**IS heart sang like a nest of nightingales while he worked through the afternoon. Somehow, the story of his affair with the boss leaked around the office. People spoke to him in manner different from that of yore. It was almost incredible, but he was getting something he'd never had before—respect.

Rain was hammering down when he closed his books and left for home. What did it matter? The stinging drops felt good on his plump, beaming face, and the air was like old wine. Disdaining the bus, he walked along the wet, shining avenue, whistling to himself as he trotted along. He'd got news that would paralyze Martha!

A noise came from around the next corner, an explosive sound like that of a burst tire. Then another and another and another. Running feet pounded somewhere around the angle of the corner building. He came level, saw two figures racing toward him. One was six jumps behind the other, and both had guns. The nearest of the sprinting pair was twenty yards away. It was his opponent in the bar!

Spears of fear jabbed themselves into Trimble's brain. There was an uproar further down that street, and it looked like the running pair were making a frantic getaway. If the leader recognized Trimble, he'd seize the chance to blot him out in full flight. There was nowhere to hide in those split-seconds, no place in which to bury himself until the danger had passed. Even worse, the sky was heavily clouded, and his precious shadow was gone.

"Clarence!" he screamed, fearfully.

No reply. His shout drew the leading fugitive's attention. The fellow knew him immediately, sucked back thin lips in a deathly grin, raised his weapon. He was almost upon his quaking victim, the range was less than one yard, and it was impossible to miss.

Trimble kicked him on the kneecap.

He didn't do it on the impulse of the moment, nor with the desperation of a cornered rat. He was driven to it by the inevitable conclusion that his only hope lay in behaving exactly as if his missing shadow was still in support. So he lashed out with his foot, striving to connect accurately, using every ounce of his strength.

The other promptly plunged onto his face as if determined to poke his head through the sidewalk and have a look at the subway. It was a heartening sight that made Trimble suspect his efficient shade might still be hanging around even though unseen. The thought lent him courage.

With the startled expression of one who has seen an ant miraculously change into a lion, the second runner pulled up almost chest to chest with Trimble. He was a tall, lanky specimen whose Adam's apple seemed beyond reach.

Trimble batted his stomach against his spine. The fellow gagged, bent his upper half to a convenient angle, and Trimble bashed the apple. The victim did not assume the expected horizontal position. His sallow features suffused with a mixture of hatred and agony, he straightened, swiped at Trimble with the barrel of his weapon.

**T**HE blow failed to connect. Following former practice, Trimble sucked his head into his shoulders, blew it up again, stabbed another one into the stomach. The face came down once more and he smacked it up with considerable vim.

A crash sounded behind him, and a red-hot wasp bit off the lobe of his left ear. He took no notice, and he concentrated upon the face to the complete exclusion of everything else. Foul oaths were pouring from somewhere near the source of the crash, heavy feet were thumping the sidewalk toward him, people were shouting and whooping all around.

He heard none of it. His mind had no knowledge of his first assailant's resurrection. That snarling pan opposite his own was his sole object in life, the one purpose of his being.

With aim and weight and strength, he bashed the face up, socked it down, clouted it backward. Something hard and knobbly exploded out of nothingness, seemed to tear the left cheekbone from his own head. Another one appeared to tear his ribs apart. But Trimble kept working on that face, battering it into a bloody mask and pounding in the gore.

His heart was a jitterbug, and his breath was coming in whistling sobs when a long, black object sailed over the hateful face, descended, pushing it down to the floor. He made a couple more automatic swiping motions, then stood shuddering and blinking. His vision cleared slowly.

The cop said, "Mister, for a feller your size you sure are sudden death!"

Looking around, Trimble saw that half a dozen cops had arrived, and were bundling up his recent opponents.

"That first guy," went on the other, "was Ham Carlotti, and we've wanted him for months." He clothed Trimble in admiration. "We owe you one for this. Any time we can do something for you, just ask."

Getting out a handkerchief, Trimble dabbed his ear, looked at the handkerchief. There was blood on it. God, he was bleeding like a stuck pig! And his left eye was swelling up, his cheekbone felt like hell, his ribs were a torment. He was in a devil of a mess!

"You can do something for me right now," he told the cop. "Ever since I was a kid I've wanted to ride home in a police car. How about it?"

"You bet!" the cop enthused. "It'll be a pleasure." He called to the driver of a car that had just swung in. "This gent's been a help. The ride's on us."

"Where d'ya live?"

Clambering in, Trimble sat back and enjoyed himself. Off they went, hell-for-leather, the siren yelling like a banshee, traffic scuttling madly from their path. This was the life!

**T**HE sun came out, beaming at full strength. He became aware of his shadow riding by his side.

"Clarence."

"Yes, Master," he said very humbly.

"In future, you can leave it to me."

"Yes, Master. But—"

"Shut up!" bawled Trimble.

"Shut up who?" inquired the driver, glancing surprisedly over his shoulder.

"The missus," Trimble answered glibly. "I'm ready for war."

Smiling broadly, the driver whirled his car into the curb, followed his passenger to the door. When Martha opened it, he touched his cap, said: "Ma'am, your husband's a hero." Then he went.

"Hero!" snorted Martha, crossing brawny arms on her ample bosom, she braced herself for an informative speech. Then her eyes found her partner's war-scarred face. She let the eyes protrude. "Where've you been to get a mug like that?"

Vouchsafing no reply, Trimble pushed past her, went into the hall. He waited until she had closed the door, then put skinned knuckles on his hips, faced her squarely. He had a kindly nature, and he had no desire to hurt her unduly, but it was now necessary to impress this woman that she had to deal with a man.

"Martha, I've slapped down a couple of gangsters, and I've soaked the boss another twelve bucks." He blinked as she clutched at the wall

for support. "I've been very patient with you for many years, but I've reached the end of my tether. I wish you to understand that from now on I want no more of your lip."

"Lip," she echoed dazedly, not believing her ears.

"Otherwise, I'll paste you one that'll make you wish you'd brought your parachute."

"Horatio!" She staggered forward, her face a picture of utter stupefaction. "You wouldn't strike a woman, would you?"

"Wouldn't I!" He spat on his sore knuckles.

"Oh, Horatio!" In one wild swoop she had embraced his neck and found his protesting lips.

Heck, aren't women peculiar critters? They liked 'em gentle, but a few—like Martha—preferred 'em tough. Might as well give her more of the same.

Grabbing her hair, he pulled her face over to a comfortable slant. Then he kissed her. He concentrated on aim, weight, and strength. It was a pouting, juicy, emphatic osculation that finished in a loud report.

Grinning triumphantly, he peeked over her shoulder to see what his subdued shadow thought of that. But Clarence was too busy to bother. Didn't Martha have a shadow too?

*Next Issue: Gripping Complete Novelets by ELI COLTER  
and MANLY WADE WELLMAN—Plus Eleven  
Other Stories*

## QUESTION ANSWER

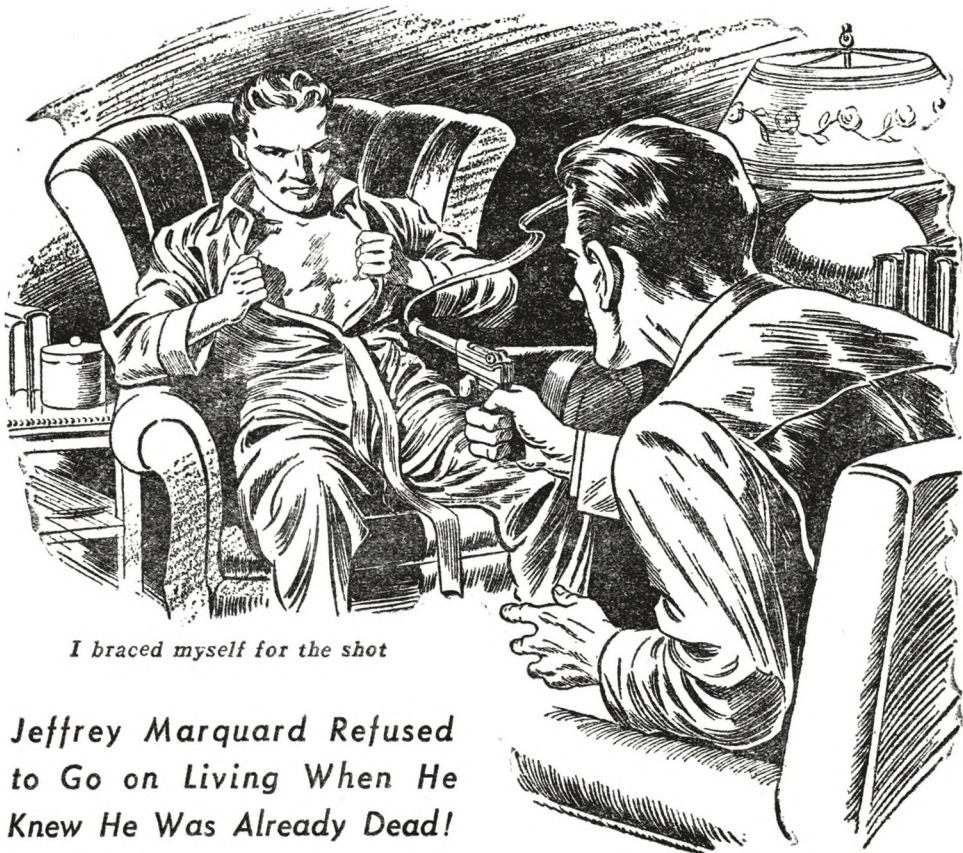
Which are the  
only cough drops  
containing  
Vitamin A?  
(CAROTENE)





# The Day I Die

By HAL G. VERMES  
*Author of "Stir Buggy," "Spider's Web," etc.*



*I braced myself for the shot*

*Jeffrey Marquard Refused  
to Go on Living When He  
Knew He Was Already Dead!*

**I** JEFFREY MARQUARD, was given the sentence of death. Not by a court of law, but by a group of eminent physicians.

Dr. Mario Ferraris, my old family doctor, had called into consultation three specialists—Dr. Wallace Emery of Johns Hopkins, whose study of narcolepsy is well known; Dr. Arild Persen, the brilliant psychopathologist; and Dr. Karl Schlegel, the Swiss heart specialist, who was in this country at the time.

After making an exhaustive exam-

ination, it was their concerted opinion, with which Dr. Ferraris agreed, that my life would terminate suddenly. Within a matter of weeks, they said—a month, at the most.

What will a man do who has but thirty days to live? All men have at some time pondered the question. When they are in good health it is considered a most amusing speculation. They laughingly assert that they would live those final few days on earth in accordance with the pleasure principle of the extreme hedon-

nist: "Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow ye die."

But these sensualists do not stop to consider that if they knew they were surely to die on the morrow, their appetites would suddenly leave them and all desire for pleasure would be purged from their blood. Beauty, love, honor—all these would be forgotten in the sole contemplation of the one unavoidable surety: *Death!*

That, in fact, was how I found it. I could think of nothing but my early appointment with the black-caped skeleton. Although I believed that I had sufficient fortitude, I soon realized that I was unable to face certain death bravely.

Measuring the inevitable passage of time became an unbearable torture. Every day I tore a leaf from the calendar; it was a ritual. But I could not stand it; I threw the calendar away. I stopped the clock. But I couldn't look at the dead hands pointing to midnight, and I took the clock from the mantel and smashed it in the fireplace. Then, in spite of the desire of my whole will, I measured time by the rising and setting of the sun.

Although I had no pain, I knew that I was dying. Everything pointed to it—the falling of the leaves from the trees; the moaning of winter winds; the guttering flame of a candle; the dying fire. Even the feeble step of my old servant sounded to me like the slow yet steady footfall of approaching death.

**I** SAW no one except Gerald Villiers, a friend who was much concerned with my welfare. But though he continued to visit me daily, he was welcome no longer. The sight of him only served to remind me again of the precious life I was destined so shortly to lose. I saw in his agonized face a presage of my fate, and I knew that he, too, believed there was no hope for me.

In the quiet evenings which I spent alone, I tried to visualize what was beyond life. True, when the doors to death were opened for me, then I would know. But I wanted to see and understand *before* that final moment, so that I could meet the end unafraid.

There were, I reasoned, only four possibilities. My individuality would pass unchanged into a different world—I would assume a new spiritual personality on the earth which I had always trod; nothing would be changed, neither myself nor the world I entered; or both would be changed. I was not greatly concerned with this last, for a future having no connection with the present is the same as oblivion.

But—the question blazed in my brain—which would it be?

If my ego simply moved into an unknown world, there was nothing to fear. For it is the loss of our individuality which makes us most afraid of death. And the new dimension into which my soul would pass held forth no terrors to one who, as I, had lived on this troubled earth for thirty-five years. No, I assured myself, there was little need to fear that prospect.

And as for the second possibility—what if I took on a different spiritual personality, like a fresh garment, and found myself free to roam the confines of the universe that I already knew? Then my new ego would equip me for the reception of other sensations, so that I might experience this familiar world in yet another way. Again there was no reason to be afraid.

But what if everything remained much the same? Was that possible? Insofar as the individuality is concerned, I believed that it was. Then I would become what living folks call a ghost. But a ghost is not ghostly to himself. He walks, talks, wears the costume of his time. He eats, drinks and sleeps, as tens of thousands of chance encounters with humanity testify.

To such a spirit-being there is no change in life after death. Everything remains the same. The only difference—not to this spirit-being but to those who are alive—is the sensation that he is dead. So, I finally reasoned, there was still no need for fear.

I wondered why I had not come to that peaceful conclusion before. It was then that I realized that such understanding is not given to us until

the end. All physicians will testify that most people die in peace. Now I learned that is so because they find at last there is no need to be afraid of death.

I had found out the truth because I was ordained to die, too. And so, calm in my conviction, I reached my last day on earth. But secure in my new knowledge, I faced the future unafraid. . . .

**B**UT afterward? What comes afterward? After the day I was fated to die, I found that I still could not answer that all-important question. Had I passed quietly and painlessly into the spirit world? Had I put on the ghostly garments of a wraith? Was I dead—or alive?

I did not know! Another day passed, and another. I should have died, I *may* have died, but still I did not know.

The uncertainty tortured me. I ate and drank. I walked and talked and slept. But, I remembered, a ghost does all of these things. Yet there seemed to be something different about me, something new and strange in my brain and in my heart. Something that I could not understand!

There was an icy coldness in the air, a peculiar wavering in the shadow of my old servant. And when my friend Gerald Villiers came to visit me, I saw a quickening gleam of horror in his eyes.

Doubt grew upon me until it was more than I could bear. The thought came to me: find out! You are in doubt. It's either one or the other. Make a test!

I had to. I had to learn the truth, had to know where I stood in the scheme of things.

After long thought, I devised what I thought to be a fool-proof plan. I explained it to Gerald, who listened to me with a face as expressionless as any face could be. Quite calmly I ordered him to make the necessary preparations.

So, just a month after the day I had been fated to die—and *did* die, for all that I knew—Gerald came in the early evening to my home. But he came most unhappily. His face was white

and strained. He was unwilling to make the test!

"Under no circumstances," Gerald insisted, "can you prevail upon me to go through with this monstrous idea!"

His attitude was understandable enough. He could not be expected to see the hideous dilemma which confronted me. Yet the test had to be made. *I* had to know!

"Gerald," I said, with all the feeling at my command, "there is a limit to human endurance, and I have already borne too much. If you could appreciate what I have been through the past few weeks, you would not refuse me. I must know whether I am dead—or alive!"

Gerald's face was white, tense. "I will not do this thing!" he exclaimed. "I will not kill you!"

I tried a last desperate appeal. "Would you wish me dead, Gerald—or prefer to have me become a raving maniac? If I am alive, I shall go mad, because according to the best medical opinion I should have been laid in my grave days ago! Now, if I have died—then, Gerald, what sin would you be committing?"

**G**ERALD rose from his chair and stared at me as though I were some appalling apparition. His mouth twisted, but he was silent and I flung the question at him.

"Your choice, Gerald?"

For a long moment he stood as rigid as sculptured granite. Then his right hand slowly slipped into a coat pocket. When he brought it out, a heavy gun was gripped tightly in his fingers.

"Ah!" I said, relieved. "I am glad to see that you brought the old Borchardt-Luger. It was my favorite pistol, you know. Do you remember how you often shot high score with it when we competed at the pistol butts long ago?"

"This is no time for reminiscing," Gerald replied, speaking with such severity that I was forced into laughter.

"After all," I reminded him, "a man can have this experience but once. Permit me to drain it to the dregs.

Perhaps it is the last time that I will feel warm blood in my veins."

Gerald's burning eyes filled with fright and he bit his lower lip.

"By the way," I asked, purposely casual, "is the gun loaded?"

In reply, Gerald pointed the Borchardt-Luger at an exquisite example of Sèvres porcelain on the mantelpiece, a vase in the beautiful *bleu de roi*, and one of my most treasured possessions. Before I could protest, he pulled the trigger. There was a blasting report, and the fragile porcelain was shattered.

"Perhaps," I remarked, "I shall soon be as useless as that broken vase."

Gerald stared at me stonily.

"Let us get on with it," I said.

I removed my cravat and unbuttoned my shirt, baring my breast.

"I have no apprehension, Gerald. You are an excellent marksman and will make a clean job of it."

"You can be sure of that," Gerald mumbled reluctantly. Seating himself opposite me, he leveled the gun.

"Good-by," he whispered. "Good-by, Jeffrey—and God forgive me for what I am about to do!"

But that was pure sentiment, and I made no answer. After all, the test was a simple matter, really. If the bullet killed me, then I should die very decently and be buried with all rites. And if it did not—

I smiled at Gerald and gave the word. "Now!"

Holding the pistol steadily in his hand, Gerald Villiers aimed point-blank at my heart and fired. . . .

And that is how I know. The

test made everything clear to me. Now I possess the answer to the eternal question. *For the shot aimed at my heart did not harm me!*

It was as though I were nothing, my emotions feeble as the light of a candle at midnight, my memory faint as a ghostly breath upon glass.

But the experience was too much for a human being. Gerald dropped the gun, began to sob in great anguish and then to babble words which to me were quite meaningless.

"You see!" he cried. "You are not dead, Jeffrey! The cartridge was a blank. The shot I fired at the vase was to get you to change your mind. But you would not do so, Jeffrey! You forced me to prove the truth!"

The truth? Ah, poor Gerald! Indubitably he is mad. The test removed every doubt from my mind. I know now what comes after death, and the knowledge of it has brought me eternal peace.

For at last I understand that a month ago—as it was ordained—I died. That is why I did not feel the bullet from the Borchardt-Luger. Gerald was too mad to have substituted a blank cartridge. Yes, as I sit here at my desk writing these words, I am a dead man.

Soon now I shall have completed the manuscript of my account. I shall call for the young doctor in the white uniform, and I know he will make sure that my work is published.

Indeed, he read the unfinished portion of my account only two days ago. He was very kind and helpful, you know, and he assured me that I had never written so well when alive.

# College Humor

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CENTS

THE BEST COMEDY IN AMERICA

FICTION • SATIRE • CARTOONS

ON SALE EVERYWHERE!

# THE DJINN OF EL MOHRAB

By CHARLES S. STRONG

*Author of "Chaka's Legions," "The Blue Whale," etc*

SIX foot, heavily bearded, well-muscled, Rene Dufour gazed through squinted eyes into the merciless heat of an African sun that had been unable to wilt his determination or diminish his strength. But the dancing light-devils that hovered over the sands of the Sahara caught vagrant shadows in the innermost recesses of his crime-ridden brain, and created queer figures that rose up above him with outstretched arms.

Rene laid aside the shovel he held and brushed the sweat from his eyes, muttering.

"There is nothing there! There can be nothing there! These are but the tricks of the desert."

What Rene thought he saw was a towering long figure with long, wavering arms. Bony fingers, shooting out from the fiery shroud, appeared to be closing over his eyeballs, driving spikes of flame into his eyes, making his brain dance. These hallucinations had been coming to him ever since he had begun his plans for escape from the Penal Battalions of the Fifth Regi-

*Over the Merciless Wastes  
of the Sahara Wanders the  
Soul of a Man in Torment!*

*Dufour fired at the Djinn*



ment of the French Foreign Legion.

Rene had been listening too much to the tales of his native companions. Together with the superstitious Breton background that was his heritage, it was no wonder that he was seeing *djinn*s, leprechauns, or whatever name they were given. Sensible people knew there were no such things. Rene Dufour brushed his hand across his forehead, blinked, then picked up his shovel again.

The Penal Battalions of the French Foreign Legion were working southward in a zigzag line across the mighty Sahara Desert from Sidi-bel-Abbes to Timbaktu, a narrow concrete thread unfolding behind them, that would constitute a life-line for the men of La Belle France when the enemy might strike on both sides of the Mediterranean. From oasis to oasis, over trails that had known only the tramp of camels' hoofs, there now twisted the hard-surfaced road that would carry wheeled vehicles—trucks, combat cars, motorcycles.

Rene Dufour was with a group of two hundred-odd men that lifted picks to shoulders, then swung them against the shelves of rock that interspersed the shifting sands of the Sahara. Rene had come to the Legion to escape the consequences of a fatal stabbing in a little fishing port on the Bay of Biscay. His presence in the Penal Battalions was due to an even more heinous crime.

One morning, while the Fifth Regiment of the Foreign Legion had been encamped at Fort Pierre, he had set upon a native water bearer, accused him of attempting to rob, and had stabbed him to death. Unprovoked assault on a native endangered the lives of all members of the Legion, might lead to an uprising.

Some of the European members of the Legion tried to justify the assault, but the Colonial troops shook their heads. Dark-skinned, black-bearded holy men shook their heads, muttered curses, and gave warnings of grave things to come. Rene Dufour had never been popular with the Legion. There were stories of cheating at cards, of underhanded activities in other gambling games. Rene had even

been accused of attempting to shoot one of his officers in the back while on a small patrol and under fire of the Touaregs.

Lack of witnesses—that is, live witnesses—had prevented any action against Rene. For his part, the sneering legionnaire insisted that he had been a hero in the engagement. His comrades, knowing him, were inclined to doubt it.

Only Rene knew how much the mumblings of the native holy men affected him. Only he knew of the nights when he had leaped out of his blankets, to see vanishing figures moving through the iron-barred window of his cell, to assume phantom shapes on the edge of the star-lit desert and then scamper away, mocking the legionnaire with silent, weird expressions.

Rene's working companion, linked to him with ankle gyves and double lengths of chain, was Abu Bekr, an Arab from the Atlas Mountains who had fought through the World War in the Turco Cuirassiers, and had continued his service to France after the Versailles Treaty had saved the world for democracy.

Abu Bekr, well along in his forties, with the upright carriage of the Arab race, the trim, clear-cut jaw, and the piercing, eagle eyes, was plying a pick because of jealousy on the part of one of the *sous-officiers*. It was the sort of thing that often turned faithful Colonial troops against the French Republic.

But even so, after Abu Bekr was restored to his rank in the Legion and again received his two sous a day, he would renew his allegiance to the big men in Paris, and would think nothing of it.

**A**BU BEKR was steeped in the traditions and legends of the desert and, knowingly or not, contributed to the subtle wave of fear that was obtruding itself upon the inner consciousness of Rene Dufour—fear that frayed his nerves even more than the whips of the sergeants in charge of the work gangs, or the probing fingers of conscience.

For Abu Bekr had the smooth fa-

cility of that teller of tales who had first conjured up the Arabian Nights entertainments. When the Arab spoke of the little people of the palm trees, the spirits of the desert winds, the devils of the biting sands, these characters assumed a reality that could not be denied.

Thus it was that Rene Dufour wrestled with himself before he finally framed the words.

"I am leaving here, tonight," he rasped, without breaking the rhythm of his pick. "Are you with me?" Abu Bekr, with all his superstitions, would be a formidable ally in any battle against the desert.

"Leaving?" asked Abu Bekr slowly. "And where will you go? Men do not escape from the Penal Battalions. You know that."

Rene Dufour shrugged his muscled shoulders.

"These people that have tried to escape the lash of Sergeant Kossof in the past have not been clever. They run away with their feet, not with their heads. I have worked all of this out with my brain, even though my mind has become a bit addled by your idle mouthings about *djinns*."

Abu Bekr shook his head solemnly.

"Even the Romans had their household gods. The Transylvanians have their werewolves and vampires; the Irish have their leprechauns and pixies. Just because you are ignorant, you should not laugh at these people of the shadows. You will be caught," the Arab insisted.

"I shall never be caught," Rene snapped. "Neither will you, if you come with me."

Even as he spoke he shuddered, as though cold fingers of doubt were tightening about his heart; as though unseen hands were gripping him, holding him back, handicapping his initiative.

"I must know more about this, *feringhi*," Abu Bekr said cautiously.

Rene Dufour cast a glance around for a sight of the whip-wielding Sergeant Kossof, or the keen-eyed Lieutenant Cartier.

"It is simple," the Frenchman hurried on. "We know from the plans of the road that the oases stretch south-

ward at intervals of from twenty-eight to forty miles. This is not a long day's march for a man who has withstood the bite of the sand and the howl of the wind for seven long years, as I have. I shall take a supply of food and water when I leave, and head for the nearest oasis. When I have replenished my canteen there, I will destroy the spring, so that my pursuers will be handicapped by lack of water."

Abu Bekr broke in upon him at this point. His usually placid face was wreathed in a look of horror.

"Destroy an oasis?" he demanded. "But you cannot do that! It is not only your pursuers that will come there. The oases are the blessings of Allah. They are for the nomads of the desert, their men, their women, their children, their camels. What are they to do without the life-giving water? Ever since the time of the Prophet, there have been bitter curses poured down upon the heads of those that defile the springs of the desert. You cannot do this! It is unthinkable! You must not do it!"

"More of your old-wives' tales," Rene Dufour sneered. "After the first oasis, I shall go on to the next and repeat the process there. It should not be many days before pursuit must be abandoned."

"But what of the airplanes?" Abu Bekr inquired, looking now at the practical side.

"Finding a single man in the desert is a big task for an airplane," Rene pointed out. "A plane can be heard far off, and when it comes, I have but to crouch down upon the sand or rock. With a burnoose thrown about me, who will know but what I am another bit of stone or a dune of sand?"

Rene's eyes shone and his face relaxed from the firm lines that it habitually held.

**B**UT in the eyes of the Arab quite a different picture was presented. Yet he continued his pick swinging, while another member of the battalion shoveled the broken stone and carted it away in a metal wheelbarrow that reflected the afternoon sun like a pillar of brass.

"You cannot foul the water in the

oases. The *djinn* will not allow it," Abu Bekr finally declared, after a long silence.

"The *djinn*?" snarled Rene Dufour in contempt. "I have heard stories of this *djinn*, but never have they been substantiated. It is a tale out of the Arabian Nights, an entertaining thing that provides campfire amusement, nothing more."

He scoffed at the sincerity of the middle-aged Arab, but Abu Bekr continued his remonstrances.

"You cannot do it, *feringhi*. The water, it is put in the oases for the Beloved of Allah. This water is the life-blood of the Faithful, and they expect to find it flowing freely, that they may drink of its crystal clearness and eat of the dates in the palms that give it shade. Allah has arranged it, and the *djinn* must carry out his bidding."

"Your *djinn* will be no match for the pistol I will carry. You shall see, if you are not afraid to come with me."

Abu Bekr shook his head. "I will not go. And if you do, the vultures will devour what the desert and the *djinn* leave behind!"

As the quick-swooping night of the tropics shrouded the road-camp of the Penal Battalions, the men were loaded into trucks and driven back to their cells at Fort Lejeune. As they were locked up in their cubicles at the fort, a chill went through Rene Dufour as though skeleton fingers were brushing against his flesh. He laughed harshly. It was but the wind blowing off the cooling sands of the desert.

After he had finished his meager evening meal, Rene Dufour set about the last act of his planned escape. Since the desert itself was an imprisoning wall, the prisoners were not too carefully guarded, once they had been placed in their cells. Rene had counted upon this fact from the time he had stolen the huge rasp from the tool truck, to secrete it each morning under the packed dirt in one corner of his cell.

For days he had been working at the dried mud of the wall, had weakened the bars across the window space. Now he was able to bend them back. The file made short work of the gyves

that bound Rene Dufour to Abu Bekr.

"Are you coming?" the Frenchman demanded of Abu Bekr for the last time.

The Arab shrugged. His piercing eyes bored into the other. His words, dripping with unspoken thoughts, gave eerie promise.

"No, *feringhi*," Abu Bekr replied, "for I know you will not succeed. You cannot foul the water in the oases. The *djinn* will not allow it."

Rene Dufour shrugged cynically. He climbed out of the cell. How much the calm, unhurried words of the Arab affected him, he did not show. But it was too late to turn back now. The guards would discover the wrecked bars in the morning, and his term in the Penal Battalions would be even more intolerable.

Somewhere in the darkness about Rene Dufour eyes were boring into his back. They were not human eyes transmitting a warning, but other orbs without tangible form. The Breton was afraid to look back over his shoulder, for fear that he would see them gleaming, that they would hypnotize him.

Like a shadow the escaping prisoner moved along the wall until he came to the barracks. The soldiers of the Fifth Regiment were in the mess shack eating their evening meal. It was but the work of a moment for Rene to possess himself of a pistol, numerous rounds of ammunition that went into his pockets, a belt ax and a large canteen.

At the end of his journey Rene would need money. He knew that the company clerk took care of the mess fund. It had been accumulated, sou by blood-and-sweat-earned sou, and turned over to the clerk for needed cigarettes, cognac and other little luxuries that made life bearable. Every man in the outfit had contributed to this fund. But that had no effect upon Rene Dufour.

**A** SNAP of the file broke the lock on the company clerk's desk. The tin box came under fumbling fingers, and Rene transferred the crumpled notes and jingling metal to his tunic pocket. This theft was almost as



treacherous as his intended defiling of the waterholes. But there could be no *djinn* guarding the company funds.

Rene Dufour laughed harshly, then leaped at the sound of his own voice. Was this crazy Arab superstition going to lead to his recapture even before he had gotten clear of the fort? The Frenchman broke into a sweat at the thought.

His canteen was filled to overflowing moments later at the well beyond the fort. Then, circling around the dune to keep out of sight of the sentries, Rene Dufour plunged off into the desert, guiding his steps by the stars that had brought him and many another Breton fisherman back to port when sundown had found them far at sea.

A sickle moon was riding low over the desert. It did not give much light, but it did lend a mystical quality, a fearsome atmosphere to the sand and stone that stretched endlessly in all directions. The path to Sierra Leone and freedom was a long and tortuous one, but Rene Dufour did not think of that.

Wrath loomed up before the escaping prisoner. His fingers tightened over the butt of his gun. He drew it half out of its holster as strange sounds formed in the sand, boomed up into the night, seemed to pound all about him. Was this the *djinn*, warning him to turn back? He halted, peered ahead. But the ghostly form settled back into the sand.

Rene Dufour was mentally and emotionally exhausted when he reached the first oasis at the dark hour of four o'clock in the morning. He sat down in what would later be the shady side of the date palms, partook himself of a hasty meal, drank deeply of the water in the spring, refilled his canteen, then set about his task of defiling the oasis.

His first job was to chop down one of the date palms, cut off short lengths of the butt and thrust them into the throat of the spring. Even as he did this, a nameless, inexplicable force stayed the lifting of his hand. Several times his ax slid off the bole of the date palm. Rene Dufour halted.

"*You cannot foul the water of the*

*oases. The djinn will not allow it.*"

The words had been those of Abu Bekr. But now they seemed to come from all around the escaping prisoner. His ax was slipping because he was tired. After all, he had been traveling all night. Or was that the explanation? Rene did not know.

Sweat was bathing the man, making his dirty outfit stick to him. But it was not the sweat of honest toil—it was the sweat of fear.

Nevertheless, Rene went doggedly on, resisting a power stronger than himself, yet a power that seemed to be giving him a chance to contemplate the heinousness of his own activity. But Rene Dufour considered this reprieve as a victory on his part.

When the escaping prisoner had effectively halted the flow of water, he shoveled sand on the mound that now covered the basin of the pool. Then, with his canteen over his shoulder, he headed off into the dark curtain that shrouded the coming dawn, and hastened his footsteps southward.

Almost before he was out of sight of the oasis, a strange pounding began to beat against his brain. It was as though something was perched upon his shoulder, some small human figure, ever droning into his ear.

"*Dufour, you cannot foul the water of the oases. The djinn will not allow it.*"

ONCE again the words of Abu Bekr pounded in his head.

Rene Dufour stopped only long enough to stuff cotton from a small medical kit into his ears, to tighten the cloth of the neck-covering that dropped down from his hat. Then he brought the grayish robe that was to camouflage him about his shoulders.

The droning words did not cease. Suddenly Rene realized that the cotton in his ears would prevent him from hearing the approach of airplanes, if indeed they did send them after him.

He stumbled on through the rolling sand dunes until it was almost midday. Now and then he had surcease from the droning and pounding that addled his brain. Occasionally he looked back over his shoulder, in

dread anticipation. Would the *djinn* appear to plod along behind him—or, what was more tangible, a patrol of the French Foreign Legion?

But fate withheld its vengeance. With renewed assurance of the cleverness of his plans, Rene Dufour turned aside from his route, sought the shelter of one of the rock pinnacles. Rolling himself up in his burnoose, he covered most of his body with sand and went to sleep.

His rest was not entirely undisturbed, however. Now and then he tossed restlessly. Through his subconscious mind, stimulated by the warning of Abu Bekr, there raced a picture of the *djinn* of el Mohrab, guardian of the oases of the Sahara.

The *djinn*, up to now a vague, phantomlike thing, suddenly became personified in a huge, towering green form with broad shoulders, fearsome face, dangling arms with claw-tipped fingers on widespread hands. It was more formidable than the heat devils that had tantalized Rene on the road gang and at the fort.

**I**N ONE particularly realistic nightmare the *djinn* extended its fingers toward Rene Dufour and closed in upon him. The Breton awoke with a start. Sand was still banked about him. Night had again closed down over the silent reaches of the Sahara, a silence that was broken only by the hissing of the sand and the sighing of the wind. But where was the *djinn*? It seemed to be all about Rene; inside his very being.

Rene Dufour found himself sweating. He knew that terror was holding him tightly in its remorseless grip. He sat up, unwrapped his rations, and ate sparingly of them. Then he uncovered his canteen, drank deeply of the cooling draught in the vacuum-sealed container. Moments later he was ready to continue his trek southward. Now he was fleeing from his own thoughts as well as from the Legion.

As his feet began slogging into the sand, pulling out of it, moving forward and ever ahead, again there perched upon Rene's shoulder the little form that seemed to have no weight, yet a definite presence. Again

the uncompromising words beat into his brain.

*"Dufour, you cannot foul the water of the oases. The djinn will not allow it."*

But he had already fouled one spring—and nothing had happened.

Rene Dufour repeated a number of incantations that had proved effective against Breton ghosts when he had been in France. They were sufficient to win him a temporary respite. When their efficacy had been tested, he concentrated on the task of studying his backtrack for signs of pursuit. He scanned the horizon carefully.

Bulking forms that appeared now and then through the darkness soon dissolved into nothing. Schooled in the ways of the desert, Rene knew that they were whirling sand devils, rising up in his wake to plague him.

Then he looked ahead and saw the lone date palm that marked the next oasis. This would be the turning point of his escape. The pursuing party, if there was one, might be able to go for one day and one night without water, but when he had fouled the second oasis, they would certainly turn back before the horror of the desert claimed them for its own.

It was a little after one in the morning when Rene Dufour came down the bowl at the bottom of which was the bubbling spring of el Mohrab. He slaked his thirst with the sparkling water, again partook of his store of rations, refilled his canteen and then set about the grim task of chopping down the lone date palm. Even as the blade of the ax bit into the tree bole, a voice with an Arabic drone sounded behind him.

*"Dufour, thou art accursed. Allah has sent down His might upon thee. This is the water of the Faithful, thou shalt not defile it."*

The earlier chant might have been his own conscience, Rene decided, sweating, but these words were clear, calm, not to be idly dismissed. He faced about. At the edge of the circle of light formed by the flashlight he had brought, there bulked a grim form. Rene Dufour brought up his pistol, fired at it twice.

His only reward was a hoarse,

screaming laugh. And then harsh, chilling words.

"Think you that you can kill the *djinn* of el Mohrab, *feringhi*? Thou art indeed a guileful one."

Rene Dufour, remembering the effect of his Breton incantations, again called upon the gods of land and water that had held at bay the superstitions of his native Bay of Biscay. The bulk at the edge of the flashlight glow seemed to blur, then move back, to gather again further away. Rene snapped out the light, turned with sweating brow to his task of chopping down the tree.

His work-toughened muscles brought the ax down against the wood with repeated strokes, and as each one bit into the tree, a thin wail rose.

"This bloody *djinn* probably lives in the tree," Rene Dufour tried to console himself. "When I kill it, I kill him. Abu Bekr ought to see me now."

Even as he spoke his muscles were aching, and his brain was seething with maggots of fear.

Not many minutes later the date palm tumbled to the ground, and Rene carefully measured off the lengths he would use to cap the spring. He cut up the butt of the tree, lifted a five-foot length of the bole and thrust it into the throat of the oasis. Even as he did so, the cold, grim voice of the *djinn* came again to his ears.

"The carrion-eaters of the Sahara will feast upon your bones, *feringhi*," it warned.

**T**HEN there followed a soul-searching laugh that had come before to Rene's ears. He hesitated, turned around. Finally his unsteady hand brought up the gun again, and he tried to search out the voice.

But now it seemed to come from everywhere. It boomed out on all sides of him. It came up through the singing sands. It mocked him from the sickle moon.

Then Rene Dufour began to shovel sand on the tree-stopped well. Even as he did a black form loomed up before him. A terrible blow struck him in the head, and he fell forward. His arms and legs turned to useless flesh

and muscle. And through it all there sounded the harsh, challenging laughter of the *djinn*.

"*Rene Dufour, you cannot foul the water of the oases! The djinn will not allow it!*"

\* \* \* \* \*

It was eight o'clock the following morning when the search party of the Penal Battalions of the Fifth Regiment of the Foreign Legion arrived at the oasis of el Mohrab. Lieutenant Cartier was in command of Sergeant Kossof and four men. One of the men was Abu Bekr.

Lying face down alongside the pool of el Mohrab was the limp form of Rene Dufour. A nasty bruise on his forehead and the crushed temple behind it indicated the source of the fatal blow.

After an examination of his body, Rene Dufour was buried some distance away from the spring, so that his rotting corpse would not pollute the water.

"What killed him?" asked Sergeant Kossof in some awe, after they had drunk at the well, and were on their way back to Fort Lejeune.

"It was the *djinn*," replied Abu Bekr calmly.

"Nonsense!" snapped Lieutenant Cartier, anxious to discourage any belief in the superstitions of the desert.

"Rene Dufour tried to pull the same stunt he got away with at the last oasis. He cut down the date palm, lopped off a length from the trunk. This he tried to thrust down into the throat of the spring. But the pressure of the water in the spring was too much for him. The bole of the tree slipped out of his hands, the pressure of the water thrust it up out of the spring, and it struck him in the head. The blow was sufficient to kill."

The rest of the patrol seemed to be satisfied. But Abu Bekr knew something of the workings of Allah. Desert tribes had their own explanation for the death that came to all who defiled the wells of the oases.

No, these *feringhi* would never understand. And somewhere in the shifting sands, perhaps the tormented spirit of Rene Dufour echoed the belief of his Arab bunkmate.

He plunged the dagger into his own breast, crying: "My last gift, oh, heartless one!"



# The Bag of Skin

By DOROTHY QUICK

Author of "Red Knight," "Strange Awakening," etc.

## CHAPTER I

### *The Belt*

I FOUND it in a tiny shop that nestled deep in the shadows of the Rialto. I had gone into the place more to get out of the hot Florentine sun than to make a purchase. Obviously I had to look at something, so I asked about coral necklaces. So far on the trip I had been the only girl in Miss Parlon's "select" group that hadn't bought at least one string of coral, and rather

than stay in the sun any longer I would have purchased a dozen.

We had been warned not to go out at mid-day, but I had been bored with the chatter of the girls and, remembering the picturesqueness of the Rialto bridge arching itself like a camel's bump across the Arno, I had come forth to view it once again. We were leaving Florence the next day and a trip to the Villa Medici was scheduled for the late afternoon.

I was so glad to get out of the sun into the damp cool of the shop that

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A COMPLETE WEIRD NOVELET

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*To Dream or Not to Dream  
—That Is the Question Born  
of the Curse of the Mancini!*

I bought three necklaces and a bracelet. The things the shopkeeper sold me were good and not expensive. I didn't haggle over the price as Miss Parlon had told me to do. I paid what he asked, thinking I could now cross off my list four of the people who would expect presents when I returned to America.

While the shopkeeper went to make me out a bill for the "so-particular-United-States-custom-men" I looked around the shop.

Over in a corner was a showcase I had somehow missed. It was full of a varied assortment of oddities that were obviously antique. I recognized a Roman ring, a strange little bottle that could have been for perfume or poison—and then I saw a queer kind of purse.

It was made of some parchment-like material, pouch fashion, and hung from a beautifully embossed leather belt that looked as though it were set with precious stones. Jeweled belts had been the smart thing in Paris. I had one or two in my wardrobe but this was the genuine article, and, if the stones were real, it would be an acquisition!

I could easily cut off the little leather pieces that held the pouch, then I would have a wonderful belt—the very latest thing, yet one that had a real story behind it. For I knew instinctively that the belt and pouch were genuine antiques with a history. Of course I had no idea what that history would turn out to be. If I had I would have run quickly out of the shop, back to Miss Parlon and the rest of the girls.

**T**HE shopkeeper was ready with my package and the bill.

"Let me see this belt—the one with the pouch," I said.

There were other belts in the case less ornate.

The color drained out of the man's face. "You no want that to see." His English was good at times, at others terrible. "I have new belts—this one is old."

"That's why I like it," I persisted. "Take it out."

"No, no. Listen, young miss, sell

it I must, since you ask. If you will buy, the price *you* can name, though the jewels are without price. Yet I tell you if you take it you will have to wear it until— But no—I can tell you no more, only that you will regret— I beg you take the things I have sell to you and go away."

His voice was full of concern.

But I am not the daughter of Cyrus I. Parker, aviation tycoon, for nothing.

"Open the case," I said imperiously. "I want to see the belt."

"If you take it, you no can let it go," the shopkeeper said.

I thought he meant I would pay any price for it and he intended making a hard bargain. That didn't worry me. I had plenty of the Parker fortune in my letter of credit.

"I must see it," I insisted, my desire growing with his reluctance.

The man unlocked the case.

"Very well," he said, "but you will have to take it out yourself. Not for the fortune that the Medici once owned would I touch it."

He stepped aside.

I came around and thrust my hand in the case, catching, as it happened, the pouch, not the belt. As I took it in my hand, it felt as if I were touching another hand. Not exactly a hand, for there were no fingers, but I definitely felt as though I were touching human skin. It was soft and pliable and yet it definitely was not parchment.

"What is this made of?" I asked.

The man shrugged. "I have often thought of human skin, but perhaps it is only the hide of a pig."

I almost dropped the thing. Only the fact that it seemed to cling to my fingers of its own volition saved it. I told myself the heat of my hand probably exerted some suction which caused the thing to cling.

"The belt is lovely, the stones look real," I said. "I can cut off this pouch arrangement."

"That you no can do," the man's head swung violently from side to side, "or if you do, you must wear the pouch alone. It is the pouch—" Suddenly he switched his conversation. "The jewels are real. The belt

was made to carry the pouch. It was made by a man famous in Venice in the fourteenth century. He made it for one in the Ayour family. When the last of the race died, I bought in the pouch and belt at the sale.

"Fortunately for me, I touched it not, for before I came to open the casket that held it, I had read a writing of the curse that goes with it. So I threw it from the casket into that case and there it stayed. Now you must buy it, since you have taken it."

**A**LL this mysterious talk was a build-up for the sale, I supposed, so I wasn't impressed, but the belt itself did intrigue me. The jewels were rubies and sapphires and, though of old-fashioned cut, I was sure the shopkeeper spoke the truth when he said they were real.

"How much?" I asked, sure that this time I would have to adopt Miss Parlon's tactics.

To my surprise I was wrong.

"Give me what you like, only remember that the jewels they are genuine. I should have something, though I sold the casket at a high figure."

It didn't seem possible. I had no idea what the actual value of the jewels were, but I named a price that seemed generous.

"Thank you," he bowed.

"I haven't that much money with me. I'll have to go to the bank and return."

"Very well, young lady. Take the belt and return with the lire if you will."

I was impressed with his trusting me.

"I'll be right back. Here, wrap this up."

I tossed the belt and pouch to him. As I did so, a searing pain shot through me that bent me double. It continued, stab after stab, and I seemed to be on fire. I screamed—I couldn't help it—the pain was so intense.

The shopkeeper hurried to me and clasped the belt around my waist, pulling the leather through an ornate gold buckle until it fitted me per-

fectly. The instant it was in place the pain stopped.

"You have taken the belt—you must wear the belt."

There was actual pity in his voice.

"You mean—"

"Nothing more than that, young lady. Go now. Come back tomorrow morning with the money—not before—and wear the belt tonight. I command you."

For an instant the little man looked like a descendant of the Cæsars. There was something about him that prevented my asking further questions. I removed the foulard belt of my dress, rolled it up and consigned it to the depths of my pocket-book. Then, without another word, I picked up my packages and went out of the dark shop into the sunlight.

At first I walked along as though I had been stunned. Great pain when it is quieted leaves a mental lassitude, probably exhaustion from the nerve effort necessary to withstand its onslaughts, and the pain I had felt in those few minutes had been incredibly intense.

Gradually I had begun to look at the whole experience as uncanny. The shopkeeper, the belt, the pain—the fact that the shopkeeper had let me set my own price on a priceless thing, and then told me not to bring the lire till the morning.

Something was wrong somewhere.

**S**EVERAL times on my walk back to the hotel I felt a hand brush against my hip. It wasn't until I had looked about several times to find the street practically deserted that I realized it was the pouch—that strange, skin-like pouch that felt like a human hand. It was as though a hand rested on my hips.

When I got back to the room, Sheila, the girl with whom I shared accommodations, exclaimed: "Why, Alice, what a divine belt! Where did you get it?"

I told her, but not about the pain, nor the other peculiar things.

"It's the loveliest thing I've ever seen and so quaint. When you're tired of it, will you sell it to me? Somehow it fascinates me."

She was laughing, yet strangely serious.

"I'll think about it. Will you come to the bank with me? I've got to get five hundred dollars worth of lire."

Sheila whistled. "The stones must be real."

"They are."

We went to the bank and later drove out to the Villa Medici. I can't say I enjoyed that lovely place as I should have, for the sensation of the hand resting on my hip was intensified. As the day progressed I imagined I could almost feel fingers tightening their hold on my flesh. I tried to laugh myself out of it, but the feeling persisted.

So much so that when it came time to undress I was almost afraid. I waited until Sheila, who was still lost in admiration of my purchase, was taking her bath before I unclasped the girdle. Nothing happened—there was no searing pain. Only the pouch seemed to stick to my dress as though it actually had fingers. I took hold of it and pulled it off.

It took quite a bit of strength, but I felt no pain.

"I must have been affected by the heat this afternoon," I thought airily, and laid the thing on the bureau.

As I relinquished my hold on the pouch, the pain shot through me—severe and terrible. I exercised all my control to keep from crying aloud, touched the pouch with my fingers and the pain stopped.

I experimented and found out that if I touched the belt the pain did not cease. It was the pouch. Every time I let it go, that same knifing agony shattered my body. I finally undressed, holding the pouch in my hand. It was awkward, but I managed. Then I fastened the whole arrangement over my nightgown and crept into bed.

When Sheila came back I pretended I was asleep, but watched her looking for the belt. Finally she gave up and, turning out the light, went to bed.

My tired brain was in a turmoil. The shopkeeper had talked of a curse—vaguely, but still he had talked of one. Also he had said: "You have

taken the belt; you must wear the belt."

Did that mean that I was to be tied to this cursed pouch all my life? In the morning he would have to tell me more, explain what he had read about the belt in the paper he had found. It was my right. I had to know.

I moved, and my hand came in contact with the pouch. It was as though fingers curled themselves around mine. I tried to unclasp them, but I couldn't.

A sick feeling of horror came over me that no amount of reasoning could shut away. It deepened and the fingers clutched mine feverishly.

Then suddenly I realized I was no longer lying in my bed at the Grande Hotel with Sheila not far away! I was walking in a garden and the air was heavily scented with flowers. At the same time I knew there actually was another hand clasping mine. This was no imagined sensation—it was a fact. And beside me was one of the loveliest girls I had ever seen.

She was slim and fair, with great ringlets of hair that looked like spun gold clustered on her shoulders. Her skin was white as alabaster, her brown eyes deep set and fringed with darkened lashes—the only touch of color in her fragile, cameo-like face. Even her lips were pale. There was distress in her eyes and tears on the thick lashes, while her hand held mine frantically.

Musical as the most poignant notes of a violin that is muted, her voice came to me.

"All this I have told you to my shame, because unless he comes to me again, I die of grief, my brother."

## CHAPTER II

### *The Brother of Fiametta*

**B**ROTHER! It was only at that moment that I fully understood I had gone back in time and that I, Alice—or rather my spirit—was imprisoned in the body of a man—a man who was the brother of this lovely



creature who walked by my side with her eyes full of tears.

I looked at myself in the reflection of the water of a nearby pool. I resembled the girl in a more mature way. She looked about sixteen, whereas my age was nearer thirty. I was a little taller and I had her same clear, etched features moulded in masculine fashion. My eyes were brown, deep set like hers, but they reflected anger instead of grief.

The body I inhabited was strong, muscular and hard, with no excess poundage. I had well turned legs in silken hose, and wore puffed trousers of blue slashed with crimson and a surcoat to match with great sleeves. My hair, of an auburn shade, was cropped just short of my square shoulders. A rapier hung at my side from a leather belt studded with jewels.

I knew nothing of this man's past or what he thought except as he thought it. But I knew he was in some way mixed up with the belt and pouch I had bought that mid-day in the shop. For I, Alice, kept my own identity in my thoughts. I was like a person watching a play, only instead of being in a box seat, I was imprisoned in one of the actors. Somehow I had gotten back into the fourteenth century. I could guess that I would learn the story of the strange thing that I had bought.

Now I felt that the man was furious, but I had to search out the reason from the conversation that followed.

"My sister," he began, and it seemed strange to hear the deep, masculine tones issuing from my lips, "I do truly think you mad. To have so little pride, Fiametta—to weep for a lover who has left you."

"Nay, Edmund, you wrong both Carlos and myself." Fiametta's young breast heaved. "Carlos loves me well and truly."

"So," Edmund's laugh rang out, "so he leaves you for love of Madonna Mancini."

"Nay—nay—he leaves me for the Mancini, but not for love, nor should you call her Madonna, Edmund. They say in Venice that she is not a woman but a witch."

Edmund drew back, loosing Fiametta's hand and making the sign of the cross.

"Where hear you such things, my sister?"

"From my women."

"There are no witches, Fiametta. Such tales are old women's stories."

"Carlos himself says she is a witch. He hates her, and yet she draws him to her. Already has she had half of his fortune, the great Gianchini fortune, against his will, and he goes not to her because he would, but because he must. He has so sworn to me by the holy cross."

**T**HERE was that in Fiametta's voice that throbbed on Edmund's heart strings. I could feel his love for his sister and his anxiety for her future stinging through him.

"Of a truth, I had contemplated ridding you of Carlos as a worthless, faithless fool not fitted for your husband," his hand played with the hilt of his sword, "but now I wonder. If you speak true, Fiametta, perhaps I should go and see this Beatrice Mancini and save Carlos and what is left of the Gianchini fortune."

Fiametta's cheeks flushed with color the same shade as the roses that rioted all over the high stone wall.

"Oh, I love Carlos as no man was ever loved before. I would rather die than live without him, and he loves me. Only she holds him in a spell, a witch woman's spell, from which not even my love can set him free."

"Why, then, *this* must!" Edmund lifted his sword a little from its scabbard and let it fall back. "I will go to the Mancini and send your Carlos back to you, though I must busy the wench myself to set him free."

The color fled from Fiametta's cheeks and she flung her arms about her brother's neck, holding him close.

"No, no—thus I should lose you too."

The man I now was laughed again. If I could have given forth expression of my own, I should have laughed too—not as he did for very certainty in his own strength, but because of all this talk of magic.

Edmund laughed a long time.

"Come, come, Madonna, have more faith in your brother. Have I not always given you your heart's desire?"

"Yes, yes, but of what use to rescue Carlos if you fall into her honey trap? Besides, it cannot be. No men has she released until she's drained their manhood and their fortunes from them. Death and ruin follow after her. Men know this, yet they cannot resist her. She charms well. Surely she is a witch."

"I fear no witches, nor do I fear Beatrice Mancini's honey trap nor spells. I am secure in my love for my bride to be. The thought of Juliet alone would keep me safe."

Fiametta was still troubled.

"Carlos loves me, yet he is like a fly that struggles in a spider's web, unable to win free. I have no strength to stand more, my brother, nor would Juliet thank me for sending you to the witch's arms. Now do I wish that I had held my tongue."

Fiametta bit her pale lips until a little drop of blood splashed red against the whiteness of her chin.

"Peace, child." Gently, Edmund wiped away the blood. As he did so, I could feel the tender love for her that surged within him. "Go to your chamber. I will bring Carlos to you later and see to your nuptials. Fear not—all will be well. Faithfully, I promise you."

**S**UDDENLY Fiametta was on her knees clutching Edmund's belt.

"Stay, brother, by our long dead mother and father whose place you have taken so well, I beg you to stay. I will resign myself to losing Carlos. I will somehow live without him—anything, rather than lose you too."

Edmund raised her tenderly, kissed her forehead.

"I bid you to your chamber and fear not. I am made of sterner stuff than Carlos. I have more years behind me than he has seen. I have loved too many women to be snared by the Mancini, witch or no. Go, child, and plead no more. I have spoken."

Reluctantly Fiametta obeyed. Like a wraith she glided down the garden path between the great Madonna lilies she resembled until she vanished

through the carved stone portals into the shadow of the house.

Edmund watched her go. I read his thoughts, for his love for her and his contempt for the Mancini were an open book.

"I shall go now," he muttered, "and finish this matter. Make the child happy with her love, after I have talked well to him. All this I must do in time, so I can take Juliet to the Masque."

He, too, walked down the path into the house, pausing only long enough in the hall to bid a servant fetch his cloak. A gondola was waiting.

"To the Palazzo of Beatrice Mancini."

He was settling himself among the velvet cushions of the gondola and did not see the boatman making the sign of the cross when he heard the direction.

Edmund was totally unafraid, entirely confident his mission would be successful, but I—I was not so sure. I had not missed the horror on the boatman's face, nor the terror in Fiametta's voice when she spoke of the Mancini.

I wished there were some way that I could warn the complacent Edmund that he was going toward danger—both to body and to the soul—but I could only watch the play. I could even anticipate and see further than the man to whom I was so closely linked, but I was only a spectator. I could take no part in the events that were unfolding before me.

A dull haze lay over the city of Venice. It rose from the water and seemed to meet and mingle with the atmosphere as drops from a fountain. Edmund stirred lazily upon his cushions.

"It is very hot," he murmured.

The gondolier plying his oar smiled crookedly.

"You go to an even hotter place, my lord," he said.

"Do you mean that some day I shall rest among the fiends in the devil's home, Giano?"

"I talked not of an afterworld, my lord. You go to the palace of the Mancini. Well, devils and witches are of one breed. As for me, who first guided your baby steps, I'd rather

know you safe in hell than see you lost to such a one as that lady."

The old man regarded Edmund anxiously.

**H**ERE were my fears crystallized in words—not the words of a young girl, but a man old in years. Would Edmund pay attention to them?

Apparently not, for once more he shrugged his shoulders.

"Fear not for me. I have my love."

"Others have loved, yet have they thrown their lives at her feet, and she has taken them as her due tribute, but not until she's drained their money-coffers dry. She will make you welcome, for your wealth is known in Venice."

"What is her charm, Giano? Are all men in Venice mad, that they do let her strip them of their wealth?"

"Nay, my lord, but she is beautiful—all things to all men, like that Argive beauty of whom the ancients sing. Some say," Giano dropped his voice, "that she is indeed Helen of Troy reborn to avenge herself on men for what men did to her. If you but look upon her face your senses whirl and you are filled with an insatiable desire, a burning longing that only her kisses can allay."

"I shall not kiss her."

"No man has done so," Giano leaned upon his oar, while the gondola drifted slowly along with the tide. "I hear much upon these canals, my lord—much of ruin and death—but I have heard nothing of satisfaction to any man from the lady—only of hopeless longing. Oh, my lord, I beg you, go not to the Mancini Palace. For the sake of an old man who loves you, and for the sake of sweet Lady Fiametta and the Lady Juliet whom you love."

More than anything I longed to have Edmund heed this counsel, but even before he spoke, I knew from his thoughts he would not. Edmund knew no fear, and believed not in the dark powers.

"Hush, Giano. I go for Fiametta's sake—to save her love. No," he raised his hand as Giano would have spoken, "tell me no more. For though the lady were Fate herself, yet must I face her.

Ply your oar, Giano. I must be away from the Mancini Palace in time to take Madonna Juliet to the Masque."

Giano's thin lips muttered, but the words lost themselves in the mist. He bent to his oars and the gondola sped along, past St. Marks, past the Doge's Palace. The Bridge of Sighs curved picturesquely for a moment and then was gone.

"Hurry," cried Edmund, and Giano paddled faster.

On and on we went, down the Grand Canal, and as it grew darker, lights sprung up in the palaces, and the great painted mooring posts loomed large in the glare of the lanterns hung at their sides.

Suddenly the gondola turned away from the Grand Canal, away from the bright luminosity into a narrow water way.

At first the houses were lighted and the reflections in the water were like spider webs on which the moon spread glancing rays of silver. Then the lights lessened until, as we went further, we passed through rows of silent darkness, gliding along between great piles of white marble which glistened under the moonlight.

**S**TILL further we glided down dark waterways where a man might come to his death and none be wiser. Then Giano steered the gondola into a narrow canal. Far away toward the end of it lights flared. A pink marble Palazzo came gradually into view. Lights blazed from every window and, clustered around the quay by the mooring posts, were hundreds of gondolas—among them one that Edmund recognized, for he said softly:

"Carlos is here."

"Ay, and half of Venice! The Mancini casts her nets wide and the fish swim in." Giano guided his boat to the quay and steadied it there with his oar.

Edmund sprang up, put his hand over Giano's where it rested on the oar. "Await me, friend." There was a catch in his voice.

"Until eternity, if need be." Giano's eyes pleaded, begged his master not to go inside.

But Edmund did not hesitate.

Lightly he vaulted to the quay upon which a score of men were standing. They were not gondoliers, for these men lingered in their boats, but rather men of the merchant class, I gathered from Edmund's addressing one whom he evidently knew.

"What do you here, who should be seeing to my wedding garb?"

The man started.

"If you go within there, you will not need your garb, my lord. I dare not enter, but night after night I, and these others, listen to the Mancis's voice. Will you, too, listen? Soon she sings."

"I go within." Edmund walked forward briskly, but I, who for a little while was part of him, knew that for the first time he hesitated. I could read his thoughts plainly.

"Where there is much talk, there must be some truth. Why should I take so great a risk on the eve almost of my own wedding for a man who is obviously not worth saving. Better to get my sister another gallant—" But then the vision of Fiametta's pale cheeks came to his eyes and he heard her voice — "without him I would rather die"—and his steps did not falter, though now he went unwillingly.

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### CHAPTER III

#### *Behind the Curtain*

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I ADMIRED this man but I was afraid for him. To what was he taking the spirit of Alice? What would I have to witness, and where did the pouch fit into the puzzle? Well, I must wait and see, for the reel was unwinding and some innate sense told me that once inside those thick carved doors it would certainly move faster.

Edmund seized the knocker, which was in the form of an imp, and let it clang back against the door. It made a strange, singing noise that vibrated against the ear drums unforgettably, as the door swung inward.

"Welcome, lord," a smooth voice

purred, and servants came forward to take Edmund's cape.

"The Lord of Ayour is welcome," said still another voice, and Edmund wondered that they knew his name.

A steward stepped out of the group of servants and bowed low.

"I will take you to the presence chamber, for soon Madonna Beatrice greets her guests with song."

"'Presence chamber'—as though I go to greet a queen," thought Edmund, and his heart hardened against the Mancis.

Quietly he followed the steward across a wide hall, up a staircase of pink, Grecian marble which curved gracefully, on through another hall which had columns like a cloister that led into spacious chambers. Between two of these columns the steward paused and gestured with his arm.

"The presence chamber"—and there was awe in his voice, as though he were a priest admitting a sycophant into the shrine of the Delphic Oracle.

Edmund stepped between the columns, through wide flung doors of a blue glass that was misty as the waters of the canal. He found himself in a large, spacious room with high arched windows. There were tapestries on the walls and the glow of many candles.

Before one end hung a curtain of some strange material that changed as he looked upon it. First it was blue, and then it merged from gray into green, and lastly to the color of a pure aquamarine before it turned to blue again.

This strange curtain held Edmund so that he would have been content to watch its vari-colored hues forever except that in his heart a warning was singing: "Go — fly from this place while you yet may."

But though he half turned as if to obey this inner force, despite himself his eyes drew back to the curtain. Behind it was undoubtedly the Mancis—Madonna Beatrice. Just looking at the curtain made him long to see what lay behind—long and yet dread—for fear had touched Edmund with one of its icy fingers. His confidence in himself lessened with each moment he spent in this room.

All at once he was aware that he was not alone. The room was thronged with other men—men who knew him and still others of whom he knew. Messaire Alentour, said to be in high favor with the Doge himself, was there and nodded to Edmund, who noted that the eyes of Messaire Alentour were deep sunken in his face, and the red of fever glistened on his cheeks.

**EDMUND** looked all about the room until finally he found the man he sought.

"Carlos!" he exclaimed, and, walking toward one of the arched windows, put his hand on a gallant's arm.

Looking at Carlos, I could understand Fiametta's longing, for here was one of the handsomest men I had ever seen—in this life or my own twentieth century one.

Surprise and shame ravaged his face.

"You, Edmund, here!"

"I come but to pluck you forth from this evil place. Someone awaits you in a garden, Carlos."

Carlos groaned and covered his eyes with his hand.

"I know, I know—and part of me is in that garden with Fiametta — the best of me, Edmund. But all that is base in my nature keeps me here in hopes that some day *she* will touch my hand or take me behind the curtain. Sometimes she does so honor a man. That is the hope of all who linger here. It will be your hope too."

Edmund shook his head and said, "No," firmly enough, but I, who was as himself, except that I still retained for myself my own identity as Alice, knew that he was no longer so sure of himself. The maggot of doubt bred quickly.

"Come, Carlos—come with me now."

For a second the boy—for Carlos seemed very young — hesitated. It looked as though he might go, but just as he started to speak, there came a strain of wild unearthly music from behind the curtain—as though someone swept a hand across the strings of a harp from heaven or hell, thought Edmund.

A hush fell over the room and with

it a tension of expectancy strung so high as to be almost unbearable.

"Look," cried Carlos, "the curtains part!"

Edmund swung about just in time to see the curtains drawing aside. It was like the waves rolling back for the children of Israel, for on either side the curtains still shimmered and changed their hue, but no one looked at them now, for standing between their folds was the Mancini.

Beatrice Mancini! Her beauty was so great that it struck home to Edmund's heart as though it had been an arrow. She stood beside a tall, golden harp, upon which one hand rested lightly. Her dress was of the same shimmer, unreal stuff as the curtains. One minute it seemed transparent, the next moulded to her glorious figure.

She had copper-colored hair that waved away from her face and down her back to fall in curls below her knees. Her neck and arms were bare, so were her feet, but everything paled before the beauty of her face.

Poets have sung of such loveliness from Homer down through the ages, but they have never been able actually to crystallize it into words, so how can I? I only know that in that room was perfection and the realization of all men's dreams.

**F**OR the first time in my life I felt a man's desire. Longing for the Mancini was hot in Edmund's veins and I shared his feelings. Nor could I wonder. I thought of the sirens I had read about in history — Cleopatra, Diane de Poitiers, Du Barry, Lady Hamilton—and the account of their charms dimmed before that of Beatrice Mancini, whose fame, so far as I knew, remained unsung. Perhaps Giano was right and the immortal Helen lived again in Venice.

From the shadows behind the Mancini two servants brought a gilded chair. She sank into it as though she were a flower moving in the wind, and, drawing the harp against the curve of her breast, began to play and sing in a deep rich voice of exceptional quality.

There was that in her voice that caught the senses, and it was more potent than opium. Edmund suc-

cumbed to it wholly. Even Fiametta was forgotten. In him was nothing but the desire to clasp the Mancini in his arms, to know her his. With every man in the room, it was the same. Their feelings were written plainly on their faces, and they made no attempt to hide them. The music was but the tightening of the net her charms had cast.

Only I noticed that whereas the rest of the room blazed in light made by the many candles, that the part where the Mancini sat was in deep shadow save for a faint circle of rosy light which surrounded her. Only I felt sinister evil emanating from her. Or did Edmund feel it too? His thoughts were not definite enough for me to read, for a struggle went on within him, as desire and sanity fought for mastery.

The music died away in one low throbbing note. The Mancini let the harp stand by itself, and, still staying in her chair, turned her face toward her guests.

"I bid you welcome," she cried, and her voice was like a brook murmuring over cool stones.

"We bring gifts," cried some of the men.

She inclined her head.

"Then I thank you," she said courteously. "My steward shall see them bestowed, and some day I shall thank the giver appropriately."

Simple words, simply said—but oh, the meaning in them, and the hopes they brought to life within the men that looked on her as though the sight of that incredible beauty was wine to their souls.

"She is too beautiful," Edmund muttered to himself. "Such beauty is unreal and yet—if I could touch her hand."

Now a man pressed through the crowd.

"Madonna," he cried, "have you no word for me? No special thanks for what I have given?"

She looked at him and her expression remained unaltered.

"Such thanks as I can give are surely yours, my lord."

"No more? Can I not touch these burning lips to the coolness of your

fingers and heal the fever in my veins?"

The man, who was striking-looking and richly clad, had pushed through the crowd until he stood almost on the edge of the circle of soft light that played about the Mancini. His eyes devoured her.

"I have given you my all. Have you nothing for me?"

**T**HE Mancini looked at him and still her expression did not change.

"I have given you thanks, I have sung to you, I have received you in my house. I have no more to give you."

The way she emphasized the pronoun raised high the hopes in the breast of every other man in the presence chamber.

"Then," cried the man, "I take what you will not give."

He lurched forward into the rosy light.

The Mancini looked at him steadily, her beauty unchanged by even so much as a touch of pity. Under her gaze the man stopped. Already within the circle he was quite near to her, but he made no attempt to touch her. Rather did he seem as though he were hypnotized, for her eyes held his.

As though in a dream, he took a dagger from his belt and, before anyone could stop him, plunged it deep into his own breast, crying: "My last gift, oh, heartless one!" as he fell at her feet.

The men who had brought the Mancini's chair appeared from the shadows and carried the body back into the darkness.

All this while the Mancini sat undisturbed—the classic beauty of her face untouched by what she saw.

"Poor foolish lad," she said softly. "I do not know what drove him mad."

"Do you not, Madonna?" cried Messaie Alentour. "Then look into your mirror and you will understand."

For the first time the Mancini showed emotion. Not in her face—that perfect visage did not alter, but a faint, almost imperceptible tremor shivered over her lovely body.

"Let us forget this unpleasantness. There is wine for all."

"We need no wine who look at you," Messaire Alentour drew nearer to the circle.

"Thank you, Messaire." The Mancini extended her hand. It reached beyond the rosy glow, and Messaire Alentour kissed the slender fingers, while a deep sigh that seemed as though from one man came from the other men in the presence chamber.

A second later Alentour had stepped back. The red fever burned brighter in his cheeks, but he shivered as though from cold.

"Greetings to you, Edmund, Lord of Ayour, my new guest."

The silver voice of the Mancini throbbed as the strings of the harp had done.

Edmund awoke from his spell.

"Greetings, Beatrice Mancini."

"Shall I thank you for your gift?" the honey tones went on.

"Nay, I have brought no gift."

"Perchance you brought one without being aware. Come hither, my lord, come hither to me. I choose *you* for my partner."

A groan swept over the room. But the heart in Edmund beat against his breast as though it were a wild caged thing at the thought of the realization of his desire. Soon he would hold that lovely body in his arms, kiss the cool reflection of such beauty as he had not dreamed.

Only I shuddered within my soul. For this Edmund of whom I was a part was a fine man, and I sensed evil beyond the power of words in this room and I did not want him to go to a woman who could watch a man die for her sake without even the flicker of an eyelash.

But I was utterly helpless. I could not warn him.

**T**WO things happened simultaneously. Messaire Alentour cried out: "Not he—not he! It is I you should choose. Have I not poured gold from the Doge's coffers into your lap? So you give me your fingers, and to him who brought nothing, yourself. I'll not suffer it."

And at the same time Carlos laughed bitterly in Edmund's ear.

"You would send me back to Fiametta so you can rest in the Mancini's arms!"

Furious, Edmund turned to Carlos. "Get you gone to Fiametta!"

"No!"

But the Mancini was answering Messaire Alentour and the room hushed to her voice.

"Messaire, force me not to call to being powers you know not of, and be not so wroth. There are other nights. Have you not touched my hand? Can you bear too much joy at once?"

Alentour quieted and stepped back into the group.

Edmund turned to Carlos.

"Tonight you go to Fiametta."

"I'd rather kill you than leave you in the Mancini's arms," Carlos snarled.

Hate was all about Edmund as he moved forward—a thick haze of it. Denser than the mist over Venice, it surrounded him, and there was danger in it—danger from these men who hated him for being preferred to them. They fingered their rapiers uneasily and Edmund, sensing this, placed his hand on the hilt of his. Yet he cared not, who thought only of the Mancini's kisses.

As Edmund neared the Mancini, Alentour whipped his rapier from its sheath.

"This I will not bear," he cried. "Had you chosen another I might—as I have done before. But to give your favor to a man who has only just come, who has brought no gifts, cannot be borne. I challenge you, my Lord of Ayour."

Alentour threw a handsomely embroidered glove in Edmund's face.

The Mancini rose. "Now Messaire Alentour—"

Edmund interrupted her.

"Peace, Madonna, I fight my own battles." He leaned over, picked up Alentour's glove and thrust it through his belt, then drew his sword. "I accept your challenge. Let us fight for the honor of dining with the lady!" he cried.

The Mancini sank back into her chair. "So be it."

The men drew back, leaving Edmund and Alentour alone in a kind of circle facing each other, their swords in hand.

## CHAPTER IV

*First Dream*

**N**OW I was frightened. If Edmund were killed, what would happen to me, Alice? Would I die too, or would I be swiftly catapulted back to my own time without even knowing what the story of the bag of skin was? For so far I had seen nothing of it nor heard any mention that would give me an idea.

I had no time for further thought. The men were evenly matched. I knew that, the instant their swords touched. They were both masters of fencing, only Edmund was the cooler of the two.

Thrust and parry, thrust and parry. Flickering steel darting hither and thither. Every man in the room wanted Alentour to win. But the Mancis sided with Edmund. I felt strength flow from her, but her face remained unchanged and her fingers relaxed on the arms of her golden chair.

Thrust and parry. Now Alentour drew blood from Edmund's left wrist, but it was only a long ugly scratch on the back.

It served to infuriate Edmund. He lunged forward, avoiding Alentour's feint, and thrust his rapier home, deep into Alentour's breast.

A little moan went through the room as Alentour fell. Edmund drew out his sword and wiped it on the dead man's brodered coat. Then he straightened up, saluted the Mancis, and let his sword fall back into its scabbard. Again the men appeared from behind the curtain and bore the body away.

"Did I not say you would bring me a gift?" the Mancis cried. There was exultation in her voice, but her face showed nothing.

"I have brought you blood, if you care for it," Edmund said dully.

"You have rid me of a gnat that flew about and bothered me," the Mancis said, "and you will bring me more gifts. Come, my friend, it is

time to dine. The servants have spread the table."

There was that in her voice that made me fear for Edmund more than Alentour's sword had done. He moved toward the circle of rosy light, a man in a dream, in his mind no thought of Fiametta nor his mission. All were lost in his longing for the beautiful vision that sat waiting.

A murmur of unrest swept over the throng. I could hear them.

"Let us kill him!" "Avenge Alentour!" "The Mancis protects him with her magic." "We should die in a lost cause!"

The whispers went on. The hate grew and seethed against Edmund like water in a pot that boils, but it did not overflow.

Edmund moved on toward the Mancis. I knew he went to evil, that when he touched her lips he lost his soul, but I could not prevent him. My frantic thoughts could not penetrate his.

On and on we went, nearer and nearer to the rosy circle. The whispers of hate grew.

"Let us kill him!"

"Even the Mancis's magic could not prevail against us all."

"On, men!"

His body was in danger, and his soul.

Edmund remained unmoved. His eyes were on the Mancis; he only saw her beauty.

**S**UDDENLY a voice rang out— Carlos' voice, high-pitched, hysterical, full of scorn:

"And you love Juliet!"

That penetrated Edmund's thoughts and went straight as an arrow through his armor of indifference. With her name a face rose before Edmund's eyes. It stood between him and the Mancis — a sweet face, the face of Juliet, full of love for him. For a second during which life stood still, that sweet face of Juliet weighed in the balance against the beauty of the Mancis. Then love won and desire flowed out of Edmund's veins as waters rush away once a dike is opened.

A few steps nearer to the Mancis,



then Edmund turned and addressed the room that was still full of murmurs against him.

"Are you men, that you stand back and let a woman rule you? Come, you have swords. Rid Venice of this witch who sucks you dry!"

Never a man moved. They all stared at Edmund incredulously. But the Mancini laughed, a peal of laughter like a cascade of rushing waters.

Eventually it stopped. Then she said clearly:

"You fool! Think you a man can kill his heart's desire? Look upon me and tell me if you could kill me."

She rose from the golden chair and, standing there in all her bright perfection, looked on Edmund.

The thin prickings of desire coursed through him again, sending out their longings into his veins, until once more I was afraid for him and for myself. If he allied himself to evil, would that evil stamp itself into my soul too?

Again the Mancini's voice broke the silence.

"Would you kill me, Edmund?"

Edmund looked on her. As he looked, the vision of Juliet again came between him and the Mancini. His blood cooled.

"No, I will not kill you," he said, and took a step nearer until he came to the edge of the circle of light in which the Mancini stood. "No, I will not kill you. This I swear. But neither will I let your beauty ruin men."

Quicker than thought his rapier leapt from its scabbard across the light, and bit into the Mancini's cheek.

Then a most ghastly thing happened. The sword, instead of going deep, caught in the skin and ripped it from the Mancini's face, showing horror underneath!

No wonder her beauty had remained unaltered, and no expression showed upon her face. For she had worn a mask! Amazingly wrought, that delicate mask of pure beauty quivered on the floor, and the thing she was lay revealed to all men. The sight was horrible. Never awake or sleeping can I forget what, for want of a better name, I must term a face. A death's

head would have been pleasant in comparison, for here was evil and corruption beyond human knowing, beyond human bearing.

**M**EN looked once and groaned, then hid their eyes or fainted where they stood. How anything living could have a face like that was more than anyone could know. Even those who had seen their loved ones ravaged by the Plague saw no such sight as this. But was she living? That question beat in Edmund's brain. Was she not a thing from the dead, out of a tomb, given life by Satan himself? Edmund held his rapier up before his face and backed away from that loathsome countenance.

The Mancini lifted up her perfect hands and hid her face so that only the eyes, great balls of blazing fire could be seen.

"Wait," she cried, and there was something in her voice that could not be denied. Men, who had already begun rushing toward the doors, stopped their headlong flight and stood rooted to the spot, waiting for what she had to say. But their eyes were on the ground, for not one of them could bear to even glimpse the revulsion of that awful face again.

Only Edmund stood staring straight at her while his very soul was sick within his breast.

Again came the Mancini's voice, and this time it was not clear like rippling water. The honey tones were hard as ice.

"So, you have won this rout, my lord of Ayour. Yes, you have triumphed over the Mancini, and the White Witch of Venice is no more. Carlos will return to his Fiametta and these others will crawl back to lesser beauties. Not so?"

"So! At least they will be true beauty—not false—not something deathly hidden by a mask."

Edmund picked up that thin parchment-like thing on the point of his rapier and held it up for all the room to see.

"Who knows the true from the false—or what is true and what is false?" the Mancini asked, and no one, not even Edmund, dared to answer. "That is

a riddle I leave with you all, but this I say to you." Her baleful eyes glared straight at Edmund. "For what you have done this night you shall suffer. You have taken the mask—you must keep the mask. Night and day it will be beside you."

Edmund laughed. "Not I. Besides, will you not have it back again? It could be mended for you."

There was even pity in Edmund's heart for this loathsome creature.

"True. The devil who made it has not lost his skill. I will be beautiful again but elsewhere than in Venice." The Mancini's voice was still hard. "But I say again—the mask you have taken you must keep. This is the Mancini curse on you."

The voice died away and the Mancini's hands fell from her face.

"Slay the witch," cried Carlos. There was a rush forward. The rosy light dimmed and went out. The curtains fell together, only now they were of a deep blue stuff that did not change color. When the men got lights and searched behind the curtains, they found nothing but the harp and an empty chair. The servants who guarded the back doors swore no one had passed. Only the steward said: "Search no more. The Mancini is gone." When pressed for explanations he gave none, but he spoke truth—the house was deserted.

**C**ARLOS came to Edmund, who still stood with the mask hanging on the point of his rapier.

"Let us go," Carlos said. "I'll throw that thing away."

He took the mask, and as he did so, it gave a little screeching sound and a swift agony shot through Edmund—an agony I understood only too well, who was beginning to comprehend the story.

"Nay, nay," he cried, racked with pain. "The witch cursed well. Give me the mask."

Carlos obeyed him wonderingly. As Edmund took the thing in his fingers, the pain ceased, just as my pain had done. He gave it back to Carlos and the pain returned. Once more he took it and the agony stopped. Then he thrust it deep into his doublet.

"Carlos is saved, and Fiametta has her love. So am I cursed," he thought, "tied to a mask which holds my life in it. Perhaps I shall go mad, or perhaps Madonna Juliet will save me from this as she saved me from the Mancini. Only time will tell, and I fear the telling."

He held out his hand to Carlos.

"Let us leave this place," he said aloud. The boy's fingers clasped in his, they descended the stairway out into the quay. Giano, his old face beaming with joy swung his gondola up for them.

"Came any woman out of the Palazzo?" Edmund asked.

"None, my lord—nor anyone I did not know."

"Yet is the Mancini gone?"

"To hell where she came from. Good riddance, say I."

Giano had not seen that face. He could still smile as he sent the gondola moving along the canal.

Carlos began to cry. After all he was only a boy who had drunk deep of horror.

"Hush," Edmund told him, but Edmund himself wished he could weep too. Within his doublet the mask burned as though it were a live coal he had placed there.

"My life and death are in it, and who knows that they are not one," he thought, while he held the boy's hand, comforting him. At last the sobs quieted, and the boy's fingers relaxed their hold. For a little while I could feel them faintly—then I opened my eyes. . . .

**F**OURTEENTH century Venice was gone. I was back in the Grande Hotel in Florence, the belt around my waist, the pouch hanging at my side.

What had happened to Edmund? Had he married Juliet, or had the curse been too much for him? And Fiametta and Carlos—what of them? I longed to know the end of the story.

Sheila was still asleep. I looked at the clock; the hands marked nine. Surely the shop would be open. I slipped out of bed, gathered up my things and dressed in the bathroom.

I was in a hurry; we were leaving Florence at eleven-thirty. I had to pay the shopkeeper, find out the end of the story, and, above all, discover how I could get rid of this cursed thing.

In the bright light I looked closer at the bag. I fancied I could dimly see the outlines of a mouth upon it. Obviously Edmund had made the mask into the pouch-like bag when he found he had to always wear it.

The shop was open—the only one whose shutters were up. The shopkeeper let me in and his eyes searched my face.

"You have gone back into the past, young miss." It was half a statement, half a question.

"Yes, or dreamed. I have your money here, but first I must know—" "That is your right. You dreamed of Edmund, Lord of Ayour, and the Mancis—the first dream."

"Yes." I wasn't sure what he meant about the "first dream."

"How far did it take you?" The shopkeeper was eager.

"We had left the Mancis Palace, the boy Carlos was sobbing. What happened after that? Were Edmund and Juliet married?"

"Oh, yes. They lived happily too—the Ayours and the Gianchinis. But Edmund wore the belt until he died. When they robed him for burial, his son, unknowing, took off the belt, touching the bag, so he had to wear it. His experience is the second dream, or adventure—call it as you will. This book," he lifted an old manuscript bound in soft leather, "gives glimpses of the history of the mask which Edmund had made into a bag so he could carry it more easily. To know them fully, it states, one must sleep again—each night a different dream—"

So now I knew what he meant by the first dream.

**H**E WENT on. "I will read you a little. It was written by another Edmund three centuries later. Listen.

"Life, because of the curse, has become unbearable. So I have thought of a way

to spare the generations to come. We have tried many ways to rid us of the curse, we Ayours of the past. Once indeed we buried the bag on the man who died wearing it, but he walked again, though he was truly dead and the sight was horrible—a dead man who moved among the living—decomposition going on for humanity to see. Finally someone took the bag from that poor, tortured body and it knew rest. No one ever tried to bury the curse again.

"I have studied the records of the ages and found a way to save others misery, though it will cost me my life. But what does that matter? I am old and believe that death is but the opening of a door to greater wonders than earth holds. I have had a casket made and into it I shall put the pouch-like bag on the belt. I shall lock the casket and tie the key on this book and leave it, thus saving posterity.

"I shall die in agony, but, as I said before, I have lived well and do not mind. This warning I leave to anyone who is curious or daring enough to open the casket. Touch the belt if you like. That you can do safely, but remember, once you touch the mask from which the bag was made, it becomes your own. Wear it you must, until someone takes it from you, and that someone must truly desire it. For you cannot get rid of the bag by a trick. Sell it, if any wish to buy, for any price. But, oh, I beg of you who read this, let the casket be. Disturb not the mask, lest the curse of the Mancis fall upon you."

The shopkeeper stopped reading and handed me the book.

"This is yours. I should have given it to you yesterday, but you were young. I was afraid. I thought it better you know gradually. It goes with the belt and bag. You see, I read it before I opened the casket, so I did not touch the bag."

I took the book and gave the man his lire. He bowed low, thanking me.

Once again I left the shop in a daze. I had annexed the mask of the Mancis and the curse unknowingly, but I could pass it on. Sheila already coveted it. I could sell it to her.

But did I want to sell it? If I kept it, I would re-live each experience an owner of the mask had had—night after night a different story. The idea was fascinating, tempting.

Should I sell the pouch-like bag to Sheila or should I wait until I had had more adventures?

When I reached the Grande Hotel I still hadn't decided.

*Next Issue: ONE MAN'S HELL, a novelet by ELI COLTER*

# Ghost Knife

By BERNARD BRESLAUER

*Author of "He Who Spoke," "Mountain Justice," etc.*

**T**HE cell was not big enough for a man to lie down in. A man could sit, haunched, his knees drawn up beneath his chin, and for a few minutes give rest to bone and flesh. But then the stone would grow hard against the back

head and feet, with pain in between. Then the man would stand up.

If he was a tall man, he would have to stoop a little, since the cell's ceiling was less than six feet from the floor.

Willi Toler was standing. He was tall, and so stooped a little. It was cold. The season was late Autumn, but there was no heat.

Felons, murderers, had heat in the prisons of Germany, but the good Willi Toler, no murderer or felon, had none. For a concentration camp was different from an ordinary prison, and it was a concentration camp which housed the coffin-tomb which housed Willi Toler. Outside the camp's walls the last leaves were falling, and the wind made rustling music with them. Inside, the Nazi whip fell on the naked back and drew from a human chest and throat the familiar sequence of shriek, scream, moan, whimper, and at long last a low empty-eyed gibbering.

Willi Toler neither saw nor heard. He had once seen leaves falling—it seemed very long ago. The sight, he remembered, had made him both sad and glad—sad because things that once had flowered were dying, and glad because that death was but a presage of the coming spring.

No leaves fell within the camp's walls. There were no trees. There were only steel, masonry, guns, clubs, whips—and men. Two groups of men. Those who guarded and those who were guarded—the latter were the political prisoners, of whom Willi Toler was one.

He too had been beaten, but he



*Gessler looked like the very personification of death*

of the head, the head would tip forward to get away from the hardness—and the ache in the neck-muscles would begin, tolerable at first, unbearable soon.

The toes too, crushed back by the opposite wall, would know a tingle and then a burning, and finally pain, just pain—until the man was only a

*In a Coffin-Like Cell, a Victim of Grim Oppression  
Dares to Laugh at His Brutalized Captors!*

had made no sound. They wanted names, his captors—the names of those, who like him, had operated a printing press in a cellar, and circulated at night the leaflets and the pamphlets which informed the German people that cannon could not be eaten but that butter could, and told them in addition why they were being given cannon while the butter was being withheld from them.

**W**ILLI TOLER, standing in his cell, head bent a little, whispered to the spider.

Yes, he had the spider for company, and that was why he had not yielded to his first impulse to sweep the web away when he had first seen it. The spider had grown thinner in the last two days, but that was not strange—the web had grown larger. Willi Toler had grown thinner too, and that was not strange either.

"Spider," he whispered. "You spin and you spin. Why? You do not know. But I do. It is your nature to do so. But it is nature working merely on an instinctive level. You do not know, you simply *do*. But man—men—live on a higher level. Why, then, do they spin webs for each other, to ensnare each other and make one man's gain another man's pain?"

"Why am I captive and evil men free? Spider, you cannot tell me. It is because I tried to answer that question to others that I am thus confined while still alive. They seek the names of my friends. They think, in time, I shall tell them. And spider" . . . the whisper was hardly audible now . . . "I am afraid . . . I am afraid my tongue will wag. Strong as the spirit may be, my flesh cries out for surcease, my head for a pillow, my throat for cool water, my skin for warmth.

"All these they promise me, and I am afraid my tongue will escape my spirit, wag against my will, condemn my friends to this living death—the staunch Carl Hock, the good Paul Schiller. . . ."

The solid steel door of the cell had opened suddenly, and Willi Toler was jerked out of it by strong

hands. The spider kept spinning its web.

They prodded and pushed Willi Toler along the corridors and finally thrust him into a room already familiar to him. It was the room in which he had been questioned before. Its warmth smote him like a blow. He gasped. His cold flesh crawled inside his clothes, as though the warmth were a tangible thing and he could not get close enough to it.

"Well, Toler," the man seated at the table said harshly, "are you ready to give us the names of your fellow-conspirators?"

"No, *Herr Gessler*," Willi Toler said in a low voice. Within his heart, he prayed: "Please God, don't let me talk. Don't let me talk. Take my life. Show me a way to make them kill me, for then I will not be able to talk and betray. Show me a way. . . ."

"We already have one of the names, Toler—the name of Paul Schiller. Hah, that struck home, didn't it?"

"You did not get it from me." Willi Toler cried desperately. "You did not get it from me!"

"From you," Gessler said. "You talked to yourself. Remember?"

And Willi Toler remembered. Poor Paul. Doomed. Doomed by him. They would go for Paul, these men in brown shirts, bring him in. My God, it must not happen to the others!

**T**HE heaving of Willi Toler's chest subsided. He had found a way to make them kill him. He spat in Gessler's face!

Gessler's gun leaped out of its holster. Gessler looked like the very personification of death. Thank God! Now it would come! But Gessler did not shoot.

"Take him back to his coffin," Gessler snapped. "I know these fools and their spittle. This one was just dying to have me shoot him. Did you see him, you chaps, when I had my gun out and he thought I was going to shoot him? Eyes closed, actually looking happy. Can you beat that? Happy!"

"I am a happier man," Willi Toler

said softly, "a happier man in my cold tomb, Gessler, than you will ever be in the warmth of this room."

"Take him away!"

They took Willi Toler back to his cell, stood him up in it. As they thrust him in, he had to twist his head to avoid tearing the web which the spider was still spinning.

"They said I looked happy, spider," Willi Toler whispered. "That my face was the face of a happy man. Is it so now, spider, with the hate boiling inside of me—hate for myself for having given good Carl away. My face, which they called happy, feels all twisted and distorted, with hot eyes and fanged teeth. Was it my fault, spider, for whispering that name to myself? Is there a betrayer within me? Did I mean to betray, cloaking the betrayal under the pretext of talking to myself. Oh Paul, forgive me!"

"There is nothing to forgive," a voice said.

**W**ILLI TOLER'S head snapped back and banged the ceiling.

"What's that? Who spoke?"

"Willi, it is I—Paul."

"Where are you? I cannot see you? Did they bring you here already—"

"No, Willi—they did not bring me. When I heard the battering on my door, I knew what it meant. The fact that we were still at liberty meant that you had kept silent. I could not be sure that I would be as strong. So—with this knife—I killed myself. See, the blood is still on it. Take it, if you too have use for it—"

Willi Toler, as in a dream, saw a hand, palm upward, and a knife resting on it, dripping blood. This could not be! There was no room in this narrow coffin for anyone but himself, there was no room for another's hand and arm. Nevertheless Willi Toler reached out. It seemed to him that he reached out to the full length of his arm, yet no wall stopped him. And he took the knife, and raised it—raised it above his head!—and plunged it downward, heart-high, into his chest.

They found him standing up at a slight angle the next morning, his heels against the bottom of the facing wall, and his right hand, clenched as though having hold of something, pressed rigidly against his chest. There was nothing in the hand, there was no mark on him, but Willi Toler was dead.

When they brought the body to Herr Gessler, Gessler's face turned purple, then pale.

"Verdammdt!" he shouted. "We will never know who the others are now! Toler dead, Schiller a suicide by the knife—"

He stared down at the body, his chest heaving. The color came back to his cheeks, but something like fear and humiliation and anger and shame, all mixed together, made a kind of whirlpool in his eyes. His mouth opened to say something, then closed, opened again, closed. But something inside of him made him speak finally. Grudgingly, in low tones of wonder, the words forced from him, he muttered:

"He looks happy... the swine..."

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Magician-Sleuth, in the FIRST ISSUE of  
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## THE GHOST

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AT ALL STANDS

# Hound of the Haunted Trail

By GEORGE J. RAWLINS

*Author of "Twenty Drops of Blood," "The Ghost of Galena Mine," etc.*



*I started at the sight of him*

**H**OW did I know Neil Winthrope was murdered? I didn't—not at first. Like everybody else I thought his death accidental.

Yes, at the murder trail I testified that Neal's dog acted strangely, giving me a hunch. That was the truth. But if I'd told the whole truth, they'd have called me a liar—or questioned

*Like a Dim Specter From the Past, a Dog's Spirit Bays Its Fatal Requiem!*

my sanity! Anyway, the part left untold couldn't have altered the verdict.

You know what close friends Neal and I were.

"Jim Abbot," his wife used to say to me, "Neal loves you next to his fox hounds, and I come third!"

Maybe something to that! I admit we spent many a night out in the hills listening to the cry of the pack, when Neal should have been at home. But Mrs. Winthrope couldn't say it was my influence, for when I didn't go with him he went alone.

On those lone hunts he usually took only one dog, old War Cry—that lean, muscle-hard hound, his prize pack leader. War Cry's got a voice that would thrill a wooden man! Clear and mellow, as a bugle, and pitched just right to echo in these pine-clad hills. A frosty moonlight night with War Cry making music on the trail is something to dream about.

The dog was Neal's constant companion, the only one of the pack allowed the run of the house, and the way those two understood each other was positively uncanny! War Cry anticipated Neal's every thought. I used to tell Neal they practiced mind-reading!

Some dogs can get that way. For instance, that setter of mine, Susie Q. Sometimes when she's in my study I'll walk past my gun cabinet a dozen times, and she never flicks even a whisker.

But let me even think of taking a gun out of there and she's up and dancing before I move a muscle. How does she know? Sense? Instinct? Call it what you like, I think it's truly occult!

You see, Susie Q is down close to nature, without that shell of culture separating us humans from a lot of elemental truths. She needs no language to transmit thoughts. She does it directly by a natural art nearly lost to us in our vaunted civilization. Well, Neal and War Cry were like that.

On one of their lone hunts, Neal fell from that cliff and was killed.

Or should I say: "Neal was killed—and fell from the cliff?"

That fatal night War Cry came in before daylight. He raised so much commotion that Mrs. Winthrope got up. Neal hadn't returned. The dog kept acting strangely, and about

breakfast time Neal's wife sent for me.

I followed War Cry out into the hills. I could see Neal's tracks where he crossed the marsh in the meadow. Up through Wild Cat Gap the trail follows a narrow ledge around the mountain. At one place there's a straight drop of about forty feet down to the rocky creek bed.

**WAR CRY** didn't take the trail but followed the creek below it, and there I found poor Neal's broken body on the rocks. His skull was fractured and he'd been dead several hours.

Nothing suggested foul play. It seemed reasonable enough that a man might slip from that ledge at night. True, Neal had a few enemies. He had run off several moonshiners operating on his property. Hadn't put the law on them—just ordered them away.

But you know how strongly some of these mountain folk feel about things. I suggested this as a possible motive for murder, but with no evidence to support the charge the coroner returned a verdict of death by accident.

They buried poor Neal in the old Winthrope burial ground just over the hill from the house. His wife closed up the place and went back to her folks up North. She sold the hounds and the live stock, but War Cry she gave to me.

Neal's death went pretty hard with me. Also with War Cry. The poor fellow was a heart-broken dog. He refused to hunt, moped about the house all day. At night he would lie and look at me with those deep sad eyes of his until I couldn't stand it any longer. I'd go over and take his head between my hands and talk to him.

"There's nothing we can do about it, old fellow," I'd tell him sadly.

He'd whine, and lick my hand in appreciation. Then he'd draw away and look at me like there was something I could do! He'd get up and walk out on me—go straight for the Winthrope place and the old cemetery over the hill.



When the moon was bright and the night was still, I could hear his long-drawn howls floating down the valley, and I knew he was sitting by Neal's grave crying his heart out for his lost master.

Naturally, it got on my nerves. War Cry was like a ghost in the house, yet I didn't have the heart to make him stay outside. His eyes wouldn't let me. They haunted me. They made me feel I was failing him—him and Neal—in some deep obligation. They spoke of a strange and unknown thing I couldn't understand, that stood as a barrier between us.

Though docile and friendly in everyday matters, the dog seemed to resent my lack of comprehension. That barrier rose like a solid wall between us at any suggestion of intimacy. And always, it was his eyes.

Sometimes in my study when things had been quiet for hours, something would draw my head around. There would be War Cry, his eyes burning into mine. They pleaded with me, but the plea was unfathomable. They impelled to action—an action without direction. They accused, and I felt the sting of unknown guilt.

**O**CCASIONALLY Susie Q, my bird dog, crawled up beside my chair, roused me with a low growl. I'd turn, to meet War Cry's brooding gaze. And then I'd see Susie watching War Cry, her hair bristling along her spine. What did she see, beyond my human ken?

One night I was reading something about mental telepathy and thought transference. How our dependence on language had weakened our faculties for straight communion between mind and mind. How it is a natural faculty common to the lower animals and practiced by primitive peoples.

I've already told you War Cry made me feel I should do *something*. Was he trying to tell me *what* to do! I looked him straight in the eye until I almost hypnotized myself, but my poor dumb brain couldn't interpret his message.

Yes, I admit it seems laughable. I—Jim Abbot—trying mental telepathy with a fox hound! It's things like

that I omitted from my testimony at the trial. Imagine trying to put that over before a hick jury! Laughable or not, I *knew* that War Cry was trying to tell me something.

So I decided on an experiment. One evening just about dark, I put on my hunting clothes and boots, took the keys to the Winthrope place and with War Cry at my heels, I went over to the old house. I built a fire in the grate in Neal's trophy room, where we had spent many hours together.

While War Cry stood whining like a hound dog will, I dug out some of Neal's old hunting clothes from a chest in the corner. War Cry whimpered, trembled, buried his muzzle deep in the folds of the clothing. The sight and scent of them must have brought back an overwhelming flood of memories to the dog.

I dropped the clothes into Neal's favorite chair beside the fire. Then I pulled up the chair I usually occupied, settled myself and lit my pipe.

It was dark by now. Outside, the night shone clear and frosty with a full moon rising behind the hills. It was on just such a night that Neal had died.

The cheery fires in the grate held back the damp chill of the deserted house. Fantastic shadows flickered on the walls, from whence mounted trophies looked down on me in stolid silence. The fitful firelight played on antlered heads and glinted from eyes of glass.

My experiment was about to begin. If ever War Cry's brain and mine could talk to one another, I felt that this was the time, this the ideal setting.

War Cry crept up to Neal's chair, quivering. Tentatively he rested one forefoot on the clothing in the chair. Slowly the other foot came up beside it and he laid his head on outstretched paws. A thousand times I've seen him in exactly that position at Neal's knee. I reached over and gently stroked his shoulder, as Neal would do.

**H**E LOOKED up—not at me, but at an imaginary figure sitting in that chair! He stopped his quivering

and an unearthly contentment swam in his deep brown eyes. I swear I believe the dog saw Neal Winthrope!

I patted him again, and he came and lay down between the two chairs—Neal's and mine. For a long time I smoked in silence, gazing into the fire, trying to *think* of nothing, trying to *feel* what War Cry thought—trying to feel the presence of Neal, as War Cry felt it.

I don't know how long I sat there. You can think I slept, if you like. I cannot deny that possibility, though I have no recollection of sleeping.

After a while War Cry got up and stretched himself, yawned, the yawn ending in a whine. He went to Neal's chair and put his paws on it, and his tail thumped the floor. I didn't look at the chair. It seemed I couldn't look. But Neal Winthrope was sitting there! No, it was not imagination—he was there! I know it!

Then I heard Neal's voice. "How about it, old fellow?" he said to War Cry. "Want to go out after 'em to-night?"

Neal stood up. He walked across the room between me and the fire. He seemed not to notice me—and now War Cry no longer noticed me, either! I had the strange feeling that *I wasn't there!*

I saw and heard and knew—yet was not physically present. I was an unseen observer, having no part in the little play. Time and space placed my material self elsewhere. Neal was the reality—I the ghost!

Neal got his hunting coat and hat from the deer horns beside the door, put them on. He came back and stood a moment by the fire, like he'd forgotten something. He took his pipe and a can of tobacco from the mantel, slipped them into his pocket. I heard him shake a box of matches to see if it was filled.

While War Cry whined and scratched at the door, Neal picked up the hearth shovel and carefully banked the fire with ashes. That was like Neal. Wanted the room warm and comfortable when he returned. Even then, I wondered if this were the time he never would return. . . .

Going to the door, Neal spoke again

to War Cry and they went out together into the phosphorescent night. I followed them.

We went down through the dank meadow, War Cry trotting ahead and scouting the ground on either side. We crossed the marshy strip at the upper end and took the path toward Wild Cat Gap. I remember every little detail of that trip.

Here, Neal paused to let War Cry sniff out a scent that proved too old to follow. There, a rabbit flitted away like a wraith across the pasture. I even remember a dim light in old man Fletcher's house a little ways down in the hollow.

**N**EAR the Gap, War Cry struck a scent and gave tongue in that silver-clear bugle voice of his. The scent was cold but he ferreted it out methodically, his clarion notes ringing out at intervals in the still night. He worked up the creek bed into the Gap. Neal hesitated a moment, then took the upper trail along the cliff. He knew the fox would strike for high ground, and the upper level gave him an advantage.

Rounding the mountain along the rock ledge, we neared the fatal place where Neal—the flesh-and-blood Neal—had met his death, either on the trail or on the rocks below.

The moon had passed its zenith and the cliff stood shrouded in shadow. Still, there was light enough to see. Just above the trail a few stunted oaks clung to the cliff, their gnarled limbs and protruding roots reaching out like weird tentacles above us. As Neal passed beneath those oaks, suddenly I saw an arm and shoulder appear among the scant foliage.

The arm descended in a vicious swing, wielding some sort of club. The weapon caught Neal squarely behind the ear, and he fell from the cliff as a tree falls.

I saw little in that brief glimpse, yet there was something vaguely familiar about that arm and shoulder. Even in that deceptive light I caught the flash of a plaid shirt I remotely remembered. I knew that somewhere in my mind a name was associated with it!

That was all. The dream—if you could call it a dream—ended. . . .

Again I became conscious of sitting in the chair before the fire in Neal's trophy room. I stretched myself—shook my head to make sure I was awake. War Cry lay at my feet, apparently asleep. Neal's chair stood empty, except for the old hunting clothes exactly as I had placed them. I knew it was nearly morning by the moon shadow on the floor. The fire had died to smoldering embers. In the darkening room the trophy heads loomed grotesquely, wound in their veils of shadow. The deadening chill of the deserted house was creeping in upon me.

I know I am not a coward, yet my teeth began to chatter—and not from cold.

I had tried to read the record that War Cry's brain contained, but this was more than I anticipated.

"It was all a dream," I argued with myself. Was I a weakling, to take fright at a figment of my own imagination? I must have slept the long night through sitting in this chair, and naturally I dreamed about what was uppermost in my mind!

Even if I had made occult contact with the mind of the hound, it was still in the nature of a dream. Thus I reasoned, and the thought brought courage.

I picked up the poker to shake the dying fire into life again. And then I saw that the fire had not burned itself out. *It had been banked with ashes!*

**I** LOOKED about the familiar room, seeking confidence in my sanity. Could I have banked that fire? I knew I hadn't! Hurriedly, I got the fire to blazing. Its warmth and light would revive me.

Starting to leave for home, I noticed streaks of partially dried mud on War Cry's glossy flanks. Stooping down to examine the stuff, I found it was not the reddish clay the dog might have picked up along the path from my house to the Winthrope place, but black muck found only in that marshy strip where the meadow heads up into Wild Cat Gap!

Had War Cry been out while I sat here and slept?

The windows were closed. I stepped quickly to the door. It was securely fastened as I had left it. The room afforded no other exits. By what unknown agency—by what strange means—had the dog left the room, and then returned?

My brain refused the conflicting evidence of my senses. My taut nerves sang in my ears and I rushed from the house in near-panic!

On my way home in the half-light of dawn, I met old man Fletcher taking his cows to pasture.

"Hi, Jim," he called to me. "Didn't I hear ol' War Cry on the trail last night?"

"I guess you did," I replied, evading the enigma of that ghostly hunt.

So! Here was corroboration. War Cry *had* left that room during the night! Fletcher's testimony did not clarify the mystery, but rather confirmed it. Still, his simple statement substantiate—at least, in part—my own deductions.

I drew much needed strength from his verbal support.

"Reckon thar ain't no other dawg livin' with a voice like his," the old man went on. "First time I've heard him since Neal Winthrope got killed—'cept when he's howlin' up at the cemetery."

"Yes," I agreed, clinging a moment longer to the warmth of human companionship. "War Cry has refused to hunt ever since poor Neal died."

"Looks like both of you done a pretty good job of huntin' last night." His glance shifted from War Cry to my boots. "Must of been through the marsh up toward Wild Cat Gap."

My eyes followed the direction of his gaze. In utter consternation I saw that my boots—clean, the afternoon before—were thickly smeared with the same black muck which streaked War Cry's flanks! Muck from the marsh—still damp!

**I**T TOOK me several days to accept the unsolved riddles of that night. Then, my thoughts turned again to that arm and shoulder and the plaid shirt. Without warning, the

name came to me. Lew! Lewis Callahan!

Lew Callahan! One of the moonshiners Neal had dispossessed. The man had an unenviable record. I found he had left this part of the country immediately after Neal's death. People said he had a job on the docks in Norfolk.

I talked with the sheriff and the county attorney. I didn't tell them all I've told you. They considered my suspicions poorly founded, but had Lew apprehended and brought back for investigation.

We confronted Lew with War Cry. That friendly dog went wild with rage and we had to restrain him. Convincing evidence for me—but hardly conclusive in court. Then, for Lew's benefit, we started to reenact the scene as I described it. A deputy in a plaid shirt got in the tree to act Lew's part. I dressed in Neal's hunting clothes to impersonate him.

War Cry seemed to sense the play and went baying up the creek, true to form. When Lew saw the deputy in the tree lift his club as though to strike me from the cliff, he broke down and confessed. . . .

Well, they hanged Lew Callahan a few weeks later, just before sunrise. The night of the hanging I couldn't sleep. War Cry, too, was restless and went to the Winthrop cemetery earlier than usual.

I'd never heard him howl quite like that before. A note of grim satisfaction and something of triumph blended with the heartbreak. His requiem seemed to change to a mournful farewell.

War Cry came home just as the sun peeped up from behind the dewy hills. He didn't come in quietly as he always had before, to lie in melancholy silence on the floor. He came with a rush, head up and tail wagging!

His very manner bespoke self-confidence. No hint of reproach now beclouded his deep brown eyes. He came straight to me, and for the first time War Cry saluted me as an equal—as man to man!

\* \* \* \* \*

That was quite a long while ago. War Cry hasn't forgotten, but never once since then has he been back to the old cemetery over the hill. Sometimes of an evening while he sits with his paws on my knee, head stretched on those paws, we talk over the old times when Neal was with us—and War Cry's tail thumps on the floor.

He's *my* dog, now—the heart and soul of him—for the barrier between us was swept away when my bewildered efforts helped him tighten a hangman's noose.

Does he trail the fox again? Why, sir, there isn't a better fox hound in all of seven states!

## COMING SOON



PATH TO PERDITION, by John Clemons

TIME TO KILL, by Henry Kuttner

SPIDER WOMAN, by Maria Moravsky

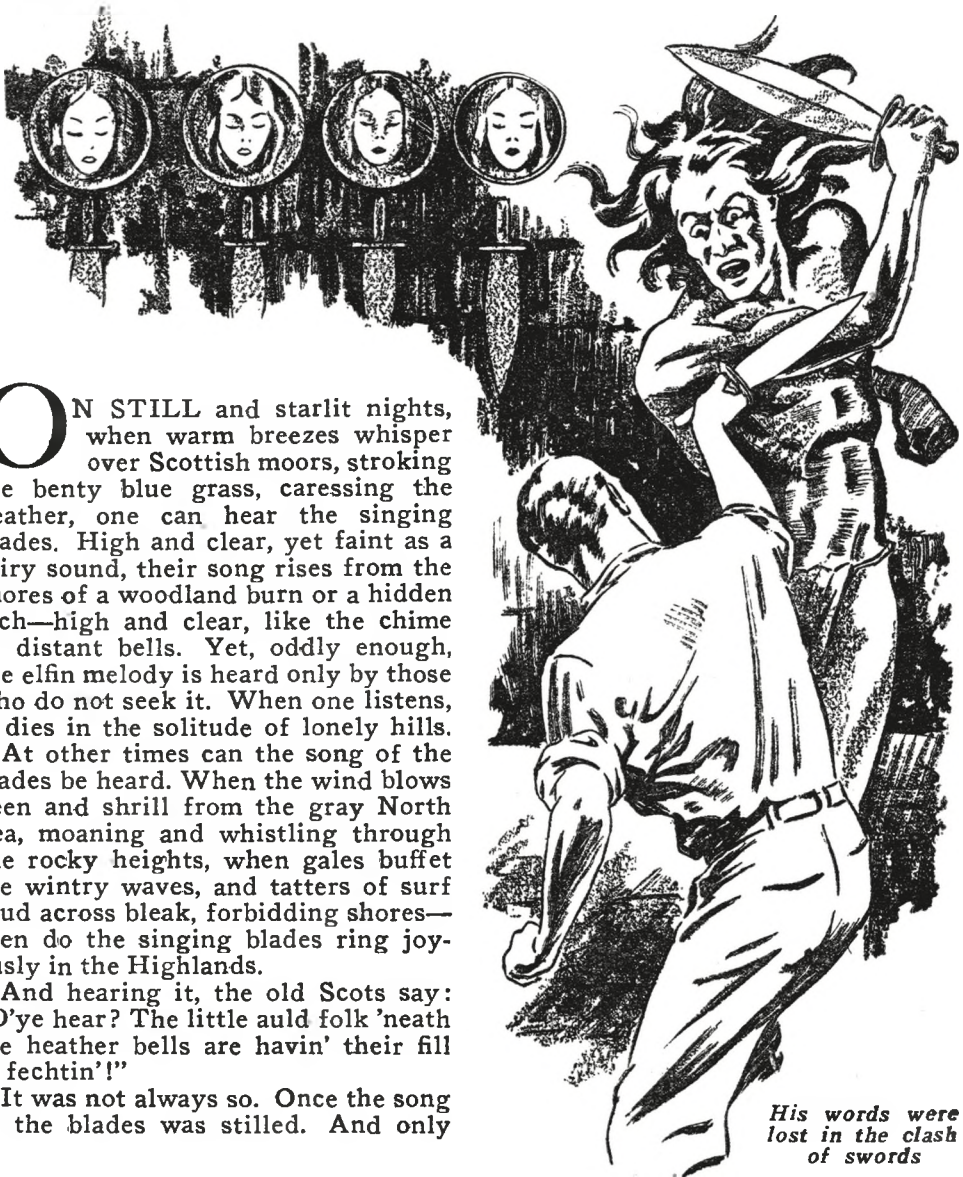
THE CAULDRON, by Lloyd Arthur Eshbach



# Singing Blades

By LLOYD ARTHUR ESHBACH

*Author of "The Time Conqueror," "The Meteor Minors," etc.*



**O**N STILL and starlit nights, when warm breezes whisper over Scottish moors, stroking the benty blue grass, caressing the heather, one can hear the singing blades. High and clear, yet faint as a fairy sound, their song rises from the shores of a woodland burn or a hidden loch—high and clear, like the chime of distant bells. Yet, oddly enough, the elfin melody is heard only by those who do not seek it. When one listens, it dies in the solitude of lonely hills.

At other times can the song of the blades be heard. When the wind blows keen and shrill from the gray North Sea, moaning and whistling through the rocky heights, when gales buffet the wintry waves, and tatters of surf scud across bleak, forbidding shores—then do the singing blades ring joyously in the Highlands.

And hearing it, the old Scots say: "D'ye hear? The little auld folk 'neath the heather bells are havin' their fill o' fechtin'!"

It was not always so. Once the song of the blades was stilled. And only

*His words were  
lost in the clash  
of swords*

*It Was the Need of the Little People That Brought Malcolm MacLoen  
Back to the Highlands to Use His Sword Again for Those He Loved!*

sound of the wind swept through the valleys and across the fens and marshes. Then Malcolm MacLoen came to Scotland, seeking ancient things. . . .

Malcolm MacLoen made his way through the utter quiet of the oak forest that fringed the blue expanse of Loch Naver. Perfume rose faintly to his nostrils from the water lilies in the marshy edge of the dark lochan. Now and again he heard the dim, plaintive cry of a distant curlew. But the thoughts of Malcolm MacLoen were not of the wood, the lilies, or the curlew; they were miles behind him in the castle where he had spent the night. He saw again the solemn-faced old caretaker, heard his somber words of warning as they parted.

"Ye're thinkin' o' wanderin' through yon black hills—so I heard ye tell the Laird. 'Tis yer ain business, but I'm thinkin' ye'll regret it." He shook his wizened head dolefully. "'Tis lonely amid Ben Klibreck—unco' lonely. Na mortal mon will ye find, na beastie nor bird will ye hear, save only the music o' hoot owls an' the chirpin' o' bats.

"Na, na, laddie— stay awa' frae Klibreck Hills. Ye'll find only heaps o' stone that the Pechties built, a bit o' bronze, the scattered bones o' a puir mon dead lang syne. An', perchance, ye'll meet some o' the little brown folk themsel', or the Sidhe, or the ghaist o' an auld Druid hauntin' the wood. Dinna ye go the way ye plan, laddie, for the deil is in yon hills, awaitin' fer sic as ye."

**M**ALCOLM MACLOEN scanned the gloomy heights of Ben Klibreck, the forest-cloaked hills that rose, humplike, from the southern shore of Loch Naver. He could well understand the superstitious fear that surrounded these dark hills. Their solitude, the gloom of their sunless forest aisles, the enigmatic stone ruins which were scattered across their slopes and hidden valleys—all were designed to awaken dread in Celtic or Gaelic minds.

Even he could sense the subtle spell of the stillness about him, could feel a weight, vaguely sinister, in the very air of the place. Yet, paradoxically,

there was something else—a feeling of familiarity and well-being—as one might feel upon returning to childhood scenes after long years of absence.

It was a strange feeling, for he knew definitely that never before had he seen the shores of blue Naver.

He and his father before him had been born and bred in America. A love for ancient things had led him to study archeology and ethnology. And his Scotch ancestry had urged him to peer behind the veil of Scotland's early life. A month of wandering had brought him to the foot of Ben Klibreck.

Malcolm saw a narrow, stony path leading up the hillside under the trees, and he followed it. It wound around moss-green boulders, into shadowed ravines, through clumps of thickest woodland—like an ancient stream bed, he thought.

Low-hanging branches caught at his curly black hair, whipped his slender frame, as though seeking to restrain him. As he penetrated deeper and deeper into the forest, Malcolm was thankful for the first time in his memory, for his small stature which, more than once, had been the despair of his tall, raw-boned, sandy-haired father.

He came at last to an ancient, mighty oak, greater than all its fellows, its trunk as thick as a dozen strong men, and he paused to rest beneath its wide, gnarled branches. Time had not been kind to the forest monarch. Storms and lightning blasts of uncounted centuries had shorn away its crown, had splintered its upper trunk, yet it stood undaunted, as eternal, almost, as the mountain which gave it life.

As Malcolm stood there scanning the forest with dark and deep-set eyes, that strange feeling of familiarity returned with overwhelming force.

*Once before he had stood in the shelter of this very tree, watching for savage, bearded men who crept stealthily through the forest. There had been fighting that day, joyous battle with sword and shield, arrow and bow. . . .*

Malcolm MacLoen shook his head impatiently. What nonsense was this! He'd been listening too long to sense-

less superstitions. Yet in spite of himself the thought persisted.

Almost angrily Malcolm started up the rocky path—then stopped short. To his left about three hundred yards, if his memory had not failed him, lay a fortress of stone. . . . Memory! What had memory to do with an idea so absurd? He scowled into the shadows that lay on every side. This persistent recurrence of pseudo-memories had become damned annoying. He'd have to snap out of it.

He hesitated. After all, he had no definite course mapped out, no plan that he must pursue. It wouldn't matter if he did turn aside from this rocky path—and if he failed to find the fort, his mind would be freed of its wild imaginings. With a shrug he cut across the hillside.

The ground rose gradually beneath him, climbing to form a little hump on the mountain slope. And as he pushed through a final barrier of trees and underbrush, his eyes widened, and the short hairs stiffened on the nape of his neck. On the crest of the hillock lay a circular wall of stone, an ancient fortress of a primitive race!

**F**OR an instant Malcolm MacLoen stood stock still, his mind filled with a great wonder and a feeling of unreality. Coincidence? It might be—but he didn't think it was. This fort was exactly like the one he had—remembered, save that this seemed older, marred by the touch of time.

Slowly he climbed over the rough stone barrier and stood in a round clearing on a carpet of peat-moss, thickly spread by centuries of growth. This was not as he recalled it. There had been smooth, flat stones underfoot, roughly fitted together, with earth-filled spaces between them. He frowned thoughtfully as hidden cords tugged at forgotten memories. . . .

*At the foot of yonder wall he had—he had buried his sword! Wounded, he had lain there awaiting capture or death, and had thrust his blade beneath a flat rock that it might not fall into enemy hands. . . .*

Scowling, Malcolm MacLoen stared around the fortress, his brain a battlefield for warring skepticism and un-

willing belief. Then abruptly he dropped to his knees at the base of the wall, and began to dig with his fingers in the layer of moss. It was deep—too deep for such digging.

He swung his pack from his back and brought out a little, pointed spade. He set to work with this, and in moments heard it rasp against rock. Impatiently, he dropped the tool and worked his fingertips into a narrow crevice. He felt them grip a rough edge of stone, and he gave a sudden, sharp upward heave, wrenching back a great slab of gray slate.

He crouched unmoving, while for an instant his heart seemed to stop, then it thudded against his ribs, and a strange, wild exultation leaped up within him. For there, in a matrix of black earth, lay his sword!

He stared at it with mixed emotions, examining it simultaneously with the eyes of an antiquarian, and with the gaze of this strange throwback who recognized the blade as his own. Despite its green patina of age, the bronze sword was a thing of beauty, a perfect piece of workmanship, double-edged, and small, almost, as a toy. Nothing could be finer than its simple symmetry. It expanded from the handle toward the center, then narrowed quickly to a long, sharp point. It resembled a leaf wrought in imperishable metal. But most unusual of all was its handle—a haft so short that no adult hand could hold it with comfort.

Once before he had seen a weapon like this; it had lain on plush in an Edinburgh museum. And even then, he recalled, he had sensed something vaguely familiar about the blade.

Malcolm grasped the bronze sword, and as he straightened, his mind and his sight seemed to blur. An instant of complete blankness, then . . .

*He spun to face the slope below the fort. A fog had risen—it had come up from the lake without hint or warning—and it would hide the accursed Goidel, creeping up the hillside, darting from tree to tree. Dimly he could see movement in the thick underbrush. Arrows sang past his ears, some speeding down the slope, others darting out of the mist and shadows and leaping*

*toward the fort. He had lost his bow, but none could pass his sword!*

*Now the Goidel charged! Out of the fog they came; he saw their blue-tinted bodies, their savage faces, their great swinging swords. They were giants, mighty thewed, brutish, twice the size of himself and his comrades. They must not pass the wall! Shouting, he sprang to the top of the barrier. . . .*

. . . And as the blurring of sight had come, so did it go. And Malcolm MacLoen realized suddenly that he stood upright upon the wall, the ancient sword raised high above his head! The mist had vanished, and of savage foemen there was no trace!

**W**EAKLY Malcolm dropped back within the fort. Lord—but that had seemed real. He felt his legs trembling with relaxing tension, and perspiration moistened the palms of his hands, his brow, and his upper lip. Striving to check the hammering of his pulse, he gazed out over the valley. Below him, serene as a landscape on canvas, stretched the Highland wilderness. Beyond, the sun glinted on the placid expanse of Loch Naver. All was peaceful save his own mind.

Had he actually experienced these things, been in this very spot, in some former existence? Reincarnation—was that the answer? How else account for these—memories, the finding of the sword?

He thought of the Celtic bard Taliessen, who had written: "I have been a light in a lantern a year and a half, I have been a bridge for passing over three-score rivers, I have been a director in battle, I have been a sword in the hand, I have been the string of a harp. There is nothing in which I have not been." Nor was Taliessen alone among the Celts in his beliefs. As a people they found spirits in trees, gods in stones, and mystery everywhere.

Absurd? How could he say so in the light of what had happened?

His gaze fixed itself on a huge boulder jutting from the slope below the fort, and a curious frown appeared on his face. In his vision the—the Goidel

had seemed to be giants, twice his size. Yet he had seen one passing that boulder, and his head had been lower than the top of the great stone—and the boulder was no more than six feet tall! How account for his lack of a sense of proportion? The vagary of a dream—or something beyond his present knowledge?

Still puzzled, Malcolm MacLoen turned away at last and continued up the side of Ben Klibreck, plunging deeper and deeper into the Highlands. The bronze sword, wiped clean of earth, dangled at his side, thrust within his belt. And, strangely, it gave him a feeling of security and confidence greater than he had ever known, as though it were a well of strength from which he could draw at will.

The sun hung low in the west when Malcolm MacLoen decided to camp for the night. He stopped in a little natural clearing on the bank of a nameless mountain stream: He built a fire and prepared a simple meal. After he had eaten, he sat with his back against a boulder and stared into the embers, his mind busy with the events of the day. And abruptly he realized that his hands, without conscious direction, were polishing his sword on the cloth of his coat—polishing with practiced touch, as though they had done it countless times before!

He heard a faint rumble of sound in the north, and he looked up. Darkness had crept over the eastern sky, deepening the shadows under the great trees. And a deeper darkness was rising out of the great North Sea.

After that initial roll of thunder a tense, dead silence fell. Malcolm listened with all his senses, alive to the gathering of Nature's forces. He heard the gentle splashing of the little stream; and there was no other sound. No breath of air stirred on the mountainside; the leaves of the oaks hung limp and heavy; no slender blade of grass moved. Even his own breathing slowed under the weight of a mounting tension. Then again from the north rumbled the faint, dull booming of thunder.

He saw, at the limit of his vision, a



low bush dip its head toward him, solemnly, like a page boy announcing an honored guest. Then a wave of rustling and sighing swept through all the forest; and the lull and frozen stillness fled before a cool wind. He heard the faint murmur and moan of the breeze, searching, like a grieving mother, in deep ravines and rocky crags and every dark and shadowed place.

**N**OW the bank of clouds swept hugely out of the north. It was a monstrous thing of angry purple and black, a bulging, mushrooming, lumbering thing, instinct with storm. It rolled ponderously across the sky, as though all the power of every wind of earth were pushing and piling behind it.

A serpent's tongue of lightning lashed out of the black mass in a momentary flare of light. As it died, there burst upon the slopes of Ben Klibreck a mighty, bursting blast of sound. It was like the sound of a gigantic boulder rolling and bounding down the mountainside, banging and booming from crag and rampart to vanish in the deeps of the distant valley.

Malcolm MacLoen leaped to his feet, aroused by the thunder from his sensuous enjoyment of the approaching storm. Once before he had weathered a Highland tempest without shelter, and it hadn't been pleasant. He glanced around for something that might protect him; and as clearly as though he saw it with his physical eyes, he pictured a great round stone tower higher on the mountain! . . . *Home of the Goidel—place of sorceries!* . . . Like a whisper, only half heard, the thought passed through his mind.

For an instant Malcolm hesitated. Should he trust these "memories"? Then a sudden recklessness swept over him, and he laughed joyously, without conscious reason. Why not? This knowledge of things that he could not know had not failed him thus far; he'd follow its guidance wherever it might lead him!

Quickly he stamped out his little fire, made up his pack, and flung it over his shoulder. And with his sword

at his side he started up the flank of the mountain.

A low roar rose all around him, and the oak leaves swished in the rising wind. There came gusts of greater violence, and at shortening intervals he felt sudden whirling currents of air that gave promise of mightier blasts to follow. The clouds sped to engulf the horizon, rolling swiftly, bending the tree tops, and twilight merged with a growing darkness. The last bit of blue sky yielded to the angry surf of cloud racing like a tide beyond Klibreck's peak, and black night enfolded the world.

Guided only by instinct and that uncanny memory of his, Malcolm MacLoen made his way through the forest. And at last, even as the first drops of rain spattered around him, he saw a square of light glimmering through the trees, and he came to the tower he had expected to find. A flash of lightning at that instant revealed it clearly, rising before him like a remnant of a Gothic castle.

It was circular, built on a broad base, and narrowing upward with a graceful curve. Malcolm had seen others of these structures—called by the old Scots "Pictish Towers"—but this was by far the largest, all of twenty-five feet broad at its base. Shelter—yet its smooth, windowless walls seemed fearsome and forbidding, awakening instinctive dread. . . . It seemed that he had known it and shunned it in an earlier day.

With a shrug Malcolm darted to the low, square doorway from which wavering light streamed. He reached it and was crouching to enter before it occurred to him to wonder at that light.

Someone lived within, or like him had sought shelter from the raging storm.

As he straightened inside the tower, Malcolm's gaze fell upon a log fire burning brightly in a stone fireplace set in the opposite wall. Its flickering light glinted ruddily upon a long row of leaf-shaped swords exactly like his own, and a row of small round shields, all of brightly polished bronze! He noted this in a single startled instant. Then he turned hastily as a faint foot-

fall slithered upon the smooth flagstone floor.

"Hello!" he exclaimed.

**A** SOMBER figure emerged from the shadows beside the doorway, leaving a crude stone table at which he had been sitting. He was extraordinarily tall, towering head and shoulders above Malcolm, and he was thin, a somber figure cowed in a robe of black. Fierce eyes, so bright as to seem burning, glared from a face of frosty pallor.

"Hello," Malcolm repeated. "Sorry to intrude, but I couldn't find any other shelter, so I dashed in here to get out of the storm."

He could hear the fury of the tempest outside, the infernal din of thunder, the keening, shrilling voice of the gale, muffled only by the thick stone wall. Then he realized that he had received no answer, that the tall man stood motionless, staring fixedly into his eyes with those fiery orbs.

For a long, uneasy moment Malcolm waited, then he said with an attempt at lightness:

"Maybe you don't understand English, so if you'll just give me a hint, I'll try to talk your language."

Still those strange eyes stared unwaveringly, and the tall figure did not stir. Only his shadow, a grotesque, misshapen thing cast by the flickering flames, moved with the rise and fall of the light. Malcolm's uneasiness gave way to dread as the moments passed. The man must be mad, utterly mad—and he wished now that he had remained out there in the wind and rain under the oak trees! From the corner of his eyes he glimpsed a long sword on the wall above the stone table, and he wondered what he'd do if the other decided to use it. . . .

And then the tall man spoke, his voice hoarse and throaty, as though it had not been used for a long, long time; and his words were in a tongue that Malcolm had never heard. Or had he? It had a strangely familiar ring, as though it were a language he should remember.

"Sorry," he said, "but that's all Greek to me."

The tall man spoke again, and Mal-

colm started. His words were Latin, but a Latin that was a living tongue, spoken as it must have been in ancient Rome, not stiff and mechanical as his own Latin must be.

"Who are you who comes to disturb Caermarthen, the last Druid? Know you not that men shun the gaze of a Druid's eye?"

"I am Malcolm MacLoen; and I am sorry if I have disturbed you," Malcolm answered. "If I may, I would remain until the storm has passed."

His thoughts raced. Caermarthen, the last Druid! He had heard of a book, *The Black Book of Caermarthen*, which had been written by a Druidic bard. But he had lived thirteen centuries ago. Druidism itself was dead. . . . Fervently he wished he were miles away, anywhere out of the reach of this madman. . . .

He thought wryly of the old caretaker's words: "The deil is in yon hills, awaitin' for sic as ye." He had spoken truth.

"You must leave," the self-styled Druid said in a voice as forbidding as the moan and rumble of the storm. "I want no visitors. Go now, or—" He stopped abruptly and thrust out a long, bony finger. His eyes glared redly. "The sword! The sword! You have found it!"

Involuntarily Malcolm stepped back, his fingers gripping the hilt of his weapon.

The white face thrust forward hungrily, and the strange eyes burned like living coals in shadowed sockets.

"For thirteen long centuries have I searched upon every hill and through every valley for that blade," he rasped triumphantly, "and now you have brought it to me!"

**M**ALCOLM'S dark eyes narrowed. He felt a tide of resentment sweeping through his mind. Who was this man who dared to claim his sword? One of the Goidel, he seemed. . . . *And was! He remembered him now—Caermarthen, chief of the blue-skinned marauders! Sorcerer was he, and enemy of the Sidhe—but never would he touch sword of Cinel Loarn, save to feel its point! . . .*

Malcolm shook his head dazedly.

Those were not his thoughts. But he kept his hand fixed upon the hilt of the little weapon.

"This is *my sword*," he said grimly, "and I plan to keep it."

The fiery eyes met his with savage intensity. There was Satanic wrath in their depths, a hint of something coldly calculating, a suggestion of furtive speculation.

"But I need it—it will complete my collection. Look!" He waved toward the wall above the fireplace.

Careful, *Cinel Loarn*, came the ghost of a warning thought.

Then Malcolm turned to gaze at the array of gleaming bronze he had seen upon entering the tower. In perfect alignment the bronze swords hung from their hilts, thirty or forty of them, like soldiers on parade. And

*you slept. Awaken—and smite this despoiler of the Sidhe!*

And with the voice, like a resistless tide, a personality swept up from the depths of memory, thrusting back and back the mind and consciousness of Malcolm MacLoen. . . . And he was *Cinel Loarn*, whom *Sidhe* and *Goidel* alike called the *Little Fox*. . . .

With calculating eyes he watched *Caermarthen* swaying, half-stunned, fury growing on his bony face. He had slipped from his long robe; and he stood revealed in the loin-cloth and sandals and blue tattooing of a *Goidel* chief.

Bellowing, he charged across the flagstones to his great sword on the wall above the table. He wrenched it down and whirled toward the *Little Fox*.

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above each hung a round bronze shield, only a foot across, and tooled with marvelous artistry into a thing of beauty. For every shield there was a sword—save one. Beneath the disc at the end of the long row gaped a vacant space.

He half turned again toward the tall man—and a pair of sinewy arms whipped around him, pinning his arms against his sides. Instinctively he dropped to one knee, reached up, and flung *Caermarthen* over his head. He was on his feet instantly, sword in hand, every muscle tensed.

Hot resentment flared within him. He had been tricked! This was not to be borne! He watched the tall man crawl erect; and an eagerness, a heady recklessness tingled within him. He heard a voice like the voice of another speaking within his own mind:

*Awaken, Cinel Loarn. Long have*

"Now shall you die," his thin lips writhed. "And you and your sword shall hang upon yonder wall!" His tongue was the tongue of the *Goidel*. And *Cinel Loarn* answered in the same guttural speech.

"Not so, Blue-skin! Never have ten *Goidel* been equal to one of the *Sidhe*."

His last words were lost in the clash of their swords and a ripping, crashing report that burst simultaneously in the world of storm outside. For moments they fought without hearing sound of smiting blade, with only bedlam of wind and thunder filling their ears. Then came a lull, and the ringing of bronze against bronze rose above the storm.

After the first moment of conflict, *Cinel Loarn* knew he would be fortunate indeed to conquer *Caermarthen*. The *Goidel* rushed in with sweeping cut which might have shorn his head

from his shoulders, with mighty lunges which would have cut him in two. He leaped back, out of reach—but he realized that he would have need of all his skill if he were to avoid that slashing edge. His own blade seemed pitifully small, little more than half the length of Caermarthen's weapon. Yet he smiled as he fought, leaping in, darting away, weaving a veil of singing bronze before the fiery eyes of the Goidel chief.

**B**ACK and forth Caermarthen moved, passing slowly to the right, circling about the Little Fox, seeking to penetrate his defense. Cinel Loarn gave ground steadily, keeping out of reach of that slashing blade, deflecting thrusts and lunges when they came too close. He watched every move of his assailant, seeking an opening.

And it came! A vicious swing carried the great blade far to the left, and before the Goidel could recover, Cinel Loarn leaped in. By a hair's breadth the tall man escaped the thrust as he reeled away; but the Little Fox followed so closely that he could not bring his great sword into play. And just inside the low doorway, where the rain drove in in slanting sheets, the other's sandal slipped on the wet stones, and the blade of Cinel Loarn bit into his shoulder! Caermarthen staggered and fell to the flagging.

Poised for the death thrust, the Little Fox heard a chorused sigh—a sigh that rose from the wall above the fireplace. A faint sound, like the whisper of oak leaves under a vagrant breeze, yet he heard it above the lashing of the wind and the drumming of the rain. He looked up at the swords and shields—and his blade sagged limp in his hand.

Where every sword hung was the shadowy form of a man of the Sidhe! And for every shield a wraithlike woman. And on every face was a look of pleading, of eagerness, and—hope—hope awakened by the blood!

Swords and men; shields and maids—they were as one. Had hung there long and long, bound within their weapons, imprisoned by the wizardry of Caermarthen! Red wrath welled

within Cinel Loarn, the hot blood pulsing in his temples. They were his brothers, his sisters—these Sidhe whom the Goidel sorcerer had chained! And one there alone, Ethne the Fair—she had been his mate! And Caermarthen had planned to hang him and his blade upon the wall—to complete his collection!

He whirled at a sound, whipping up his weapon barely in time to turn aside a savage blow of the Goidel. Then he leaped far back, again on the defensive. For a change had come over the tall man. Anger lurked in his red eyes, but it was cold, cold anger that made every sword stroke a threat of sudden death. And those strokes came swiftly, surely with a speed amazing for so long a blade.

Desperately now, Cinel Loarn kept away from that menacing point. His arm had lost some of its firmness, and his breath rasped in his throat. The greater size and strength of the Goidel were beginning to tell. The Little Fox tried to close in, but the sweeping cuts of the great blade drove him back, around and around the chamber.

Faintly now to the ears of Cinel Loarn came the whispers of the Sidhe, wailing, dread-filled: *Courage, Little Fox! Slay—slay swiftly! Remember your cunning, Little Fox!*

He could not answer, had no breath to answer.

Then he heard another voice, above the rest: *Slay for me, Little Fox! Long have I waited for your return—and now you have come. Slay for love, Little Fox!* The voice of Ethne the Fair. If he could but see her. . . .

Leaping away from the blade of Caermarthen, he cast the briefest of glances toward the long bronze shield; and he saw a shadow with scarlet lips, and long tresses spun of night clouds, and eyes that were shaded pools in a forest. And new strength flowed into his wearied limbs, new cunning awakened within his jaded mind.

A trick—there was a trick he had used in other conflicts with the Goidel. Strange that he had forgotten it. Retreat—still must he retreat—weakly, barely escaping thrust and lunge. Retreat, leading Caermarthen across the chamber. He sensed the stone table at

his back, felt it brush his hips—and his sword wavered. Left an opening for a sweeping downward stroke.

**H**E SAW it descending swiftly, but his lithe form was swifter, dropping toward the floor below the level of the tabletop! And the long sword, driven with all the strength of Caermarthen's arm, crashed against the stone slab!

A guttural Goidel curse burst from his lips as the weapon slipped from his nerveless grasp—a curse that died in a cough. For the blade of Cinel Loarn had leaped into his breast!

The Little Fox stepped back, his weapon stained with Goidel blood, his eyes on Caermarthen's pallid face, waiting. A momentary silence fell within the tower. Even the rush and roar of the tempest seemed hushed by the silent footfalls of death.

The fire died in the eyes of the Goidel chief. He swayed drunkenly. He looked at the blood gushing from the gaping hole in his chest, coursing down his blue-stained body. He looked at Cinel Loarn, curiously, wonderingly, as though face to face with a great mystery.

And then he laughed! It was not a pleasant sound. It was without mirth, hollow, ironic, clattering brazenly through the unnatural silence.

"Thirteen centuries," he muttered hoarsely. "Thirteen long centuries do I seek that accursed blade—and on the night I find it—it drinks my—blood!"

He tottered like a tree about to crash. His eyes glazed, but he did not fall. Cinel Loarn watched in horrified fascination, for a dreadful change was taking place in the long, lean

form. It seemed to shrink, to melt before his eyes. The features blurred—became formless—and that which had been Caermarthen sank into a mound of dust, obscuring his fallen sword.

Momentary vertigo seized Cinel Loarn, and he pressed an arm across his eyes. Memory seemed to fade in a dulling of his senses. Then dimly he heard a chorus of clanging and ringing as shields and swords rained from the wall. He heard voices, familiar voices of the Sidhe, an excited, joyous babble. He felt strange, heavy garments pressing upon him, loosely, as though cast over him by a careless hand. He opened his eyes.

Wonderingly he stepped out of the queerly cut apparel, large enough to be worn by one of the Goidel. Vaguely it seemed to him that once he had worn the strange things—but that could not be. He recalled threads of a dream in which he had been larger, fully twice his normal size—but what cared he for dreams?

Ethne the Fair stood before him, and there was a smile on her lips, and a warm light in her eyes. Gently his arm went around her—and he thought how good was life, and how sweet was love. . . .

. . . So now again, where had been solitude and silence, the singing blades can be heard in the Scottish Highlands. And, strangely, they can best be heard when the tips of the great oaks bend before a gale, when thunder drums roll sullenly over peak and valley, when lightning spears dart through lumbering cloud banks. It is almost as though they rejoice in storm, as though the tempest awakens them to new and joyful life.

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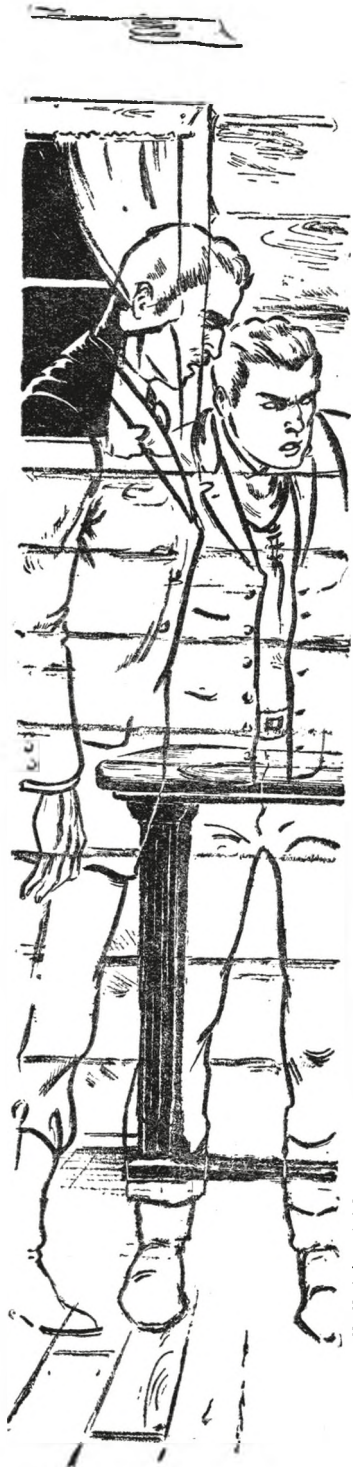
## WIZARD OF SCIENCE

FIRST ISSUE

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AT ALL STANDS

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*Mysterious wraiths were in the cabin*

# THE MAN FROM DARK VALLEY

By AUGUST W.  
DERLETH

*Author of "A Message for His Majesty,"  
"Eyes of the Serpent," etc.*

**A**S SOON as the jury returned the verdict acquitting Jim Everard of the killing of young Tom Burt, Burt's wife rose and left the courtroom.

Ira Perkins leaned over to Ken Haley and whispered to him in a voice audible almost all over the room.

"That jury's been fixed, or they're afraid of Jim Everard. He's guilty as hell, and everybody knows it!"

Both Perkins and Haley got up hastily and followed Mrs. Burt. Outside the building they stopped and spoke to her.

"If you don't mind, Mrs. Burt," Ira

*The Talons of Fate Strike  
With Ghastly Pain at the  
Throat of an Evil Killer!*



*Mrs. Burt had waited*

Perkins said, "we'd sorta like to know what you aim to do."

"I guess I'll stay here for a while," the frail woman replied.

Ira Perkins shuffled uneasily. "Fact is, Mrs. Burt, Jim Everard's pretty sure to try what he'd call evenin' up things between you and him. And you in that lonely cabin down the canyon just suits him fine."

"I thought of that," she said. "But I don't aim to move out for a while yet. I think I'll see Jim Everard myself one of these days and fix things with him. I'm waiting for—a man from Dark Valley yonder."

With that she turned abruptly and left them

"Queer woman," Haley commented. "What was the trouble between her and Jim Everard?"

Ira Perkins shrugged. "I don't put much stock in it, but Jim—he did. Them two, Tom and his wife, they believed in spirits. They sat around a table and talked to 'em. I don't take no stock in such goings-on, Ken, but by heck they found out some things at that!

"They talked a lot about something they called *estrels* or *astrals*, which was supposed to be a spirit from their own bodies, and they could send it out wherever they wanted it to go. Some people has queer ideas, and some people swallow 'em. I didn't. But Tom Burt was a mighty nice neighbor—disregardin' his ideas, of course."

Haley nodded. "And I suppose they found out something about young Bud Johnson's death?" he asked.

"Uh-huh!" replied Perkins. "They claimed one of them 'astrals' witnessed it. Tom, it was. They said Everard did it, and I gotta admit Everard was the only one who had any reason to put the kid out of the way. Tom claimed he saw it."

"And so he didn't live to tell it to a jury. That it?" asked Haley.

"That's it. Not that a jury'd have believed it, but I guess Jim didn't like the thought of it. So he got rid of Tom and fixed the jury."

Perkins paused for a long moment. "And right now I ain't feelin' that Mrs. Burt ought to be all alone in that

cabin. It's too easy for Jim Everard to get at her if he takes a notion to do it."

Ira Perkins stood looking speculatively after the dwindling figure of Mrs. Burt. Abruptly he turned to his companion.

"I'll tell you what—are you game to watch that house with me tonight?" he asked. "Say, until that man she's expecting from Dark Valley reaches her?"

Ken Haley hesitated a moment; then he nodded. "I'll do it."

**T**HERE was a light burning in the single western window of the Burt cabin in Lonesome Canyon.

"That's the direction of Dark Valley," Perkins said, looking off into the impenetrable darkness.

"Anybody coming into the canyon from that side will need a light," Haley observed after a bit.

The two of them were sitting on a ledge across the canyon from the Burt cabin. Not far behind them the dark forms of their horses moved in the night, and up above a few stars shone coldly in the cloudy sky. A chill wind was sweeping into the canyon from the prairies.

The hours passed in silence. Toward midnight the light in the cabin abruptly went out.

"She's going to bed," murmured Haley.

Even as he spoke, the door of the cabin swung open, and a figure appeared on the threshold, crossed over, and stood outside. In a moment, two more figures appeared behind it. The three of them stood for a brief instant in the wraithlike mist rising from the canyon. Then they turned and vanished in the darkness along the ridges into the depths of the canyon itself. They had started off on the trail toward the village.

"Well, I'm damned!" exclaimed Ira Perkins softly. "I never saw anyone go into that cabin."

"Neither did I," Haley said. "But they could've got there before we came."

Nodding thoughtfully, Ira Perkins agreed. Uneasiness came over him then suddenly. The two men looked

at each other, and their faces reflected their tension.

"Say!" Perkins exclaimed. "Suppose that wasn't Mrs. Burt and the man from Dark Valley! She didn't say anything about two men. Why, there were three people there! By God, maybe Everard had somebody waitin' for her before we came!"

Haley caught his breath.

"We can settle that in a hurry," he said presently. "We can go down there and see. Only I can't figure out why they waited this long, if that's the situation."

They mounted their horses and cut down into the canyon and across. Before the cabin door they pulled up and swung down off their mounts. Perkins reached the door first and knocked. There was no reply. He knocked again. Still there was no reply, and he pushed the door open on a dark interior. Behind him, Ken Haley struck a match.

They peered into the room, and in the wanly flickering light they saw Mrs. Burt sitting oddly at a table, her head lowered against her outflung arms. There was an unnatural stillness in her posture, and Perkins gasped sharply.

As the two of them entered the cabin, the match went out. Haley immediately lit another, sought and found the lamp—still in the west window—and lit it. Perkins went immediately to Mrs. Burt's side. He called softly, thinking she might be asleep, and then, having received no indication of awakening from her, shook her lightly. Then he came abruptly to his knees and stared into the woman's face.

**P**ERKINS turned a sick look toward Haley.

"She's dead, Ken," he said.

Haley came to his side, and together they bent over Mrs. Burt.

"What're you lookin' for?" asked Perkins.

"To see if she's been shot," replied Haley. "There's no wound on her."

For a moment the two men looked down in perplexity on the woman's body. Perkins broke the silence.

"Ken. I'll have to stav here. You

run into town and bring out the coroner. Tell him she's dead, and we don't know what killed her. Because someone must've killed her. I don't believe she put out that light."

The clatter of Haley's horse came back to Perkins in the cabin, presently was lost in the night's silence. Perkins sat for a long time without moving, no sound breaking the stillness save an occasional call from a burrowing owl somewhere beyond the cabin. An hour passed, and then from the other end of the canyon hoofbeats sounded.

At that moment the body of Mrs. Burt *moved!* Before Ira Perkins' horrified gaze, Mrs. Burt raised her head, slowly slid her arms from the surface of the table. In an instant her eyes met his.

"Hello, Ira," she said in a harsh voice.

Perkins was too frightened to speak at once. Then, realizing that it was Mrs. Burt indeed, and not her ghost, he found his tongue.

"My gosh, Mrs. Burt, we thought you was dead!"

Tom Burt's widow looked at him appraisingly for what seemed an endless time. Then she began to smile, and her voice became soft.

"You saw me here all this time, Ira?"

"For the last hour," he said. "And Ken Haley, too!"

"You could swear I was here, couldn't you, Ira?" she insisted.

The thought that the widow had gone mad under the strain of her husband's death and the freeing of his murderer came into Ira Perkins' mind, and he stiffened protectively.

"Sure, I could swear it," he said stoutly.

Mrs. Burt held up her hands and looked at them. "I won't have to leave the canyon now," she said.

Perkins was obviously uneasy. "The man from Dark Valley—" he began.

"He came. It was Tom. He brought Bud Johnson along."

Ira Perkins gulped. He was thankful for the growing sound of hoofbeats in the canyon. He said nothing.

"You wouldn't believe in astrals, would you, Ira?" Tom Burt's widow

(Concluded on page 126)



# DIRGE

By  
THORP McCLUSKY

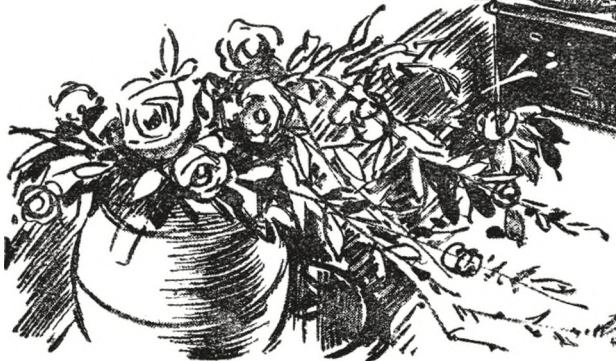
*Author of "The Phantom Sweatshop,"  
"Satan's Gunmen," etc.*

**I**T WAS in 1883. I remember the year very well because in that year Vladimir Lessoff won the gold medal for piano playing. I took second prize.

I remember; the snow was deep that winter, and it was cold. It was a mile from my room to Lessoff's. For days on end it was so cold that I only went from my classes straight home to practise, and even while practising I had to run back and forth from the piano to the stove like a madman. My fingers were like sticks half that winter, and perhaps that is why Vladimir won first prize. It was hotter in his house than in mine.

Sometimes for many days we did not go to see each other; we knew that our fingers would freeze like icicles before we had walked half the distance.

*There Was Music in Vladimir  
Lessoff's Soul—Music That  
Would Haunt Him  
to His Grave!*



*He sat down at  
the piano. "Mean-  
while," he said  
softly, "I remem-  
ber the piece!"*

On this warmer day, though, I walked to his house. It was about half-past four in the afternoon, and I knew that I would stay to eat, and on until late in the evening. So I was in no hurry, but walked slowly, watching the big rich *troikas* on the boulevards.

When I got to his house I climbed the stairs, two flights to his room and knocked. It was a big room in the front of the house. There is a bronze tablet on that house now, and the owners make a good thing of it, just showing his room to tourists—can you imagine! I had to knock loud, because he was practising octave jumps, and his tone was big, bigger than Rubenstein's, even in those days.

He came to the door and let me in and we sniffed at each other like a couple of dogs and he showed me a new octave exercise he had thought out. I tried it several times but could get no volume. It was a good exercise, though, and I resolved to practise it when I got home. I did not think the modulations were good, and I told Vladimir this, but he laughed and said that anyway the exercise was spectacular.

He was never, you understand, a composer.

After a little while he turned to me. "Do you know, Wilhelmj, that I have learned a new piece—a really astounding piece?"

I could see that he was anxious to play it to me, and so I merely said:

"What is it, then?"

**H**E looked mysterious. "Don't let Arensky hear of it," he said. "The piece is something very new. Sometimes I think that it is not music, but the work of the devil. You never heard such harmonies. They are harmonies that might have come from another world. And yet the piece is by a fellow with a prosaic enough name—Kline, Julian Kline. Is Kline an English name, Wilhelmj? It must be. I want to tour England next year, Wilhelmj. And the piece is dedicated to me!"

"My God!" I exclaimed. "How is it that this piece is dedicated to you? You are still a student—and you do

not even know the Englishman!" I was jealous.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I cannot answer that. Perhaps this Kline studied here—and admired my playing. Even then he had the conceit of the truly great artist. "I must write to him and thank him, eh, Wilhelmj?"

I was by then what you call green with jealousy. "Yes, you must, Vladimir, if it is true that this piece is dedicated to you. By the way, let me see it, that I may read the dedication with my own eyes!"

"But certainly," he replied, with evident satisfaction.

He crossed over to the piano. He took a pile of music from the lid and sorted down through it, as though he expected to find the piece near the top. But it was not there. Then he took another pile, and another, until he had gone all the way across the top of the piano. Then he dropped to his knees on the floor, and commenced searching through the music piled on the rug.

"It is here," he replied worriedly. "I was practising it today. Can someone have come in here and stolen it while I practised? You know that I am oblivious when I play, Wilhelmj. Was the door unlocked when you came?"

I began to laugh.

But he seemed very serious. Indeed, he insisted on searching in the hall and on looking in my pockets.

"This piece of Kline's must have wings," I said, laughing. "It must soar like a bird."

"No," he muttered, not realizing that I mocked him, "it is a dirge, a *marche funebre*."

"Come, come, Vladimir," I said, almost compelled to stuff my fingers in my mouth to keep from laughing, "what was the name of this dirge that was dedicated to you? Who was the publisher?"

He shut his eyes. "It had no name," he said slowly. "It was merely a dirge. Many composers are not giving their music names any more, Wilhelmj, you know that. And I cannot remember the publisher. Klindwo'— I do not know—"

"Your magnificent dirge," I said

sarcastically, "becomes merely a fantastic dream."

"No, you fool," he said savagely. "I remember the piece. I will write to Klindworth and learn who publishes it. I will send them the theme, so"—and he knocked out half a dozen notes with his forefinger. "They will send it to me."

"Ah!" I said, "but in the meantime—"

He sat down at the piano. "Meanwhile," he said softly, "I remember the piece!"

He began to play. . . .

It was music. It was slow as the drag of dead footsteps, and ponderous as the weight of many sins. And it was difficult. You know things like the B Minor Sonata, and the Don Juan Fantasie, and the big chords in Mazepa, and the modern pieces like the Godowsky transcriptions? It was harder than any of these. It was the hardest piece in the world, I think. I know that because, even today, there are but three men in the world who can play it as it should be played. But it was a piece built for Vladimir.

Such music! Chords that I had never heard before; chords that crawled and screamed, like the chords in Rachmaninoff's *Isle of the Dead*; chords that had no beginning and no ending and that were like the surge of death. . . .

He had stopped playing. "How do you like it?" he asked.

I abhorred it. I told him so. But he only smiled dreamily. "It is great music," he said. "It is too modern for you. It is the music of the future, Wilhelmj, my dusty friend—"

And so, shortly after, without staying for my supper, I went home.

**I** KNOW that he wrote to Klindworth, and to several other publishers. But none had heard of Julian Kline, or of his composition. Arensky, hearing Vladimir play it, refused to let him program the piece on his graduation recital. It was crazy music he told Vladimir.

Perhaps Arensky was jealous of this stranger—this Julian Kline?

That spring we separated. Vladimir toured and I remained on at the so-

ciety as a teacher. It was not until two years later that we met again. He had been in England.

"And I suppose that you have met Julian Kline, and have thanked him for dedicating his dirge to you?"

We were in my studio. He shook his head.

"There is no Julian Kline in England," he said slowly. "It is very strange. And what happened to the score?" He shook his head and stared somberly out the window.

Then he offered to play the dirge again for me. And again I listened to that terribly intricate, sobbing piece. When he had finished he said abruptly:

"In the fall I go to America. I will look there. In the meantime"—he handed me a rolled sheaf of manuscript—"you must keep this. It is beautiful music. I wrote it out from memory. You may want to practise it."

He smiled then, the smile of one who knows his technique already the greatest in the world.

I unrolled the manuscript. It was the manuscript of the dirge, with the composer's name accredited—Julian Kline. The dedication was at the right of the first page. At the end was the notation:

"Transcribed from memory by Vladimir Lessoff."

For fifty years, on and off, I have practised that piece. I have probably practised that piece an average of five hours a week, two hundred and fifty hours a year, maybe ten thousand hours in my lifetime.

In America Vladimir did not find the score of the dirge. Or in Australia, or, later, in New Zealand. Nowhere. You understand? Nowhere in the world was the publisher who had printed that piece, or the musician who had ever heard of Julian Kline. I was puzzled, even I who had at first laughed when the score had not been produced. There was something definitely peculiar about that score, about Vladimir's knowledge of it, about the composer who couldn't be found.

The years passed. Vladimir became rich and famous. He was a great pianist. That is his picture, and there

is another, and another. The walls are covered with pictures of him. He was my friend. Who were the world's great pianists? Ah, you answer, and you are right: Liszt, Rubenstein, Paderewski, and Vladimir Lessoff.

The war came, and the revolution, and Vladimir, who was already in America, paid my passage, helped me to find pupils, gave me of his money until I found myself in this strange country.

By this time we were no longer young men. Vladimir's hair was white while mine was iron-gray as you see it now. But Vladimir could play still, except for Paderewski he was the last of the giants.

When the young men, the men of your generation, play in Carnegie Hall I cannot hear them when the oak doors are shut, but when Vladimir played it was like a symphony orchestra. You could hear him out in the street, way down in the subway, even. There was never a pianist like Vladimir.

**A**S HE grew older, every year he would say to me, "Wilhelmj, my friend, this is my last tour, I shall retire."

He owned an estate in Switzerland, and I knew that he wanted to go there and rest. But every year he came back until he was past seventy. And then one year he didn't return. He did not even practise any more. He only played for his own pleasure, and he wrote me many letters. And in all of these letters he sang the same song. He asked me to come to Switzerland and visit him before he died.

Before he died, and him strong like a bull!

You know that, at last, I went. It is in his biographies that I was there—me! I closed my studio, I dismissed my pupils, I took boat and train to Switzerland. Vladimir came in his car to meet me at the station. He looked the picture of health.

"You do not look like one who is about to die, my friend," I told him, laughing.

He shook his head in agreement. "No, I cannot die now," he said seriously. "I feel that I am waiting for

something more; for something strange—"

"Well," I said, "you must play for me a great deal."

"Yes, I still love to play," he nodded.

We were very happy during those weeks that I was there. He played almost constantly, from early in the mornings until late afternoon, not practising at all, just playing, and I sat many hours a day listening to the fountains of sound gushing from his great black piano as his big hands swooped over it. He was my friend.

And then one day, when the sun was already an hour above the horizon, I did not hear his piano. Time went along. I breakfasted in my room, wrote my few letters, and still that big concert grand was silent. I was curious. I went downstairs.

He was sitting in an armchair close beside the piano, and on the long, upholstered piano bench lay a dozen, two dozen pieces of music that had come in the mail from a publisher in Paris. But that was not all the music. He held another score in his hands.

He did not seem to see me as I came across the room toward him; he did not answer my greeting. I looked at the music in his hands, and I saw that it was a dirge, for piano—written by Julian Kline!

My hands had begun to tremble, and in that instant Vladimir looked up and smiled. He handed me a letter that had come with the music. It was a note from the publisher, who knew Vladimir well. There was a brief biography of Kline—a very young American who had lived the greater part of his life in Paris. The dirge was his first big work.

I looked at Vladimir.

"You see?" he said, after a moment. He opened the music. I leaned over his shoulder and looked at it. Inside was the composer's name, exactly as Vladimir had placed it so many years ago, and on the right was the dedication, in that simple old style that has, regrettably, almost died out:

à M. Vladimir Lessoff

"My God!" I said.

(Continued on page 127)



By LUCIFER

*Famous Authority on Witchcraft and Superstition*

**M**YSTICS, mediums—men and women of strange occult sensitivity—seeing things with a spiritual eye as real as any scientific photograph—possessing the power to make their sensitivity believed by human beings in every corner of the Earth!

“Fantastic!” you say—but after all, what is fantasy? Science says it is the faculty of making mental images, often possessing some vague unity or continuity like that of a dream. Are dreams mere fantasy?

Do they not employ, quite often, some conscious force? Do they not impress the mind as reality? History proves that dreams are more than mere fancy.

They are part of the mental make-up of human existence. Perhaps some section of the brain, still undiscovered by psychologists, belongs to the dream realm. No doubt a higher frequency of conscious vibration—just as real as thought or vision.

#### *The Dividing Line*

The entire materialistic world of today is the result of dreams or fantasy.

Where, therefore, comes the dividing line between accepted fantasy and fact?

Fantasy today becomes fact tomorrow. History has proved this in thousands of cases.

Occult fantasy is not restricted to any one section of the world. No single nation has a monopoly.

Like human nature, occult sensitivity is international; for the psychic world is above man's vice and intolerance—and it gives its power to certain individuals in every nation of the world, regardless of race or creed.

#### *The Magic Number Seven*

Seven is a magic number in the occult universe. So let us pick seven international mystics from seven different sections of the Earth and allow them consideration. Some are dead, some are living—but life and death are merely matter of degree in psychic existence.

**F**IRST—France! What was the most outstanding moment in French history? Judging from France's greatest holiday—it was the Fall of the Bastille, July 14, 1789, when France shook off the slavery of ages and was born to life and liberty,

just thirteen years after our own Declaration of Independence.

But when we read of that tragic moment, seldom do we think of the man who was a prisoner in the Bastille—and who in addition to many marvelous feats of occultism and mystic healing, had correctly predicted the very moment the Bastille would fall.

That man was France's greatest psychic genius—the Prince of Mystery—Alexander, Count of Cagliostro. Dumas called him the greatest psychic of all time.

#### *A Famous Clairvoyant*

Cagliostro was still a young man when he grew to fame in Paris. His boyhood had been spent in the Orient. There he mastered the secrets of Africa, Asia and Egypt. He was an authority on the magic of the Pyramids.

Later in England he became hated by the gamblers because he could predict the winning numbers of lotteries and races.

His studio at No. 1 Rue St. Claude in Paris was frequented by the aristocrats of France. There he practiced medicine and clairvoyance.

Picture a strange seance. Six important people were invited. But there were thirteen chairs. Then Cagliostro asked each of the six to invite some dead person to attend the meeting. They did.

The lights were lowered. Strange sounds followed and then blasts of cold air. The lights were raised.

Every chair was occupied. The dead had arrived. They conversed with their friends as though they were living. The six living were convinced. All France knew of it the next day. The six were too important to be called liars.

It was only natural, therefore, that the

*(Continued on page 118)*

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(Continued from page 117)

famous Madame du Barry visited Cagliostro. She asked him about her future. He refused to answer. But having the power of the King within her palm, she ordered the Count to speak. He answered her not in words. He handed her a mirror.

She looked, then screamed and fainted. Afterwards when she had overcome her hysteria, she told that she had seen herself beneath the guillotine. Her head was lying in the basket before her. Years later she met her fate in that manner.

**Uncanny Predictions**

But the unrest of France soon overpowered Cagliostro. By remaining loyal to a friend, Prince Louis de Rohan, who was accused of embezzlement, the count was thrown into the Bastille. It was there he wrote his famous "Letter to the People of France" wherein he predicted the revolution and the fall of the Bastille to the very day.

Later he escaped to Italy, and then went to the Orient, where he was last reported. Many believed he went to some lamasery to live with the lamas and the real masters of the occult.

As one admirer said not so long ago: "perhaps he is still alive."

Two famous writers, one dead and one still living, have given Cagliostro great recognition, namely, Alexander Dumas and Sax Rohmer.

As one writer put it: "Cagliostro's glance was supernatural—his eyes were a blending of ice and flame. . ."

What was the secret of his power?

**An Italian Seeress**

**ITALY**—Eusapia Palladino, a woman! Recognized by celebrated scientists, including Madame Marie Curie and Sir Oliver Lodge, Palladino credited her power to a strange accident she had had when a child. Her head had been severely cut, leaving a cranial fissure out of which a chill breeze of air was found to blow during her seances. Perhaps nature had unwittingly given her a brain action still to be discovered by science. Fantasy today—but fact tomorrow?

Even as a young woman she was able to defy gravity by causing a heavy table to rise by just touching it. Then, as her mediumistic power became known, she traveled throughout the world. Finally she came to America as the guest of Dr. Hereward Carrington, the leading American investigator of psychic phenomena.

Although the press did not take kindly to her, she convinced Dr. Carrington of her genuine power. He called it more physical than mental.

As one investigator said: "If that power could be developed in human beings it would be possible for man to 'remove mountains' by mere touch."

Palladino could demonstrate her psychic strength in the daylight as well as dark.

#### Bewildered Scientists

Although she could neither read nor write, in a trance she spoke as a mental giant possessing the knowledge of all sciences. Unwittingly, she almost caused the death of a man when she placed her hand on his head while he was sitting on a chair. Immediately both man and chair rose high in the air. When she withdrew her hand, he crashed to the floor breaking the chair beneath him. He was severely hurt.

She died in 1918, after a life of bewildering scientists. Was Palladino an advance agent of mind-over-matter of the future? Who knows?

One thing certain, she utilized that part of her brain, which no human has ever brought into action before. Science will admit that much—and still admits that one half of the human brain space has never been used since creation. When will man be able to utilize all of it?

#### The Mad Monk of Russia

**R**USSIA—Gregory Rasputin! "The Mad Monk" as he was often called. Here was a healer of the sick but also a demon who one day benefited mankind, and the next gave himself to wickedness and sin.

Half devil, half god—saint and fiend incarnate. Such things were said of him. And he proved it. For lack of a better word, his enemies laid it all to hypnotism. But his power was more than that.

He carried his victims into a different world. Gave them first an ecstasy no man had ever known before—then left him writhing in pain. Rays shot from his eyes which affected one's sight and hearing. One would hear mad music and see images of torture, defying description, for there had been nothing similar on Earth or in the history of civilization.

What was it? Did this bearded monk have power to take a man or woman to a different existence?

Women were his victims as a rule. They gave him money and power. Never before had any man given them such fire of life! And through their help he became the real ruler of Russia.

The Czar became his victim when Rasputin cured the heir to the throne, something that doctors had called impossible. Thus, Rasputin brought his powers to the castle of the Czar. But were they evil powers? They must have been, for he and all those associated with him suffered a horrible fate—Satan's bill for those who play his music.

#### A Bavarian Woman of Mystery

**B**AVARIA—Therese Neumann! Here is a woman who died seven hundred times. Every Friday she suffered the torture of the Crucifixion. Her wounds

(Continued on page 120)



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(Continued from page 119)

opened and bled once a week—wounds like those made by spikes driven through Christ's hands by the Romans.

In Konnersreuth, Bavaria, this young woman was crucified by some mental power far beyond the knowledge of science.

The pain would have killed a normal person. Blood streamed down her face from the agony of the phenomenon. But still she lived on, dreading the approach of Friday, her day of torment.

As Henry Jordan, international correspondent, so ably put it:

"She lies on her bed . . . convulsions jerk her body in sudden attacks . . . the thin trickle of blood becomes a thick stream that pours down her waxen cheeks. She is living through the Passion, scene after scene, image after image, suffering what Christ suffered, brought on by her tremendous psychic sympathy for Jesus.

"Her body palpitates as though under the scourging of the Roman soldiers. Her back is bent as though bearing an invisible cross. Eight wounds open at the back of her head, bleeding profusely. Her face writhes in pain as with twitching fingers she desperately tries to pull out the invisible thorns. Now death seems imminent, her eyes stare upward, filled with strange light. Her body grows rigid, arched, her fingers clutching convulsively and then relaxed.

"Slowly wounds form first on her palms, then on her feet. The flesh breaks as if driven apart by penetrating spikes, blood spurting out in sudden gashes. Then there is a last spasmodic movement. Her head falls to the pillow and she appears as dead. Hours later she recovers. The wounds are gone. There only remains the weakness of a body having experienced a terrible dream."

**Soul Projection**

**ENGLAND**—C. W. Leadbeater! Here was an English clergyman who spent half of his life in India. There he contacted the Indian Mahatmas. He claimed they had the power of soul projection and could send their inner selves to distant planets or any part of the universe.

In one sense, Leadbeater was more of an investigator than a psychic, but admirers claim that this was his natural modesty which urged him never to take credit for the reports he made. They were his actual experiences, however, under Hindu influence and aid.

He will go down in history for his description of Mars. Not a scientist himself, he reported conditions on Mars that only the greatest of scientific investigators could comprehend.

Much has been written of Leadbeater's ability to project his inner self. He said he had been pledged to secrecy as to the method, but that any man could do it with proper application and knowledge. This seems to be selfishly held by the Hindus, and imparted to only a favored few—those who possess more than average psychic sensitivity.

Whether or not Leadbeater actually projected his soul to Mars, it is interesting to learn of conditions there—outlined as follows:

"A smaller planet more advanced in age. Contains a lesser number of inhabitants than the



Earth. People resemble Earth men but shorter and more stocky, with great chest capacity. Mars contains only one white race, resembling Norwegians. They dress in brilliant colors, both sexes wearing shapeless garments of cloth. They wear metal sandals. Garden like cities . . . many flowers . . . one language . . . use a telephone instrument recording spoken words on metal plates.

"They write in symbols like shorthand. Books are rolls of metal. Electricity is sole power. Similar animal life to Earth, but all domesticated, and used in agricultural work. Very little family life—government more socialistic. Under one ruler who divides world into great districts under a viceroy. Have overcome disease, most people living full age unless tired and thereby one wills death. Age limit about 100 years. No religion. A scientific materialism although a believer in a great unknown power who is respected as a father and a master of scientific knowledge.

"The temperature is semi-tropical, most people living near the huge canals. The country is level, no rain but irrigation from melting ices in arctic regions. The course of life is similar to average rural plane in England or America."

Did Leadbeater actually see Mars with his spiritual eye? Who knows? But millions believe he did. Descriptions of Mars as recorded in Hindu writing agree with his. The Mahatmas respected him as a white master. That in itself carries some weight.

#### A Mystic of the Far East

**F**AR EAST—Jacques Romano, now residing in America. Perhaps you have heard him over the radio at times. One who has interviewed him says there is French, English, Arabian and a touch of India in his talk and manners. He looks 45.

He is actually 75. According to doctors who have examined him, he has the skin, blood pressure and general body functions of a man of 25.

As a youth he was raised in a lamasery. He carries the personality of a master. He intends to return to his lamasery when he is 90 and then live to 150.

Before large audiences of laymen and doctors, he has stopped his heart and circulation. Has caused his stomach to cease digestion at will. He will eat food placed before him when in your house as a guest—but he will digest only that food he desires for his body. The other, including meat and bread, will not become blood.

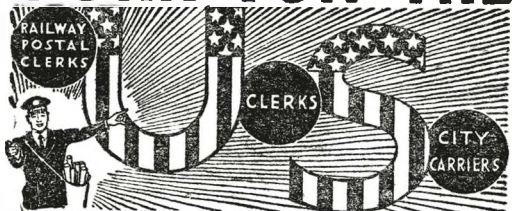
He can read your mind as though an open book, giving you descriptions of your parents or grandparents as far back as you care to have him go. He can cause a wound on his body to heal in several hours without any trace.

The American Medical Association admits the remarkable healing power of this man. He takes no money for mystic demonstrations. He is a chemist by profession. No one who has ever seen him or watched him perform, has ever doubted his mystic powers. He will not tell you the secret—but admits it is possible for all men.

He usually lectures before audiences of professional people and their friends—mainly doctors. Listen to him, and you

(Continued on page 122)

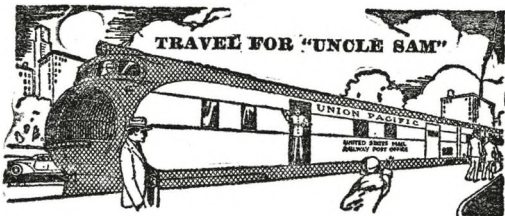
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(Continued from page 121)  
can say you have met a real international mystic. And you will feel his power.

A Famous American Medium  
**A**MERICA—Thomas John Kelly—of Buffalo. Once a coal miner—now the foremost medium in the world, the only one who has successfully foiled all traps and challenges set by magicians and newspaper men. As a young man he predicted the world war and that he would be wounded but return. His record of correct predictions is 100 percent. He became world famous when he solved the murder of a young woman in Ohio. Her death had been thought a suicide. But, one night, when Kelly was in a trance, he spoke with a woman's voice and said: "I died from a bullet wound, but it was not suicide."

It was through this mediumistic trance that justice triumphed, for had not this message come over, the police would not have investigated.

In a similar manner, Kelly solved a great kidnaping case. He has located lost articles. He has reunited long lost friends and relatives. He has made a group of magicians admit defeat in trying to outdo him. Blindfolded, he can walk and see with ease and pick up objects on demand as though his eyes were free. While he is in a trance, a strange whistling voice emanates from his chest. This has baffled the greatest scientists of today. It cannot be explained.

It seems to be some extra power generated by psychic influence either within his own brain or his sub-conscious mind. He admits he is not conscious of it.

Kelly claims that the real cosmic or astral consciousness of man never dies and that it has power to project itself whether a man is alive or dead. It dwells in an unanalyzed section of the brain while man is alive. Will this fantastic force today, become a recognized fact tomorrow? You may live to see it.

Mystics, mediums—men and women of strange occult sensitivity! Are they dreamers or super-scientists? Who are we to say?

—LUCIFER.

Announcing  
**THE BLACK ARTS CLUB**

**G**ATHER round, devotees of the Black Arts! Are you interested in the mysteries of the unknown? Are you fascinated by the lore of magic and the occult? Does the bizarre strike a responsive chord in your breast? Does your imagination soar? Of course it does! Otherwise you

wouldn't be reading **STRANGE STORIES**. We know you are interested in the hidden springs of human existence. That's why we are calling you to join our new club—a club formed as a meeting-place for all choice spirits who seek to penetrate the veil of life.

Become a **VOTARY** of the Black Arts! Simply fill out the coupon on Page 125 and mail it in. You will then be admitted to membership in **THE BLACK ARTS CLUB**, and a membership card will be duly mailed to you. It will mark you as a **VOTARY** of the inexplicable and profound elements that have interested seers and philosophers since antiquity.

But becoming a **VOTARY OF THE BLACK ARTS** will only be your first step. To go further in the organization, you will have to do more than merely sending in the coupon. If you write us a letter based upon a personal experience, or reporting an experience you have heard about and can vouch for, dealing with some phase of the Black Arts, you will be designated as a **MASTER OF THE BLACK ARTS**.

If not familiar with any such experience, you may write a letter dealing with some aspect of the mystic, occult, supernatural or psychic. Keep the letters short— not more than 200 words.

You may, if you wish, become a **MASTER OF THE BLACK ARTS** at once by complying with the above instructions. But if you are not as yet prepared, or want more time in which to prepare your contribution, become a **VOTARY OF THE BLACK ARTS** now merely by filling in the membership coupon. We'll be glad to promote you and send your **MASTER'S CARD** to you any time in the future.

**THE BLACK ARTS CLUB** hopes to win new friends for you. Friends who share your interests! For that reason we plan to stimulate the formation of local chapters, in various vicinities, which will meet regularly for discussion and study. Let us know if you can start such a chapter in your locality. We will grant a charter to any group of five or more **VOTARIES** and **MASTERS** of the Black Arts who agree to hold get-togethers.

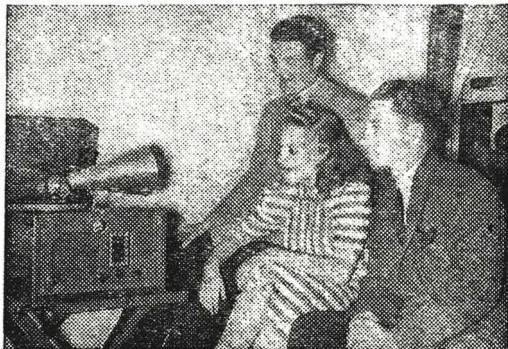
From time to time, there will be important announcements regarding activities. If at all feasible, we will arrange lectures to be given before various groups. Many prominent students of the occult have volunteered to be at the service of **THE BLACK ARTS CLUB** whenever and wherever called upon. So sign that coupon today—be one of the first **VOTARIES** of the club! We welcome one and all! A list of the earliest members joining will appear in a forthcoming issue.

So start in right now! We'll be waiting to hear from you!

Meanwhile, out of our recent batch of mail, we have many interesting letters pertaining to the magazine and its con-

(Continued on page 124)

## MAKE YOUR OWN RECORDS AT HOME



Charlie Barnet with Judy Ellington and Larry Taylor, vocalists in his band, listen to a record they just made with Home Recordo.

Now a new invention permits you to make a professional-like recording of your own singing, talking or instrument playing. Any one can quickly and easily make phonograph records and play them back at once. Record your voice or your friends' voices. If you play an instrument, you can make a record and you and your friends can hear it as often as you like. You can also record orchestras of favorite radio programs right off the air and replay them whenever you wish.

### Find Out If You Have Professional Talent

The movies . . . radio . . . stage in both Broadway and Hollywood are ever seeking new talent. Before spending money for an audition, make a "home record" of your voice or instrument and mail it to a reliable agency . . . you might be one of the lucky ones to find fame and success thru this easy method of bringing your talents before the proper authorities.

### IT'S LOTS OF FUN, TOO!

You'll get a real thrill out of home recording. Surprise your friends by letting them hear your voice as though it were broadcast. Record a snappy talking feature. Record jokes and you will become the life of the party. Great to help train your voice and to cultivate speech . . . nothing to practice . . . you start recording at once. No other mechanical or electrical devices needed. Everything necessary included. Nothing else to buy. Just sing, speak or play and **HOME RECORDO** unit which operates on any electric or old type phonograph will do the recording on special blank records we furnish. You can immediately play the record back as often as you wish. Make your home movie a talking picture with **HOME RECORDO**. Simply make the record while filming and play back while showing the picture.



THINK OF IT! I JUST MADE THIS RECORD WITH THE NEW HOME RECORDO!

IT'S WONDERFUL — AND SO SIMPLE — PLEASE LET ME MAKE A RECORD.

Yes, Bob, AND IT'S SURE SOUNDS LIKE YOUR VOICE!

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**LEARN IN 90 DAYS AT HOME**

Use spare time at home to master a profession which has made thousands of dollars for ambitious men and women. Many graduates have completed their training in three months but you can take your own time, it need not interfere with either work or pleasure. All instruction has been prepared by the teachers in our famous resident school—the same material is used and a DIPLOMA is awarded upon graduation.



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(Continued from page 123)

tents. We want you to continue to express your feelings about STRANGE STORIES. Your criticisms of the stories in the magazine are invaluable, and we expect you to keep up the good work.

First, we have a shrewd letter from a South American reader about legends of the western hemisphere:

Your recent publication of KAAPPI, THE GEIST OF THE JUNGLE, and HALF BULL, has given much encouragement to your correspondent's long-held hope that the writers of fantastic fiction might someday discover the potentialities of the legends of the western hemisphere as material for the writing of tales of the type featured in STRANGE STORIES. Unfortunately, very few of our writers have turned their attention to this vast mausoleum which is the desert west coast of South America. A. Hyatt Verrill, in his THE FLYING HEAD, is a welcome exception.

The writer's interest in such tales stems partly from the fact that ancient burials are to be found not fifteen minutes' walk from where this is being written, while unnamed ruins which antedate the Incan Empire crown all the hilltops roundabout. Dr. Verrill seems to be the only one who combines literary ability with interest in these ancient remains amid which we live. Let us petition great Pachacamac that he concede a thousand years to Dr. Verrill and that he command that Dr. Verrill give us a thousand tales from his understanding Pen.

What antiquary can fail to be interested in your projected Black Arts Club? Should qualifying experiences be necessary for membership, it is hoped that the writer's CASE OF THE EMBROIDERED SCORPION may be sufficient. This tale is not imaginary—a witness can be produced if needed—and may prove of interest to others who cannot wholly disbelieve THE WEREWOLVES OF TARMATAMBO and THE GREEN STONE RING OF LESLIE WINTERS may possibly be acceptable as further authentic experiences en-titling your Antiquary correspondent to membership in the Club.

May the protection of Kon and of great Viracocha fall upon you, fellow followers of the gleam!

Misti Selkirk.

La Oroya, Peru, South America.

Many thanks to Antiquary Selkirk for his kind comments and suggestions. And we're sure that the readers of STRANGE STORIES will be as anxious as we are to read about the intriguing experiences mentioned.

Here's a letter from a reader who really wants to make the Black Arts a hobby:

I have been interested in the psychic for a number of years. Do you think it is possible to make a vocation out of this unusual subject? I would like to specialize in haunted houses, but I don't see how I could make a living from it.

Do you know of a Psychic Investigator or school where I could learn the fundamentals? Please tell me what you think. I would like to add that I certainly enjoy your Lucifer articles.

Sydney Chester.

Los Angeles, Calif.

Mysticism should be an avocation, not a vocation for money. Where money is involved there is a temptation not to be sincere but expedient. In other words, money and mysticism do not mix. The more money-mad a mystic gets, the lesser his power grows.

Consequently, there is no school or professional institution on mysticism. One has to learn by investigation, research, and personal application. The thing to do, if you wish, is to make yourself an authority on

the subject, perhaps specialize in haunted houses in your section of the country. Then you may get a chance to report your experiences in your local newspaper, which would pay you of course for your time.

And now from a reader interested in the famous Cheiro:

I saw in the December issue of STRANGE STORIES that Cheiro, the famous seer, wrote many books. Would you please give me a list of them? And would you tell me the name of some occult club in my vicinity?

Walter Huette.

Huntington, W. Va.

Cheiro's books, published by the London Publishing Company, 62 Oxford St., London, W. 1, England, include:

- Cheiro's World Predictions.
- Cheiro's Read Your Past, Present and Future.
- Cheiro's Book of Numbers.
- Cheiro's Guide to the Hand.
- Cheiro's Language of the Hand.
- Cheiro's When Were You Born?
- Cheiro's Life, Love and Marriage.

As for an occult club, how about the Black Arts Club? We are not familiar with any club in your vicinity.

Another reader interested in Cheiro has a complaint to make:

Being very much interested in psychics and predictions, I wrote to the London Publishing Co., in North Hollywood, Calif., as suggested in your Lucifer department, but my letter was returned unopened. Reason—removed, address unknown.

Can you tell me where I could secure a copy of Cheiro's World Predictions? There are several of us who would like a copy of it.

Frank A. Ruth.

Frackville, Pa.

We're sorry to hear that the London Publishing Co.'s American office has closed. Perhaps the war may have something to do with the situation. At any rate, we advise that you contact the home office in London, address given above.

(Concluded on page 126)

**THE BLACK ARTS CLUB**  
Strange Stories Magazine,  
22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y.

I am hereby applying for membership in THE BLACK ARTS CLUB. I am a regular reader of STRANGE STORIES, interested in the occult, and am enrolling as a

VOTARY  MASTER

(Check one. If the latter, enclose a letter of 200 words or less on some phase of the Black Arts.)

Name .....

Address .....

City..... State.....

If you desire a membership card, please enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope.

2-40

Use U. S. stamps only.



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Be a Taxidermist. Double your hunting fun. We teach you at Home. Mount Birds, Animals, Pets, common specimens. Save your hunting trophies; decorate home and den. Make genuine KROME LEATHER, tan and make up furs for sparetime profit.

48 pages - tells all about it. **FREE BOOK** Now Free. Send post card. State your AGE, NORTHWESTERN SCHOOL OF TAXIDERMY  
Dept. 4172 Omaha, Nebraska

## WHY MEN GO BALD

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**PILES: Misery GOES**

2,000 TEST CASES PROVE IT!

Startling as it may seem, Only One 10-Minute Treatment was required in the majority of cases. **TRY IT AT MY RISK.** No Salves, Suppositories, Pills or Operation. Actual facts. Proof and testimony from prominent people in my community to PROVE these claims sent FREE to you. Write to **O. E. HENSPIETER, 100 W. Chicago Av., Dept. A61, CHICAGO, ILL.**

## FREE SAMPLES OF REMARKABLE TREATMENT FOR Stomach Ulcers

Due to Gastric Hyperacidity



H. H. Bromley, of Shelburne, Vt., writes: "I suffered for 10 years with acid-stomach trouble. Doctors all told me I had ulcers and would have to diet the rest of my life. Before taking your treatment I weighed 143 pounds and could eat nothing but soft foods and milk. Now, after taking Von's Tablets, I weigh 171 pounds, can eat almost anything and feel perfectly well." If you suffer from indigestion, gastritis, heartburn, bloating or any other stomach trouble due to gastric hyperacidity, you too, should try Von's for prompt relief. Send for FREE Samples of this wonderful treatment and details of guaranteed trial offer. Instructive Booklet is included. Write **PHILADELPHIA VON CO., DEPT. 878-F, Fox Building, Philadelphia, Pa.**

(Concluded from page 125)

A note of thanks comes to us from a reader who likes his **STRANGE STORIES** undiluted:

I am glad to note that you intend to keep Scientifiction in most cases from **STRANGE STORIES**. I think your companion magazines (**THRILLING WONDER STORIES**, **STARTLING STORIES**, and **CAPTAIN FUTURE**) are entirely capable of handling that department.

Not only do I highly approve of a Black Arts Club, but I should also like to become an active member. Thanks for listing the books on the subject of Black Arts. I suggest you list a few more from time to time. I'm sure that quite a few readers would be glad to get them.

I'm rooting for your magazine and this department.

Thomas Johnston.

Arlington, Mass.

Thanks to you all for those swell letters. We'll get around to publishing more of them from time to time. Meanwhile—keep them rolling in. *Au revoir*.

—THE EDITOR.

## THE MAN FROM DARK VALLEY

(Concluded from page 112)

went on. Again she held up her hands. "You wouldn't say I had very strong fingers, would you, Ira?"

Since she looked at him as if expecting him to answer, Perkins was forced to agree.

"No, Mrs. Burt."

Even now he heard Ken Haley dismounting outside. Haley was alone. He had not brought the coroner.

**T**HE door came open. Haley, meeting Ira Perkins' eyes, gasped.

"Ira—Jim Everard's been killed! He was abed, and he was choked to death. Looks like three persons done it, but nobody saw anything."

Mrs. Burt began to laugh, startling Haley.

"Nobody saw anything when Bud Johnson and Tom were killed, either," she said.

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**THRILLING WONDER STORIES**

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**CAPTAIN FUTURE**

Each **15¢** AT ALL STANDS

## DIRGE

(Continued from page 116)

Thoughts flooded my brain—confused thoughts that did not make sense. Vladimir was smiling.

After a little while he said quietly, "It is the sign. I am going to die."

I felt afraid, but I would not let him see it. "That is nonsense," I said. "You will live a great many years."

"I will not live a week," he said gently. "It is the sign." Suddenly he stood up. "But first I would like to see this young man, this Kline, whose music I have played to myself for so many years. I will telegraph to Paris, and we shall see—"

Can you imagine how Kline felt when he received Lessoff's invitation? He was hardly more than a student, remember. Why, he rushed down across France as though in pursuit of Heaven itself! I met him at the station. Even then Vladimir had become enervated. For twenty-four hours he had just sat and sat, smiling and saying nothing.

(Continued on page 128)

## WANTED 1,000 MEN!

Be a U. S. Post Office Clerk  
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Salary \$1,700-\$2,300 per Year! Pensions!  
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We are willing to give you this course with the understanding that you are to pay the \$30 cost for the Course ONLY AFTER YOU ARE APPOINTED AND WORKING.

Use coupon below if you meet following requirements: American citizen. Age 18 to 45 years, weight 125 lbs. or over, height 5 ft. 4 inches or over.

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Please send me the full particulars of your 10-lesson course which you are offering to 1,000 men. I am not to pay for the course until I am appointed and working. I am interested in (check box):

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Earns Living From Writing  
10 Months After Starting  
Course.

"I am able to live on the money I earn by writing and it is not yet ten months since I began the course! Until a few months after beginning study with you I had never had a line published. What more can I say for a course which has enabled me to earn a livelihood by the most congenial work I have ever done."

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Box 95, Lisbon, N. D.

HAVE you ever tried? Have you ever attempted even the least bit of training, under competent guidance?

Or have you been sitting back, as it is so easy to do, waiting for the day to come some time when you will awaken, all of a sudden, to the discovery "I am a writer"?

If the latter course is the one of your choosing, you probably never will write. Lawyers must be law clerks. Engineers must be draftsmen. We all know that, in our times, the egg does come before the chicken.

It is seldom that any one becomes a writer until he (or she) has been writing for some time. That is why so many authors and writers spring up out of the newspaper business. The day-to-day necessity of writing—of gathering material about which to write—develops their talent, their insight, their background and their confidence as nothing else could.

That is why the Newspaper Institute of America bases its writing instruction on journalism—continuous writing—the training that has produced so many successful authors.

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NEWSPAPER Institute training is based on the New York Copy-Desk Method. It starts and keeps you writing in your own home, on your own time. Week 1 week you receive actual assignments, just as if you were right at work on a great metropolitan daily. Your writing is individually corrected and constructively criticized by veteran editors. You will find that (instead of vainly trying to copy some one else's writing tricks) you are rapidly developing your own distinctive, self-flavored style—undergoing an experience that has a thrill to it and which, at the same time develops in you the power to make your feelings articulate.

Many people who should be writing become awestruck by fabulous stories about millionaire authors and give little thought to the \$25, \$50 and \$100 or more that can often be earned for material that takes little time to write—stories, articles on business, fads, travels, sports, recipes—things that can easily be turned out in leisure hours, and often on the impulse of the moment.

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STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933, of Strange Stories, published bi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1939. State of New York ) ss. County of New York }

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared H. L. Herbert, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of Strange Stories, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager, are:

Publisher, Better Publications, Inc., 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y.; Editor, None; Managing Editor, None; Business Manager, H. L. Herbert, 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Better Publications, Inc., 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y.; N. L. Pines, 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are none.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds or other securities than as so stated by him.

H. L. HERBERT, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 3rd day of October, 1939. Eugene Wechsler, Notary Public. My commission expires March 30, 1941.

(Continued from page 127)

Kline almost cried when he met Vladimir. He had heard Vladimir, of course, many times, but had never come closer to him than the footlights. And here he was in Vladimir's house!

HE was young, that American boy. He was so young that I couldn't make up my mind whether or not he had ever shaved. He showed Vladimir some of his compositions. Some were terrible, and some were good, and some were really good, but not one was one-twentieth as good as the dirge.

"I know that it is the best," he cried, both distressed and pleased. "I am going to rewrite it for full orchestra."

Lessoff leaned forward. "So?" he asked. "Then I am going to ask a favor of you. I have not long to live—"

"Oh, yes!" the youth cried. "You will live many years!"

Vladimir stubbornly shook his head. "I have not long to live," he repeated. "And they will give me a great funeral. I shall leave instructions that you are to conduct at that—affair. No, not all the music—just one piece, your dirge. I want it played last of all, at the grave."

The young man looked frightened. He could not believe that Lessoff was serious. Vladimir had to speak to him sharply.

"You will do this for me? You agree?"

Frightened still, and looking ready to cry, the boy nodded.

Then Lessoff got up and went to the piano. "I am going to play this piece for you, as I feel that it should be played. If you think that my interpretation is at fault, correct me."

The greatest pianist in the world, asking advice from a beardless boy!

Lessoff played. He played as well as any man in the world ever played before him. I can say no more than that.

His playing, that afternoon, transcended all the playing he had ever done before as the stars transcend the light of candles.



The lad must have known, then, that God was coming for Lessoff, that Lessoff's days were numbered. For when Lessoff had finished, had closed the piano, he said nothing, to us—but his lips moved, as though he prayed.

Lessoff sent me away, then, and I went out into the end of the day and looked at the snow on the mountains and watched the sun set. And in an hour or two Lessoff sent for me and I came back into the house.

The lad had gone.

"You see?" Vladimir said then, again. His eyes were wise, his tone affectionate as his hand clasped my shoulder. "My friend, my second-prize winner."

Two days later he died, very peacefully and quietly, in his sleep. He had not even had in a doctor.

**T**HEY gave him what you call a spectacular funeral. The whole world of music was there. And a dozen princes, and ambassadors and dignitaries, and two kings. A monster symphony orchestra played. And Julian Kline conducted his dirge. It was the first time it had ever been played in public, either as a piano solo or as a symphonic transcription. . .

You ask of Julian Kline? But why? You know that the world premiere of his first symphony takes place tomorrow night. Those who have seen the score say that it is great music, greater even than his dirge. I do not know.

Tomorrow night I will know.

But as I wait I wonder what Lessoff said to that boy that day as I walked in the Alpine grass and watched the sun redly setting into the eternal snow. I wonder if he told him about the score that Vladimir's mind had conjured up years before—conjured up out of the distant future so vividly that he had been certain the score had actually existed?

There was no doubt in Vladimir Lessoff's mind—and there is none in mine—that by some strange manifestation of fate, he had, as a youth, been granted the privilege of knowing the dirge that would some day be so imposingly linked with his death.

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28x4.75-20		2.45	1.20	30x4.75-20	3.25	1.35	30x8 1/2	3.95	1.75
28x5.00-19		2.85	1.25	30x5.00-19	3.25	1.35			
28x5.00-20		2.85	1.25						
28x5.17		2.90	1.30						
28x5.25-18		2.90	1.30						
28x5.25-19		2.95	1.35						
28x5.25-20		2.95	1.35						
31x5.25-21		3.25	1.35						
31x5.50-20		3.50	1.40						
31x5.50-19		3.35	1.40						
31x5.50-18		3.35	1.40						
31x5.50-17		3.35	1.40						
30x6.00-18		2.40	1.40						
31x6.00-19		3.40	1.45						
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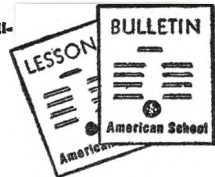
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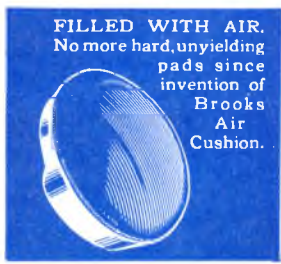
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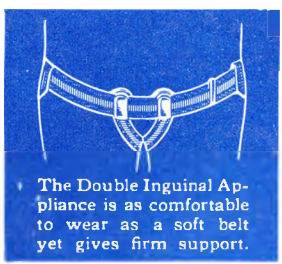
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