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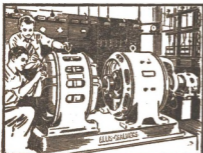
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Strange STORIES

VOL. V, NO. 1

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FEBRUARY, 1941



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A Gripping Complete Novelet

By **ELI COLTER**



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MAYAN Mystics in the sacred temples of the Eye-God—priests of unholy ritual who could lift a five-ton rock with but a gesture of the hand—masters of Black Arts who dedicated architectural beauty with the blood of terrified victims!

What was the secret of their supernormal strength—the eerie mystery of their mental magic? Have their secrets been lost forever, or will the graphic symbols of Mayan mysticism be some day unearthed as predicted, once again to bring world supremacy to the Americas?

Mayan history is vague. Archeologists differ. The Mayas were masters of art and science, ages before the known history of the world.

They dwelt in the narrow life-line between North and South America, and welcomed the winds of both the Atlantic and the Pacific. Geographically they lived on the same latitude of Egypt and India, their magic similar in many respects to that of those mystic places on the other side of the globe.

The ruined temples of Mayan mastery still reveal an architectural code resembling that of the builders of the Pyramids. Why?

The Lost Continent

Perhaps it is due to a common origin in the lost continent of Atlantis, which, when it sank into the depths of the sea, scattered survivors directly East and West—some to Central America and some across the Sahara, which was then a sea, into the fertile valley of the Nile.

For years, modern archeologists have endeavored to decipher the peculiar glyphic script of the Mayas, but with scant success—the magic key has not yet been discovered.

There is little to work on—only the traditions and legends of the natives whose ancestors revealed strange stories of ages past.

Festival of the Eye-God

Few white men have been able to gain the confidence of these tight-mouthed people. Now and then a story slips out, like the one about the festival of the Eye-God, when the masters of the Black Arts of that day sacrificed beautiful maidens on the corner-stones of a new temple.

It might have been in the great city of Uxmal or Chichen Itza—the year, perhaps 5,900 B. C., when the masters defied gravity and lifted stone upon stone by the law of

levitation, at the festival of the Eye-God. "Bosh," interrupts the skeptics—"since the dawn of human consciousness, man has never lifted weights by other than physical force."

But who can prove that levitation is not a physical force or the working of a natural law still classified as a metaphysical because it cannot be explained by scientific formulae?

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Stones of Sacrifice

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(Continued on page 11)

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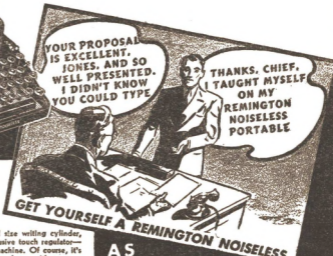
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THE BLACK ARTS

(Continued from page 8)

top of the tower, where there is a platform at least ten feet square. Directly beneath this temporary tower, at each of the four sides, is a huge stone ten cubits square and ten cubits thick. Any object dropping from the top of the tower would land directly on the flat surface of one of those stones below.

These are the stones of sacrifice to the Eye-God by whose grace the temple will be constructed. Only blood—not champagne or wine—will suffice in the corner-stone laying.

Morning comes. A red sun, like an evil eye of an awakening giant, peers over the horizon as if anticipating the promised spectacle of this fatal day.

This solar eye climbs higher and higher in the heavens until it is nearing the period of high noon, when the magic clock of ritualistic horror will strike with all its dread and abomination.

Then to the west, beyond the temple, a multitude of people gather, regimented behind ninety-nine priests and one grand master who is clothed in golden garments that reflect the majesty of the sun.

A Signal of Supplication

Slowly the procession converges on the temple plaza. The spectators arrange themselves in a circle surrounding the tower. The priests stand silent around the flat altar stones at the foot of the tower gazing up to the tower top, as slowly the grand master climbs the crude ladder until he stands erect and arrogant on the high platform viewing the thousands of mortals below.

Suddenly he lifts both arms above his head and holds them to the sun. Instantly a roar arises from the spectators who have patiently awaited this signal of supplication to the Eye-God.

They dare not start building the temple without paying homage—the quadruple sacrifice for the four corner-stones of the edifice, each stone bathed in blood—the Eye-God's price for protection.

If he is appeased, he will shut his eye until the four stones are laid, thus signifying his consent and benediction.

All is quiet once more. Then four silver-clad priests appear at the base of the tower and slowly walk to the foundation of the temple where four maidens, the pick of the city, lie gagged and bound awaiting their doom.

The first maiden is released. A scream! But four sets of fiendish hands instantly grab her—one set of hands to each leg and arm of the victim. They carry the screeching girl to the bottom of the tower—then slowly each priest, with one hand on a limb of the girl and one hand on the ladder, begins the ascent, not losing balance as

(Continued on page 12)



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(Continued from page 11)
 rung after rung is grasped in perfect synchronization of movement.

The Weird Chant

The remaining priests below begin their chant of weird harmony, accompanying each step of the climbing officials with rhythmic beat.

The trembling girl is placed upon the platform. Once more comes a roar from the spectators below as the grand master lifts his arms to the sun.

Then the maiden, face down and quivering in terror, is lifted by the four priests and held near the edge, so that the frantic girl can look down at the stone altar a hundred feet below as though it were her bridegroom who waits to embrace her mangled body with a kiss of doom.

The chant of the priests has stopped. The spectators are quiet. Then the air is pierced with a shriek which echoes to the distant plains, for the grand master has whispered something into the ear of the pitiful creature, who doesn't appreciate her fate. He then touches the top of her head.

Tolls of Doom

As he removes his hand, a heavy gong strikes somewhere beneath the tower. Four vibrant tolls. As the last echo dies and the grand master nods his head, the four priests who hold the girl by arms and legs, swing her out over the edge and let go.

Another screech! Down, down she falls—a plummet of human beauty.

Crash! She fattens on the stone, her body spilt asunder.

The grand master looks down and smiles. Then he beckons below and four more priests go for the second victim—and she is carried to the tower of sacrifice to meet her doom on the second stone.

Four times a beautiful maiden drops to her death. The corpses glisten in the sunlight like crimson silk to appease the greedy gaze of the Mayan Eye-God.

Now the four stones—North, East, South and West, are ready. But is the Eye-God satisfied? Will he allow the cornerstones to be placed in position? And who is going to lift these tons of rock into the excavation, which will then be covered by four more stones of equal size?

An Eclipse is Due

The spectators are apprehensive, although the grand master and the priests do not seem so concerned as they gather at the first stone. Why should they be? They know that the eclipse of the sun is due to begin in several moments.

Yes, the Eye-God will close his eye in affirmation, proving to the spectators that what has just transpired has met with his approval, and their new temple will be protected from the wrath of enemies.

At a command from the grand master, the priests close in on the first stone of sacrifice. Then a solemn chant begins just as the Eye-God in the heavens begins to

blink, for at one side a black crescent begins to spread across the surface of the sun.

In a moment the spectators about with joy. The Eye-God is appeased! Soon his eye will be closed completely.

Magic Power

The priests do not wait for the sun to be entirely dark. A strange ceremony of magic power is about to start, one that cannot so easily be understood by clever observers.

The chant of the priests grows louder in volume, blending with the incantation of the grand master in an eerie symphony of unholy resonance. The grand master is very serious—he is exerting great mental power as he gazes at the stone with hypnotic stare and moves his hands in circular motion. Sweat pours down his brow. The priests are likewise absorbed in concentration that bespeaks mental strain, but they continue chanting.

The strange humming vibration does more than affect the eardrums of the spectators—it tingles their emotions and sets their sensations on high. They feel an absence of weight. Their arms and legs move like feathers. The growing shadows from the darkening sun intensify this exhilaration of lightness. Like birds they believe they can defy gravity and fly. The men grasp their women companions and lift them easily with one hand, bodies remaining suspended in midair.

Levitation! What is this strange frequency that can be heard and felt by mind and body and which enables a human being to lift ten times his weight with barely more than a touch of a finger?

The Rising Stone

The Mayan priests seem to know, for slowly their hands touch the first stone containing the broken body of a sacrificed maiden.

Instantly the stone rises in mid-air for several feet. The grand master now pushes it gently and it begins to glide as though suspended by wires from a mighty derrick.

The priests follow it, and soon it hovers above the first corner excavation. Slowly it descends at the gesture of the grand master. It settles in place at the bottom of the excavation like a coffin lowered into a grave.

The sun is now nearly dark—just time to put the other three stones in place before the Eye begins to open again. And this doesn't take long. Soon the four stones are in their respective excavations, the crushed bodies of the mangled maidens still resting upon them and level with the rest of the foundation walls.

Once more the priests gather at the first stone. The bodies must be covered by four more stones before the ceremony is complete. Then at a command of the grand master they all turn to the East just as the

(Continued on page 92)

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THE BAND OF



One Twin Must Die Under Dr. Rorbach's Knife—But Cold Steel Cannot Change the Driving Urge to Live!

CHAPTER I

Of Inhuman Bondage

THE Rorbach twins, Victor and Leonard, were as alike as two peas during the first twelve years of their life. No one except their father, Dr. Hans Rorbach, could have told them apart, if Victor had not always walked to Leonard's right, and Leonard to Victor's left. That order never varied because of the

caprice of nature which had joined the twins with a band of living flesh.

The first outward indication of their separate personalities began to manifest itself when Victor and Leonard turned twelve. Their father asked them what they would like for their birthday. Leonard named a translation of a philosophical work from the Hindu. Dr. Rorbach was surprised that a boy of Leonard's age should be

DEATH

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A Complete Novelet

interested in such serious studies, but he promised to get the book.

Victor desired several things, but most important was a chemistry outfit. He boasted boyishly that he "was going to invent some kind of medicine that would make him and Leonard like other boys." Hans Rorbach, being a surgeon, winced at these words from his unfortunate son. But he had always been indulgent with the twins, hoping that his generosity and love

might in some measure compensate for their physical handicap. So he promised to see that the desire was fulfilled.

On Victor's and Leonard's twelfth birthday, the gifts they had requested were delivered to the Rorbach lodge, far up in Joaquin Canyon.

While the twins sat at a long table in their play room, Victor began his chemical experiments. By his side Leonard sat quietly absorbed in the

leather-bound volume he had so badly wanted. Leonard seemed to have completely forgotten his brother's existence as his eager, groping mind grappled with the deep truths of the ancient philosophy. Victor continued to mix chemicals in the test-tubes on the table before him. In his own fashion, he was as eager as Leonard for knowledge, though he searched with less plan and caution.

The force of the explosion knocked both boys unconscious. When Hans Rorbach came rushing into the room, he saw that the skin of Victor's right cheek had been almost burned away by the blast. Victor's hair, as black and curly as Leonard's, had been singed to a brittle mass. All over his body there were small burns and wounds from the drops of spattered acid and shards of flying glass from the broken test-tubes.

Rorbach swept the boys into his arms and rushed to the upper floor of the house, where he maintained a small surgery for his private experiments. When the boys' clothing was removed and they lay side by side upon the surgery table, Dr. Rorbach felt a little relief to note that Leonard had been neither cut or burned. He had merely been shocked into insensibility.

AS THE surgeon went on with his hurried preparations, consciousness slowly began to return to his sons. They stirred uneasily upon the white-topped table, and from their lips Rorbach heard habbled, almost incoherent words.

Ordinarily the father would have been gratified by these signs of returning life. But now his broad brow furrowed, and a look of wonder and fear came into his kindly brown eyes. For in these minutes of unconsciousness, something strange had happened to his sons.

While their bodies lay in the half-death of insensibility, some vague transmutation of the spiritual forces

which dwelt within the flesh had superseded the individual personality of each.

As he lay unseeing and unfeeling upon the surgery table, Leonard was babbling jumbled snatches of chemical formulae. Prattling of acids and test-tubes, he seemed to be putting into words the thoughts Victor had been thinking only a few minutes before. And at Leonard's side, Victor, who had never cared at all for books, was muttering passages from the Hindu translation in a strangely serious and reverent voice.

It was difficult for Hans Rorbach to believe the evidence of his own eyes and ears. Even though no such confirmation was needed for him to identify his sons, his widened eyes checked the positions of the boys on the white-topped table. Victor lay on the right, Leonard on the left. Yet now each seemed like the other. It was as if some strange disruption of nerve fibers had thrown a switch in the channels of their thought, sending the words which one brain conceived to be spoken by the lips of the other.

As Rorbach forced the needle into Victor's arm to inject an anti-tetanus serum, an abrupt change came into the boys' delirious babbling. Now their talk was a jumble of chemical formulae and quotations of philosophy. But the thing that puzzled the surgeon was that their lips moved in unison. They spoke the same words in perfect time, as though expressing the thoughts of a single brain. But that phase passed quickly. As Rorbach's nurse rushed into the room, full consciousness returned to them.

With brisk efficiency the nurse laid out disinfectants, bandages and instruments upon a porcelain tray beside the surgery table. After one quick glance at the burned and peeling skin on Victor's right cheek, she asked:

"Will you have to graft, Doctor?"

Hans Rorbach moved his head in an uncertain gesture.

"If that charred flesh is not covered with good new skin, there will be a horrible scar. Yet Victor is almost completely covered with burns and cuts. There is hardly an uninjured patch of skin on his whole body large enough to repair that mangled face."

The nurse's look flicked to Leonard, lying quietly beside Victor. Leonard's eyes were open now, and he gazed silently up at the white ceiling. Dr. Rorbach caught the nurse's thought and a hurt look came into his eyes.

"It doesn't seem right to take from one to give to the other. Victor's carelessness has brought pain to them both. If I took skin from Leonard's body to cover Victor's wounds, it would be like—like making Leonard pay for Victor's folly."

From the operating table came Victor's pitiful whimpering of pain. By his side, Leonard stirred as he tried to turn his head to look at his father.

"I won't mind, Father," Leonard said in a low, unhesitant voice. "If there is anything I can do, anything I can give to help Victor, please let me give it."

VICTOR'S cries continued and Rorbach's sagging shoulders shrugged in resignation. He nodded to the nurse.

"There is no other way. Bring the anesthetizing masks, and stand by the gas valves at the tank."

Whatever pain the twins might have suffered as a result of that unfortunate accident, it was nothing to the mental agony their father endured. For the two hours he labored with scalpel, clamps and suture over the bodies of his sons.

* Remembering that weird interlude of half-consciousness, when the souls of Victor and Leonard seemed to have changed places in the two bodies, it took all of Hans Rorbach's iron will to keep his hand from trembling. For the unquestionable evidence of that strange transmutation confirmed Rorbach's own diagnosis and the opinion

of the other specialists he had previously called in to examine his cruelly joined children.

Leonard and Victor were doomed to live joined together just as they were now. How many years they might live if that band of flesh between them was left undisturbed, it was yet too soon to say. They were still too young, their bodies undeveloped. But of one thing the surgeon was sure—they could not be separated except at the price of the life of one. Though each body was complete in all its vital organs, somewhere in that joining band of flesh lay a strange nerve tangle. The rupture of that weird connection would mean death for one of his sons.

When Dr. Rorbach had finished caring for his sons after the chemical explosion at the lodge that day, all of the many cuts and burns on Victor's body had been disinfected and dressed. New, healthy skin covered the seared flesh on Victor's right cheek, held there by clamps and covered with pads of gauze saturated with healing analgesic.

There was also a large pad of bandage on Leonard's chest. Under that bandage, a spot of his bare flesh lay flayed and throbbing. Just before Dr. Rorbach pulled the cover up over his sons' bodies, his sad brown eyes paused for a moment on that cruel lesion which joined the boys. His mouth hardened at the grim jest of fate which made one the prisoner of the other.

"The band of life," Rorbach murmured, "or the band of death. God grant that I may never have to decide which it shall be."

When the Rorbach twins were well again, it was not necessary to remember that Victor was the one on the right, and Leonard the one on the left.

Though Victor's burned right cheek showed no scar, thanks to his father's expert surgery and Leonard's gift of living tissue, there was one physical difference which marked him. Before

the disastrous chemical experiment on the twins' twelfth birthday, his hair had been as black and curly as Leonard's. It was still black, save for one snow-white tuft like a dividing line thrust upward from the center of his forehead. But it was no longer curly.

Leonard had not changed, save for that puckered scar on his breast—a mark to which he gave little thought as long as it was hidden beneath his clothing. But as the years passed, a more sinister difference began to be apparent to those who were close to the Rorbach twins and knew them well. That difference was of the soul, rather than of the flesh.

CHAPTER II

Thou Shalt Not Love!

DURING their adolescent years, Dr. Rorbach watched his sons apprehensively. He dreaded the return of that strange transfer of individualities which had shocked him when they lay upon his surgery table on their twelfth birthday. But though he observed them closely, no hint of such a psychic phenomenon came to his notice. Instead, each of the boys followed a distinctly separate course of mental and spiritual development.

Leonard still loved books. He was an avid reader of those works which tended to give man an understanding of the deeper mysteries of life.

But on the other hand, Victor tended to more material things. With the transition from boyhood to manhood, he left his desire for chemical experiment behind him. But the idea of being separated from his brother still haunted him. It grew and became more persistent with the years. Eventually it became an obsession, all the more galling because it was a topic of which he had been forbidden to speak. With maturity, he began

to be attracted to the fair members of the opposite sex, especially to Nancy Moore, the daughter of Arthur Moore, a colleague of Dr. Hans Rorbach.

Blond, vivacious and sparkling, Nancy was a frequent visitor at the Rorbach home. She was aroused by a great compassion for the twins because of their physical bondage. She spent many week-ends with them at the Rorbach lodge, keeping them company through long afternoons and evenings which would have been unbearably dreary without her. She had a way of talking to them that made them forget their deformity, yet did not betray the fact that Nancy's sacrifice of time and energy arose from any emotion at all akin to sympathy.

And Victor, as his restless eyes lingered upon the girl's slender figure, discovered within himself a mounting unrest. It was an insistent and disturbing call, goaded and prodded to a nagging canker. Furiously he realized that in his present imprisoned state, a normal life would be forever denied him.

His unrest mounted to rebellion. After several stormy scenes, he finally persuaded his father to hold another consultation with the great specialists to determine once and for all whether that band of flesh between him and Leonard might be severed. In his wisdom, Hans Rorbach had long delayed that consultation. He thought he knew already what the answer would be. So great was his love for both his sons, he dreaded to hear the verdict in all its cruel finality.

But when that verdict came, it did not soothe Victor's resentment at being bound to Leonard, as Rorbach had hoped. Instead, it only added to his bitterness and dissatisfaction with his lot. It brought to light a new argument for Victor to use in his ceaseless campaign for freedom. X-ray and advanced surgical knowledge revealed something in this examination that had been hidden from the eyes

of the specialists ten years before.

If that life band which joined the twins were left unmolested, both Victor and Leonard might well expect to live for ten or fifteen more years. It would not be a normal span of existence, yet a fairly ripe age for people born as they had been.

But if that chain of flesh were cut, it would become the band of death. Hans Rorbach aged ten years when he heard that verdict. Joined as they were, his sons could hope for little enough in years or opportunity, and should they be separated, one of them must die.

In their maturing years, the differences between the twins had grown greater. Leonard had developed a kinder, more compassionate nature than his brother. In physique, Victor was robust and brimming with health, while Leonard seemed frail and less favored with vitality. As might be expected, the life which would be sacrificed if the other were to enjoy full freedom would be the spark that burned in the frail body at Victor's left.

Again suffering must be given to Leonard.

GRAY-HAIRED, sad-eyed and weary, Dr. Hans Rorbach faced his sons in the living room of the Rorbach home. He dreaded the words he knew were about to be spoken, but there was nothing he could do to prevent their utterance. His gentle, troubled eyes went from Victor's beligerently flushed face to Leonard's calm and reflective countenance. Resolutely he stifled a half-formed thought before it could take full form.

But if his love had let him think, he might have wondered which of his sons had the greater right to live. Which, through his own unselfishness in considering the life and happiness of others, might be deserving of a longer and better life for himself?

"I don't want to die so young!" Victor said bitterly. "I want to live

out the years that are rightfully mine, and to live them like a normal, healthy man. I want to marry and have children of my own. It—it's hideous to have to die so young just because he is attached to me!"

"You are thinking of love and marriage, my son?" Hans Rorbach asked patiently, though a new look of surprise and pain had come to his eyes.

"Why shouldn't I think of such things?" Victor demanded in anger. "I see no reason for me to bury my longings within me any longer. I love Nancy Moore. I want to marry her. But I can't even tell her I love her without him listening in! I can't hold her in my arms without having him watch. And when he meets someone he wants as badly as I want Nancy, he'll feel the same way about me. Why did nature impose such cruel torture upon us? What have we done?"

"I don't know, my son. My soul cries out in rebellion at the twist in the scheme of life which permits such things to be. In nature there are some cruel things, some brutal things, and man is left powerless and resentful."

Hans Rorbach bowed his head to hide the awful pity in his deep brown eyes.

"Forgive me, but at this moment I could wish I had died in my cradle. Far sooner would I have refused my own life than to have given to my loved ones a life so short and barren."

In his misery, Rorbach's sorrowful eyes sought the patient reassurance of Leonard's calm countenance. But the surgeon winced inwardly at what he thought he read in his son's gaze, and his look lowered again.

"I'm not afraid of dying, Father," Leonard said quietly. "I'm not complaining, but life doesn't hold much for us as it is. You had no need to consult the other specialists. You're not one of the world's greatest surgeons for nothing. You knew all the time what the verdict would be. But,

Father, is there no possible chance of error?"

"None. I carefully examined the X-ray plates myself. It is as sure--as sure as death."

Rorbach's big head lifted and his eyes revealed their weary sorrow to Leonard's intent gaze.

"Such an operation can't be done, Leonard. That band of flesh which connects you to Victor contains a nerve center such as medical science has never encountered before. It is a strange tangle of nerve fibers running from one body to the other. It would be so difficult to trace accurately, I couldn't dare to trust my judgment alone."

"It is certain then that my body could not continue to function independently of Victor's?" Leonard asked.

Rorbach could not help noting how the youth had considerably twisted his words to avoid again mentioning the grim, inevitable possibility of certain death.

"It is certain," the father said in a dull, dead voice. "I have told you many times. I tell you again. While that band remains untouched, it is for you the band of life. You both may live another fifteen years, possibly more. But should that band be severed, you might linger a few days, even a few weeks, but you would die, Leonard."

"But Victor would live! You said he would!"

"Yes, Victor would live. That also is certain. But what of it? Do you think he craves for a longer and more complete life at the expense of yours? You both know the verdict. You have hoped that perhaps I could do more than these great specialists? Impossible."

The great head moved from side to side.

"There is nothing any man can do. I could cut you apart, yes. But your life would pay for the act, Leonard. It would be murder!"

Leonard stared straight ahead, his thin face white, his sunken blue eyes haggard and hopeless.

"I have no more to say, Father. I am sorry if my questions have added to your hurt and sorrow. We did think perhaps that you might have some skill beyond the others. Perhaps our faith in you led us to believe that you would find a solution to this horrible dilemma where the others had failed. I will not distress you about it again. If that's the unalterable verdict, then that's the end of it. Victor and I will get the most we can out of what life is granted us. We'll be thankful for a father who is both kind and wise, and we will abide by your judgment."

"Thank you, my son," the old surgeon said gratefully. "There shall be much happiness for you both yet. You shall see. You are young, scarcely past twenty. Mere children."

"Mere children?" Victor echoed. There was something cold and searing in the look he bent upon the old man, as if he felt that by the same act which made this man his father, Rorbach was also deserving of blame for his deformity. "Mere children, with more than half of our lives gone. Oh, what's the use! I can't get used to the idea of this--this living death! Come along, Leonard. There's no point in prolonging the agony."

Dr. Rorbach stared after the Siamese twins as they went out the door, Victor's left arm over Leonard's shoulder and Leonard's right arm over Victor's. They moved in a peculiar marching step, a timed cadence which was their only convenient mode of locomotion. As the twins passed from the old surgeon's sight, Leonard's gaze clung to his father's face. That intent gaze seemed to say, cheerily, smilingly, almost as clearly as words:

"Don't let it trouble you any more, Father. Don't fret about Victor. He's shocked and disappointed. He'll get over it in a few days."

Hans smiled involuntarily in return, a somber, indulgent smile. Then the closing door blanked out Leonard's patient, gentle face, and his sons were gone.

For a long time after their departure, Rorbach sat motionless, thinking. It was truly strange that such diabolical cruelties of nature should be. How could Dr. Rorbach, renowned for his skill in healing mangled flesh and straightening twisted bodies for others, be so helpless in the face of his own tragedy? A vicious jest of fate had given him these strange twins to father. Why



should the sole offspring of his line be these two, whose lives were a burden to them and an ever-increasing sorrow himself?

Hans Rorbach had been crushed when he had lost the twins' mother, his beloved Rebecca, at their birth. Now he was a man who had aged beyond his years, prematurely gray and old. Day and night he had had to live with the certain knowledge that his sons would grow to manhood only to receive the verdict of an early death.

For a long time, Hans Rorbach sat in his chair and stared at his hands as he flexed his long, tapered fingers in futile practise. Those were the miraculously skilled fingers which had wielded scalpel, forceps and suture with uncanny dexterity to relieve the sorrow and suffering of other men's sons. Yet they were helpless to save the lives and happiness of his own children.

He sank more deeply in his chair, shaking his head. No skill on earth could cure the canker which threat-

ened the happiness and the lives of his loved ones. Nor was it strange that Victor should be rebellious. He was so filled with health and strength! Since he had learned that Leonard was dependent upon him for life, his resentment against his brother could be expected to increase. Even though his resentful feeling was based upon envy of Leonard's patience, it was made nonetheless bitter because of his lack of these same qualities.

IT WAS not odd that Leonard did not mind so much the denial of a long life. All through their adolescent years, the course of Leonard's development had been along spiritual lines. It would have been unpleasant for the twins to attend schools with normal children, so Rorbach had provided them with a tutor at home in their younger years. Leonard continued his studies in ancient philosophies, but Victor had not taken to reading or study. He spent most of his time in a restless and futile rebellion at his bondage.

Yes, the old surgeon could easily understand the attitude of both of his sons, even the added resentment in Victor at being denied Nancy Moore. But could he, Hans Rorbach, deliberately sever Leonard's feeble hold on existence in order that Victor should enjoy a longer and fuller life? They were both his sons. He loved one as much as the other. Forcefully he told himself that, as if he would persuade himself that it was quite true. But deep in his heart he suspected that it was not. He tried to convince himself that he only admired those qualities in Leonard which were not in Victor. That, he argued, was the only difference in his regard for his sons.

His great head sank on his chest. His sorrowful eyes closed. This was sad and bitter, but it was beyond human skill to remedy. His lips moved in an almost soundless whisper, and Dr. Hans Rorbach prayed.

CHAPTER III

Mind Over Flesh

VICTOR strode into the room the twins shared, almost dragging Leonard's lagging feet along with him. Anger still blazed in Victor's clear eyes. His healthy face was flushed with fury at all the gods who could ruthlessly precipitate this wanton injustice upon him.

As the twins entered the room, Victor's gaze flicked over the many volumes of esoteric writings upon which Leonard spent his time. An idea flashed full-formed into his cunning mind. For an instant the import of the thought startled him. He strove to stifle any outward show of emotion lest Leonard suspect the trend of his thinking. But Victor's shrewd brain went on plotting swiftly and coherently.

Leonard did not want so much to live. He had said plainly that he wouldn't mind dying. Well, then, Leonard should die. Why should Victor be cheated of a full life, hampered always by the burden of a frail twin who had been joined to him by a whim of a leering and sardonic fate? Why should he suffer the denial of those earthly joys he craved? Why should he forfeit all that life with Nancy would mean, merely that this annoying fragile brother might continue to hang on a few years longer? That would be neither just nor right. Therefore it should not be, he determined.

Victor felt an unholy thrill of exultance. Leonard should die! Not today, nor even tomorrow—but soon. The method was simple to achieve that end. By glancing over Leonard's shoulder while he was studying, Victor had become familiar with the trend of his brother's psychological pursuits. Those esoteric writings of the

ascetics taught a philosophy of mind over matter.

As the months went by, Leonard was filling his mind with knowledge which enabled him to enjoy earthly existence as an experience of the mind, almost completely ignoring the body. That was all the more reason, Victor thought, why death of the flesh would mean little to Leonard.

And if Leonard could give his mind this power over his own flesh, then Victor could also gain knowledge and twist it in his own cunning way to give him power over Leonard's mind and body! But here again fate stepped into the chaotic tangle.

Victor had long been aware that, through the strange nerve tangle which attached him to his brother, he exerted a subtle influence over Leonard. True, it was erratic and faint, but he was sure that had been the result of not making any particular effort consciously to develop it. It was a sly and elusive power, of which no one but himself was aware—not any of the specialists Hans Rorbach had called in for consultation, nor Rorbach himself.

Victor doubted that even Leonard himself suspected the cunning and inexorable dominance emanating from his brother's vigorous brain. Faintly Victor was aware that this subtle influence over Leonard dated from the day when they had lain side by side in half-consciousness on the surgery table up at the mountain lodge. Victor made no attempt to analyze that influence, but he was determined that it should be called into purposeful use now.

IN THE days that followed, Leonard was surprised to note that Victor spent all day and half the night eagerly poring over the books of philosophy which he had heretofore ignored and even ridiculed. Leonard welcomed his brother's interest. He even helped with suggestions and explanations of passages

whose deep and involved meaning totally escaped Victor's materialistic mind.

As soon as his determination drove him to cast off his mental laziness, Victor discovered that he had a brilliant brain. In a surprisingly brief period of time, he had absorbed more than an ordinary understanding of this doctrine of mental power.

But in the course of his grim studies, Victor hid his seriousness from Leonard under a mask of bantering raillery. During the moments the twins spent with Nancy Moore, Victor referred to his serious reading as just a way to kill time, something to amuse him through the hours he was not permitted to spend with her. And if Leonard noticed that Victor's manner toward Nancy became more possessive as the days went by, no word of his betrayed that knowledge.

The day arrived when Victor decided to test the power for which he had been groping. The twins were in their living room on the second floor of the Rorbach home. Victor gloated inwardly in anticipation of the assured success of the course he had determined to follow. He veiled his eyes and stared at the wall. All he needed to do was to set his will over Leonard's subconscious mind, inflexible and demanding, and drive Leonard to conceive the desire that the two of them should be separated from each other.

Should Leonard insist upon the operation strongly enough, the old surgeon would ultimately consent. Their father could never refuse the frail Leonard anything. He had always loved Leonard the better of the two. Victor's lip curled in contempt. Did the old man think he didn't know that?

Victor turned his head and addressed his brother in a petulant outburst.

"Len, I'm tired of just sitting here and thinking of this mess! I want to see Nancy. Let's go over to her place."

Leonard closed his eyes wearily, held them tightly shut for an instant. When he opened them and turned to look at Victor, hurt resignation was deep in his unsuspecting gaze.

"Of course, Vic, if you want to go. Do you mean now?"

"I don't mean next week," Victor snapped. "Let's get our hats and go."

Leonard made no reply. He was thinking that he could wish to see Nancy, too, if the seeing did not hurt so much. He accompanied Victor to the closet, got his hat and set it on his head. Victor went through the same movements.

The two of them proceeded like two prisoners chained together, marching precisely out of the room, down the stairs and out of the house. They went to the garage, where the chauffeur was idly polishing the spotless Rorbach sedan. Victor peremptorily ordered the driver to take them to the Moore home.

In less than a half hour, the twins were standing before the glass front door of Arthur Moore's residence. Then the door was swinging open, and Victor was saying tersely to the pert maid:

"Mr. Rorbach to see Miss Moore."

THE maid nodded silently and beckoned them in. She took their hats, led them to the cool, spacious living room.

Nancy was stretched on a deep divan, staring at a book without seeing it. She sprang to her feet with a little cry of surprise, unmistakable delight in her eyes. But her searching glance went to Leonard's face for a brief instant and then was hurriedly averted. The delight was almost drowned in pity. She advanced toward the twins, both hands outstretched.

"Leonard and Victor! I'd begun to think you'd forgotten me."

The two gripped her hands, and Victor spoke with an odd stiffness in his voice.

"You knew that your father had

been called into consultation over Leonard and me some time ago."

Nancy dropped their hands. She stood small, slim and straight, facing them. Under her winged black brows, her deep blue eyes searched their faces.

"Yes, Victor. I knew."

"And you heard the verdict?"

Nancy drew a sharp sigh, winced as if the air plunging into her lungs had been a keen-edged blade.

"Yes—I know. It's terrible and cruel, but there's nothing to be done. We'll have to face it. Sit down, please, won't you?"

She gestured toward the divan. The twins marched to it and lowered themselves, their movements made awkward by the necessity for perfect unison.

"There are things that have to be said," Victor stated. "I have kept them to myself because I hesitated to speak of such intimate things before Leonard. I have to end my silence now, and we'll have to make believe he isn't here. I have loved you for several years, Nancy. It is because I love you that I want to be free of this unjust bondage."

As Victor spoke, his compelling gaze pulled like magnets along the beam of Nancy's wide blue eyes. The same subtle influence, which he had determined to use as a lash on Leonard to whip him to his own desires, would work as well on Nancy. Like Leonard, Nancy's mind was unfortified by any suspicion. She would therefore be receptive and easily swayed.

"I want to marry you and live a normal life," Victor went on, sternly exerting every effort of his strong will to bridge the gap between his mind and the girl's. "You'd have married me if I could have been freed, wouldn't you? You could love me as I love you, couldn't you?"

Confusion clouded Nancy's eyes. Their questioning stare was held by the dominating power that was in Vic-

tor's gaze. Then her look wavered ever so little. From Victor's flushed face under the straight, black hair with the dividing tuft of white, it shifted to Leonard's pale cheeks and quietly passive eyes, framed by their crown of curly, black locks. Two faces were so alike in contour, yet made so different by the thoughts which impelled their expressions. One was smoothed to placid peace that was akin to beauty, lighted from within by an unselfish soul. The other was flushed and twisted by a restless, frantic urge that burned within.

"You could love me, couldn't you, Nancy?" Victor persisted.

"I—yes—you know I— Oh, we can't talk this way, Victor." Pain darkened Nancy's blue eyes. "We can't. It's so cruel to—to Leonard."

L EONARD interposed quickly. His eyes were so unveiled and intent upon her face that she could not fail to read what was in them.

"No, Nancy. It isn't cruel. Don't you suppose I realize that I'm in the way, that I'm only a nuisance, that my life is worthless? Don't you know that I would give my life willingly, if in the doing I could bring happiness to you and Victor?"

"Don't say such things, Leonard!" Her face blanched. In her eyes there was a queerly startled look. "Don't! How can you even suggest it?"

"Don't you know?" Leonard asked softly. If Victor could have read Leonard's thoughts then, he would have learned to his disappointment that it was Leonard's innate unselfishness, his genuine devotion to Nancy, and not any coldly calculated influence of Victor's, which prompted those words. "Don't you know that all this time I have loved you, too? What is love worth if it cannot serve?"

"Stop it, Len!" Victor's voice was rough, but in it there was a note of veiled satisfaction. Masked triumph leaped into his eyes. The first seed

was planted. He had been shrewd in planning this, but he must pretend to be against it. He could afford to move with caution, for the rest would be so easy. He added curtly: "No one would think of allowing you to make such a sacrifice. I am surprised that your opinion of me is so low. Don't say anything like that again."

Nancy sighed in open relief.

"Victor, you are so—so fair and just. Let it go on that way, as it has been. And, Leonard, let's never talk that way again. Don't ever mention such an impossible way out of this unfortunate situation."

CHAPTER IV

You Have to Die!

THE subject was not mentioned again by any of them until the twins were on their way home. Victor was covertly watching Leonard's rapt eyes. They were staring at the roadway before them, past the chauffeur's erect head. Victor's cunning brain was relentlessly pursuing the course he had outlined and begun. Mentally he was shouting into Leonard's

unsuspecting and receptive mind.

"You have to die. You have to free me from this galling bondage. When I asked Nancy if she loved me, you heard her say yes. She wouldn't say more because of you, you poor weakling. But you have to give Nancy to the man she loves. You are of no other use in this world. The least you can do is to give her happiness. You are a drag upon me, a sorrow to our father. If you love Nancy, you will choose to die. You *must* die! You must beg Father to separate us."

Almost as if he were reciting a perfectly memorized lesson, Leonard spoke suddenly.

"No matter what you say, I insist that we be separated from each other. You must be freed from this unjust bondage, Victor. I should have known that if Nancy loved either of us, it would be you. What healthy, normal girl could care for anyone as lacking in vitality as I? I shall give Nancy the man she loves. Somehow I shall persuade Father to separate us."

Again Victor accepted Leonard's acquiescence as a tribute to his own subtle mental influence. But he could not know whether that determination was the result of his influence, or of the natural reaction of a nature as

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From the
Confidential
Notebook
of Mr. F---



3 Felt like a million when I got up this morning. Ex-Lax worked fine. Just watch me go after those birds today!



1 Missed two important sales today. Had no pep—just couldn't get going! Wonder if I hadn't better take a laxative—been putting it off too long.



2 Harry said I ought to try Ex-Lax. Took some before I Ex-Lax taste is a new one on me—just like chocolate!

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 next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family.

10¢ and 25¢



understanding and unselfish as Leonard's.

Whatever power motivated Leonard's determination, though, his mind was made up. When the twins had reached home and sought their father in his study, Leonard repeated the words he had spoken to his brother. Dr. Rorbach was aghast at mention of the haunting specter which he had hoped had been forever locked within the secret closet of silence. His eyes dilated in horror to hear Leonard demand that he wield the scalpel upon the flesh of his own sons. The old surgeon held up both trembling hands in violent protest.

"Never, Leonard! I cannot do such a thing. I cannot even think of it. Not even for you, Leonard. Please do not ask it of me."

Leonard launched into a vehement, pleading argument. While Victor listened and decried the sacrifice with his cunning, lying lips, he strove to drive Leonard on with his scheming brain.

The argument did not end in that hour, nor in that day. Leonard persisted in his soft-spoken, patient plea. He did not cease to beseech his father to perform the operation. Repeating tirelessly that he was weary of life, he insisted that he was made miserable by the continual impossibility of his and Victor's existence as they were. What did it matter that he must die? He had already lost all desire to live. Anything was better than this mockery, this cramped and humiliating half-life!

Dr. Rorbach argued, but his only argument was founded upon love and not upon reason. Since there is no harmony between reason and love, the old surgeon knew he was waging a losing battle. There was no turning Leonard away from his determination. He was patient and sympathetic, but in his gentle, quiet way he was utterly dogged, once his will was set. Victor had been well aware of that fact.

As the discussion tensed and heightened, the old man's defenses advanced from frantic protest and determined opposition to frightened and desperate refusal. Panic-stricken, he sought for some homily that would defeat Leonard's monotonous insistence. But he was finally beaten to a despairing capitulation.

MINGLED with his despair was a realization that appalled him—the frank knowledge that he loved Leonard the better of his two sons. He was shocked that he could so depart from his ideal of fatherhood as to cherish one son above the other. But he did. Leonard's uncomplaining cheerfulness in the face of adversity, his forgetfulness of self, would have swayed a stronger man than Rorbach.

The tired old man made no further effort to hide the fact from himself. Leonard's own demand that his life be sacrificed for Victor's happiness had brought the sternly repressed secret into the light. It was the son he loved better that he must lose. Strange, Hans thought, that a man always loves best the one he is destined to part with. But, Rorbach admitted, one reason for his greater regard for Leonard was that his gentle son was so much like himself.

Perhaps it was God's judgment upon him, Hans concluded. Because he had allowed himself to love one son more than the other, it was Leonard he must lose through his son's own desperate demands. He had never been able to deny either any of their material wants. They had been denied so many things other boys and young men enjoyed. Their physical handicap had made that inevitable, and Hans Rorbach had tried to compensate by gratifying their least desire.

But during these later years, Leonard's material wants had become fewer and fewer. Rorbach realized suddenly that he could not deny Leonard now, even though his beloved son asked for death.

Again Victor told himself that he had been right. Leonard would get what he asked for. Dr. Rorbach was brought face to face with the stunning realization that he could not gaze into Leonard's deep pleading eyes and say no.

"I will do it for you, my son," he said instead. "But not here. Too much of what I do is always known here. We will go up to the lodge where we can have seclusion."

Leonard visioned the Rorbach lodge far up in Joaquin Canyon. He felt grateful that his father should have chosen that place to perform the operation. Leonard had always loved the lodge that Hans Rorbach had built far back in the rugged mountains for their retirement and recreation. He loved the steep, wooded slope, for no other human habitation was near it. It was a perfect refuge, the ideal setting of lonely grandeur in which to watch the light go out. Then his beloved Nancy could be happy.

"When do we go, Father?" Leonard asked breathlessly.

A resigned, indulgent smile brooded in old Hans' deep brown eyes.

"I have a few things to do before we can leave. We go a week from today."

"A week from today," Leonard echoed softly. "Thank you, Father."

Quickly the old man turned away from his son.

"He thanks me!" Hans muttered wildly, his words choking in his throat. "He thanks me though I shall end his life. May the good Lord forgive me!"

The day before the scheduled departure to the mountain lodge, Hans Rorbach sat at the desk in his study. His elbows were on the desk and his big, shaggy head was bowed forward against his palms. He had come here to be alone for a last hour of solitude and reflection, to steel himself for the dread crime he must perform.

He heard light footsteps outside the library, the sound of the door opening. He looked up to see Nancy Moore, pale and shaken, entering the room. Her frightened gaze sought his as she crossed to him in a little rush and gripped his arms with her slim, white hands.

DOCTOR HANS! Victor called me on the phone and told me. You—you mustn't! It's too terrible. You mustn't—"

Rorbach was immobile. For a long-drawn moment, he stared deeply into her frantic gaze. Then a glow of understanding light began to grow in his eyes.

"But what is this, Nancy? Is it that you, too, love Leonard best?"

She buried her face against his chest, and her voice dropped to a shuddering whisper.

"Yes. I think I have always loved Leonard. But there was something so forceful and dominating about Victor. He—he could make me say things I didn't mean. It seemed that he was all that Leonard might have been, if he were well and strong. It is for Leonard that I am asking this, Doctor Hans. You mustn't operate. The way things are, we can keep him for a few more years at least. Little as it is, it's much better than not having him at all. Promise me that you won't do it."

The color drained from Rorbach's lined face.

"But I cannot give you that promise. I have already given Leonard my word. I cannot take back one promise to give another."

The girl's racking sobs cut deep into the old surgeon's soul. She cried bitterly:

"You mustn't! You mustn't!"

Rorbach's long, slender hands came up to grip her shoulders gently.

"Nancy, there is something I must tell you," he breathed. "I hope it will make you understand why it is that I have no choice. It was not Leonard's pleading alone that made me give my

consent. It was a threat Victor made one night when he was upset, and he has repeated it since. He swears that if I do not operate, he will kill himself. He is so desperate that I believe he would do it. Then Leonard would die, too, and nothing would be left."

Rorbach dropped his arms, and his hands spread in a hopeless, beaten gesture. Nancy realized fully the mental torture he had suffered through the misfortune of his sons. She knew that he had already borne more than a man's spirit could stand.

He had fought against his son's arguments until he had no more strength or will to fight. Now that he had been forced to submission, he had to wage another battle to steel himself for the grim task. He was at the breaking point. If anything happened to cause further argument or delay, Hans Rorbach would crack, and a great surgeon would be lost to the world.

Nancy's voice smoothed to a controlled calm.

"Then let me go to the lodge, too. I promise not to be in the way. I—I want to be with him—at the last."

Rorbach's deep eyes glimmered through unshed tears.

"How could I refuse you? We will go tomorrow evening."

"I won't go with you in your car," the girl said quickly. "Leonard would try to stop me. I'll drive to the lodge and meet you there. Don't tell them I'm coming. It would only upset them. Then after—after the operation, I can be with Leonard to the end. Thank you, Doctor Hans. Thank you!"

SHE whirled and ran out of the room. Rorbach stood staring after her. His eyes were so blinded with tears of grief, he saw her as through rain.

"In Victor's strong body she sees all that Leonard might have been," he muttered brokenly. "When they were small, my two sons were so alike.

But now they are shockingly different."

Rorbach could not keep his thoughts from straying back to that day when the twins were twelve. He pictured them as they lay unconscious upon the surgery table, cut and hurt by Victor's careless mixing of chemicals. Remembering that weird mix-up of their identities, the queer crossing of their personalities during that brief interval of semi-consciousness, Rorbach shook his head in puzzled resignation. He felt numbed and weary. In his chest there was an intolerable ache.

Neither the weariness nor the ache had lessened by the next evening, when he and his sons started for the lodge, nor the day after, when they reached the lodge late in the afternoon. Rorbach stepped from the car and followed his sons into the tall, rugged, old building. It seemed frowning and sinister. A nameless dread brushed his face like a cold, sepulchral wind as he walked down the long, gray hall. It was dank and musty from being closed to the air and the clean sun for many months.

The surgery on the second floor of the lodge had been installed many years ago, when the twins were small. Rorbach had used it for experimental research. But its real purpose had been preparation against any chance emergency during those years when Victor and Leonard had spent most of their time at the lodge. Should one of them be attacked by a fatal sickness, Rorbach wanted to be prepared to amputate to save the life of the other.

In that little surgery the next morning, Hans Rorbach faced his sons. His deep brown eyes brooded upon them as they stood beside the operating table, their combined gaze fixed upon him. The father's look studied Leonard's thin, pale face, surmounted by the mass of curly, black hair. Then it went to Victor's healthy countenance, the straight, jet hair pushed back from

the forehead, and the snow-white tuft dividing it like a chalk line.

On Victor's features was a subdued excitement that the doctor could not quite read, though he thought he partly understood it. Victor had always longed to be free. In later years, the longing had grown to an unreasoning obsession.

On Leonard's drawn visage, in his too-bright, feverish eyes, burned consuming desire and a nerve-racking impatience for the deed to be done and finished.

"We have come to the end of our journey, my sons," Rorbach said slowly. "The end of a journey for Victor and me, Leonard. This is the beginning of a longer journey for you. I have tried to be a good father to you. For all wherein I have failed, I beg that you forgive me. Remember that I have loved you both." He drew his shoulders high with military rigidity, and his gaze searched deep into Leonard's burning eyes. "My beloved son, I bid you farewell."

Leonard's lips scarcely moved, and his thin white face was sternly set.

"Good-by, Father. Do not grieve for me. What you do for me is really kind."

The expression faded from old Hans' features. Neither of his sons—the one who was to live or the one who was to die—would know what this was costing him. But Rorbach's will was his greatest strength. He had steeled himself for this moment.

Now that the time had come, he was the surgeon confronted by a scientific, emotionless task. He laid his hand upon the anesthetic masks, gestured toward the tray containing sterilized instruments, sponges and artery clamps.

"All is ready. Lie down now."

As the anesthetizing gas began to hiss through the valves, neither of the twins heard their father mutter grimly to himself. His gaze was fixed in hatred upon the band of flesh which held them together.

"The cruel band of death!"

CHAPTER V

Victor or Leonard?

THE operation was not technically difficult in itself, nor was its performance a lengthy procedure. As a result of long hours of studying the many X-ray plates which had been exposed against that band of flesh, Hans Rorbach knew from memory the location of each vein, each artery, each nerve. After Victor's threat of suicide, he had caught himself several times planning just how he would proceed, should he ever be faced with the unavoidable necessity of cutting his sons apart. He had planned each stroke of the scalpel, each grip of the forceps.

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Now it seemed he was doing what he had done over and over before—at least in his tortured mind.

But he stood on the right side of the surgery table, beside Victor, while the anesthetic flowed through the rubber tubes. A muffled murmuring came to his ears. They were gasped words, low-spoken, yet clear:

"I am glad to die—if my death—brings happiness to Nancy."

Rorbach started and his gaze sharpened on his sons. The masks all but covered their faces, so he could not see which lips moved. But Rorbach could have sworn that the voice belonged to Victor. The surgeon's jaw muscles hardened as he clenched his teeth and proceeded with hurried precision.

When it was finished, the twins were breathing stertorously under the influence of the anesthetic. Each was a separate body for the first time in their lives. Old Hans was weak and shaking, unnerved and white with nausea. He knew beyond all doubt that the knife he had wielded had taken the life of his son. There could be no appeal from that decree.

Like a man in a daze he walked out of the surgery, and went down the long hall to a small secluded room at the rear of that hall. He paused before the door and tapped on the casing.

"Nancy, it is all over. I will bring them to their rooms now. They will be awake soon. Let Leonard see you there when he opens his eyes."

The rooms which had been prepared for the twins were on opposite sides of the hall. Rorbach brought Leonard first, wheeled him into his room, laid him upon the bed and covered him gently. As Rorbach came into the hall again, Nancy passed him on her way to Leonard's side.

The doctor brought Victor and placed him in the bed in the room across the hall. He stood over him, watching his labored breathing. He stood there for what seemed a long

time, lifting Victor's lax wrist at intervals to check the strengthening pulse.

Then Rorbach jerked to sudden attention at the sound of a horrified scream from across the hall. He dropped Victor's wrist and ran outside.

Nancy stood in the opposite room, gazing with wide, terror-stricken eyes at Leonard. Rorbach's look followed Nancy's.

Leonard sat upright on the bed!

Being the weaker of the two, he might have been expected to remain under the effects of the anesthetic longer than Victor. But he was the first to recover.

Something was wrong. Rorbach read it in Nancy's dilated eyes, in her scream of a moment before. Leonard's arms reached out menacingly toward Nancy. His fingers clawed at her. His face twisted into a frantic mask of rage and hate as he shrieked invectives. But the voice which came from his throat was not the voice of Leonard Rorbach.

"You—you've tricked me! My own father, and the girl I wanted for my wife— You've done something—you've tricked me—to save him!"

NANCY'S startled look flashed to Hans Rorbach's ashen face. The old surgeon read the question in her frantic stare.

"Delirium," Rorbach muttered.

But he knew that he did not speak the truth. He moved toward the bed to soothe his son, to quiet his shrieking cries. But as he approached the bedside, the thin figure sagged backward to the pillows. Rorbach stood still for a hesitant moment.

"Leonard, Leonard," he murmured sadly. The wild eyes of his son rolled accusingly toward him. "Leonard," Rorbach murmured again, as if by mere repetition he would convince himself of what was no longer a fact.

Against the white pillows, the young man's hair gleamed jet with

sweat. But even as Nancy and the doctor watched, the waves and curls seemed to flatten, as an unseen hand might smooth wrinkles from a bit of crumpled paper. At the center of the forehead, a faint white line began to appear. The line seemed to lengthen into a tuft of snow white hair, as if an invisible and ghostly painter drew a brush backward from the perspiring brow!

Rorbach knew that his son was dying. While his gaze remained fast on the thin, sallow face, he saw that the expression had changed. Leonard's patient gentleness had gone from the eyes. The pupils were now hard and demanding. The tolerant, half-whimsical softness which Rorbach remembered in the curve of Leonard's lips had been replaced by a snarling curl. The fiend on the bed struggled up again and the hard, burning eyes glared at the surgeon.

"You killed me—to save Leonard," he panted venomously. "You have always loved him best! You—"

As abruptly as it had risen, the body was gripped in the spasm of death. It dropped lifelessly back upon the bed. Stunned, Rorbach drew the sheet up over the face and head. Involuntarily his eyes passed over the straight black hair, divided by a line of white. Shuddering, he turned to look at Nancy.

She was gone, and Hans knew she would be in the room across the hall. He moved sadly away from the bed and walked blindly out into the corridor. The door of the opposite room stood open. A little of the crushing weight seemed to lift from Rorbach's soul at the words which drifted to him.

"Nancy, how kind you are to come—to be here where I can look at you—hold your hand through the last moments of my life. I won't mind going—and I hope you and Victor will be—terribly happy."

The cool pressure of Nancy's lips prevented further words.

"Hush," she murmured. "You're not going to die."

Looking through the open doorway, Hans Rorbach saw Nancy Moore's eyes were brimming with tears. But now they were tears of joy. The surgeon's look shifted eagerly to the flushed, ruddy face of his son. Without realizing that he moved, he stepped into the room and stood by the side of the bed.

Nancy Moore bent over his son, and her small, delicate fingers were combing through the thick mass of curling, black hair. The eyes of the young man upon the bed were closed, but his breathing was deep and even. As the cool hands caressed the jet locks, a patient and gentle smile bent the grim lips of old into a tolerant, half-whimsical curve.

"Where is Father?" he muttered. "I would like to see him before—before I go."

RORBACH'S hand moved gently to pull down the sheet, exposing the strong chest of his son. The surgeon's lined face revealed no change of expression. His gaze fixed on the puckered scar which showed just above the bandage he had placed there a half hour before. His memory bridged back over the years to that day his sons had lain before him on the surgery table at the lodge. He recalled their twelfth birthday, when he had taken that patch of skin from Leonard's breast to mend Victor's mangled face.

"Father," the young man on the bed murmured again. "All of this has—hurt him so— Before I go—I want to tell him again—to tell him not to grieve."

"Leonard!" Hans Rorbach snapped. At the sound of his name, the young man's eyes fluttered open. The smile upon his lips broadened. "You're not going to die, my son. Don't ask me how I know, or why. But it is true."

The strange son made no answer, yet something in the compassionate

expression on his flushed face told his father that he understood. Nancy's fingers reveled in the curling locks. Reading the silent plea in the suddenly mournful eyes, she lowered her head to press her lips against his in answer.

Rorbach moved silently from the room. A minute later after his son had drifted off into a restful sleep, Nancy joined the surgeon in the hallway.

"My own son," Rorbach muttered, "and yet I cannot be sure!"

"I am sure," Nancy said firmly. "I saw that scar on his chest when you drew back the sheet. I ran my fingers through his curling hair. But I did not need those things to tell me. It was something in his eyes, on his lips. Leonard did not die! I know. I have the right to know, because I love him, and he loves me."

"No," Rorbach agreed, shaking his great, shaggy head slowly. "Leonard did not die. He is too kind and good to die. A soul like his cannot die. It will live on forever."

FEATURED IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE ROAD TO YESTERDAY

A Complete Novelet of Ancient Memories

By HENRY KUTTNER

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ONE MORE RIVER

By
E. HOFFMANN
PRICE

*Author of
"Snake Goddess," "Mummies to Order," etc.*

*When Old Hank Tate Answers
the Call of a Dying Enemy, He
Brings Envy and Bitterness—But
the Beyond Knows Not of These!*

HANK TATE took a faded red bandanna from his hip pocket and wiped his wrinkled forehead. Feathery clouds hung against the rising sun, and as he rested from splitting the winter's logs, he studied them for a moment. Then he spat and shook his head. A frown creased his leathery face, for he was lonesome. He could not stop thinking of Colonel Walton and the friendship which had ended, years ago, when they met Molly Kane.

Dave Walton had seen her first. He had always had the advantage. Even the sun came to his rich acres, which were east of the high ridge. Hank Tate's mouth hardened under his white mustaches, and his gnarled hands tightened about the ax helve. He had to quit mooning and attend to business, for the clouds told him



Whips cracked and
wheels rattled

that the first storm was blowing in from the Pacific.

Something colder than winter stared Hank in the face. All his years were behind him, and they mocked him. There is nothing as bitter as enmity between former friends.

A cheerful voice called out behind him.

"Drop that ax! What the hell do you know about machinery?"

It was Pat Muldoon, the ranger from the Chilao Station. Hank started. Funny he had not heard the horse's hoofs on the rocks. Pat's rugged face was the color of his saddle, and a frown wiped off his smile as he came closer and dropped the reins over the roan's head.

"Going to storm a bit." He fumbled for words. "Tough winter coming, Hank."

"Bring me that radio tube?"

"Didn't get to town Sunday like I planned."

Hank sensed that the ranger had dropped in for more than a chat. He watched Muldoon settle into the wire-mended rocker in front of the little cabin, take out brown papers, and twist a neat cigarette. Maybe they had fired him.

"Ain't in trouble, are you, Pat?" Hank urged.

"Uh—I just don't know how to start off. It's about Colonel Walton."

Hank straightened up, white mustaches bristling.

"Huh?"

"I know you and him never liked each other too much, but I'm hornin' in anyway. Doctor says he's failin' mighty rapid. Mrs. Walton says he's been talking about you. If he wasn't so weak, he'd come down the mountain to make peace with you," Muldoon said.

Hank snorted. "He'll pull through, and then he'd be sorry."

The ranger made a few false starts at speech. He shook his head.

"I'll be riding," he mumbled. "Bring you that tube next trip."

Hank stood in the doorway till the ranger had disappeared around a bend in the trail. He did not feel like working any more that day, and he went into the snug little cabin.

IT ALL went back to Molly Kane, and the day Hank and Dave Walton had met her. That was when settlers were racing into the newly opened Indian Territory. Time must have whitened her black hair and dimmed her dancing eyes. But in Hank's memory she was still slim and sweet and lovely. They were neighbors, and had been for years, here in California, but Hank had not seen her nor Dave.

He buried his face in his gnarled hands.

"One more river to cross. Dave's crossing it first. This once, being first ain't a treat."

For a moment, triumph made him glow. He got an old man's thrill from the idea of outliving his fellows. Molly would be a widow and her sons had their hands full, drilling oil or engineering. No ranching for them. Then Hank looked at his hands and shook his head. The glow had faded, and he was ashamed.

"Molly can't hold it against me," he argued, supporting the idea that a man of principle could not back down on an old hatred. "I said I wasn't ever going near the two of them. She understood what I meant."

At the time, young Hank had spoken the truth when he said that it was not a grudge. It was just a matter of not making a fool of himself, looking the things he could not say. But real bitterness did develop later, when Hank went out West and his estranged friend bought property just beyond Bear Mountain. Unwittingly Dave Walton had come so near that the old feud blossomed.

The new country that would attract one restless pioneer would logically attract another with kindred tastes and judgments. But Hank convinced

himself that this had been a gloating gesture.

The following morning, Hank began work at daybreak. Cold wind drove gray-white clouds before it. The storm was nearer than he had realized, and Hank cut wood with a fury he could scarcely understand. At times he heard voices—distant shouts, snatches of old songs, the crack of teamster's whips, and the creaking of ox-yokes and horse harness. Once he answered a familiar hail, then checked himself. He stood frightened, looking about him in terror.

He did not feel quite right until he blamed it on the wind. It played tricks in the ravine, making human sounds in the timber. But answering Dave Walton was worse than merely hearing and ignoring him.

Late that afternoon, Pat Muldoon came riding up the trail. The upturned collar of his mackinaw reached the brim of his hat. When he pulled up at the cabin, he dug into his saddlebags.

"Here's that tube, Hank. You got it now, before you're snowed in."

"Come in and have some coffee," the old man offered.

"Sure would like to, but I got to get back to the station. It'll be snowing soon like all get-out."

"Well, thanks for the tube," Hank said. He hesitated. "So you went to town after all, before Sunday?"

"Yeah. Getting things for the colonel. The old coot, he won't let them take him to the hospital. Says if it's time to go, it's time, no matter where you are."

There was a long silence while Hank fumbled aimlessly with the tube.

"Did he talk about me?" he mumbled finally.

"He was pretty weak, and he knew the storm'd block the trail."

Muldoon mounted and spurred his horse up the steep ascent. His words, Hank thought, had been an indirect

reproach for not having gone to see the colonel while the trail was still clear.

Hank heated coffee for himself. He was too tired to eat, and he was uneasy. A thought was sneaking up on him—a thought he did not welcome. He was fighting it without even being aware that it was in his mind.

HANK put the new tube into the radio, and the news flashes distracted him for awhile. But increasing static spoiled that and the music he found when he tired of war reports. The reception faded, blared, ended in a grisly crackling. A new program at last came out of the confusion. This did not amaze Hank. He had often told Pat Muldoon that his was a remarkable set. Instead of sticking to one broadcast, it sometimes offered two or more simultaneously.

Occasionally the effect was ludicrous. Sometimes it was eerie, that far-off music, dim and gray like the overcast sky. The sad, thin piping made Hank gulp and blink. He was glad when the louder broadcast came in with deep lusty voices.

"Coming round the mountain—"

Whips cracked, wheels rattled. They had certainly put in some fine sound effects in this one. He could not tell it from the pure quill.

Hank could almost taste the dust and see the shotgun messenger on the box. Then it was the race into Indian Territory, the fastest rider and the hardest driver getting the choicest claims.

He jerked upright.

"Damn if that don't sound like Dave singing!"

He wanted to snap off the switch. But he sat there, fascinated. A queer orchestration began to overpower the voice. The sweetness of things long past affected him so strongly that Hank knew for the first time how treacherous a man's memory was. Molly was singing. He knew now that his treasured recollections had become

pale and time-bleached. Instead of having carried a bit of her with him, he had hoarded unreal tinsel.

Dave's voice came in again. And as Hank had failed to carry Molly's true image in his memory, so had he failed with Dave. He had piled bitterness on a heap of warped fragments, wasting both love and hatred.

He lurched out of his chair, cursing the radio that had showed him the waste of fifty years. But he neither turned it off nor hurled it into the corner. The sound sorcery blurred and there was only a sputter and the howling of wind.

Hank shivered. He stood gaping in wonder, though his eyes were still wet and soft. The grief at losing the presences that had rolled time back was suddenly gone. Hank knew how to redeem this heart-breaking waste of love and hate, now that he realized what he had done.

He plucked an old wooden shawl from a peg. For the first time in years, Hank Tate looked forward instead of back. He reached behind the curtain that hid his neatly pressed old serge and fumbled until he found the pint of whiskey Pat Muldoon had brought him months ago. A little more than half remained.

"Ain't more than a good snort for me and Dave," he said aloud. "What that old coyote needs is some red liquor."

The radio was jerking out bits of a soap program. Hank was not at all certain that he had heard singers with voices like Dave and Molly. But the wonder of setting out to do what he had really been wanting to do for all these years was all the answer he wanted.

The gale came to meet him at the steps. Hurdling oaks and pines, it flung itself against the mountainside.

To keep warm, he struck out boldly, though he had always maintained that a slow, steady pace was the best for rough going. At the foot of the steepest grade, Hank turned back to look at

his cabin. Smoke from the dying fire rose, then flattened out and eddied toward him. Wind tore it to tatters and whirled the wisps high over the trees.

A crash made him look up. The old bee-tree had fallen at last, the end of a never-failing supply of honey. On the way back, he might salvage some of it. The bees, poor things, could not live long in this blizzard.

"Like humans," he said to the wind. "They think they can grab and hide something sweet and keep it forever and not spill or lose any."

THE first snow fell when the wind died down a bit. Feathery flakes whirled and danced past him. A cap of clouds blotted out the notch of Gunsight Pass. It would be tough going up there.

Several deer bounded past him, hurrying down trail without the slightest fear, though the wind blew his scent toward them. They were heading for the safety of warm canyons below, a sure sign that winter had come in earnest. The gale drove the snow into nooks and crannies, piling it high against the rocks. But it also swept the flakes from the trail, which made the going easier for awhile.

Eventually Hank's high boots became heavy. All the lightness had gone to his heart, leaving his feet lead-soled and numb. The snowfall was thicker now. If it had not been for the blaze on the trees, he would have lost the trail. Looking upward, he saw that the entire peak was shrouded by clouds that covered it like a cap of slate-colored fur. Now and then the darkness parted, showing the needle-sharp summit, all white and splendid.

The pass, several hundred feet below, was no longer visible. A strange moaning filled the air, and the pines added their voices. At times the sounds became articulate. Hank paused uncertainly. This was worse than he had expected. Then he turned

resolutely and bent to the climb. He had refused his chance to retreat, and he had to go on. Suppose Dave were failing rapidly!

He fought his way, half-blinded by stinging crystals. The firs and pines in the gulches were solid cones of white. Drifts piled, and often he had to wallow through, hip deep. Then he was in the midst of the clouds and unable to see the trail. For a moment fear paralyzed him, until he remembered that it was almost impossible to lose his way, for there was no mistaking the high ridge.

A bit farther up the pass, now hardly more than half a mile away, the frozen snow from the summit came down with cutting edges. Hank's legs were getting weaker. The music no longer warmed him, and neither did the voices that had come with him from his cabin. His thoughts became confused, and his intoxicating certainty left him.

"I've got to push through," he repeated anxiously.

He was walking in the cut. The wind, now coming only from behind, fairly lifted him over the final rise. He was winning!

In the shelter of high rocks he sat down. It was quiet on the down slope, and though the fall was still heavy, he could see almost as far as Dave Walton's ranch. He found company in his own voice.

"Better take a swig, long as I save one for Dave," he said aloud. "He'll have plenty of his own."

The whiskey warmed him, and his brain came to life. Sweeping the bitterness from his soul had made him years younger. A grudge was like a loaded pack saddle—something for a jackass to carry around.

AS THE drink wore off, Hank became sleepy and contented. It was almost warm in the shelter of the rock. But for the good news he had for Dave and Molly, he would have rested. He plodded along easily until

he reached the creek bottom, and there he paused for another sip.

Three or four ounces remained, but that was enough for two partners to drown a grudge in before they crossed the last river.

There was the broken alder and the oaks heavy with mistletoe. Then he was still on the trail, with not far to go. He slipped into waist-high drifts and had to fight his way back. If that old grudge had weighted him, he could not have made it.

The snowfall became heavier. Many a time, sitting on the highest ridge of his property, he had looked over the way that led to Molly's house. He had done it often enough to have every detail in mind, but things looked different in a storm, and he could not find the twin pines. Thick willows blocked him on every side. It did not seem possible for him to fight his way through the tangle.

"Shucks," he said, half-chuckling, half-sobbing. "I just got to follow the creek. Can't miss that way."

The stream was a black ribbon that threaded the whiteness. He stumbled along to the forks. The one to the right led to Pat Muldoon's station. The one to the north passed the ranchhouse. Finally he clawed his way up the steep banks of a waterfall. The pool below was knee-deep, but he did not feel the water run into his boots. His legs no longer ached, and that helped.

When Hank reached the top, he had to rest under a tall manzanita whose sheltered side showed smooth red bark. As the wind twisted, the snow mist thinned. He could see the dark mass of the ranchhouse only a couple of hundred yards away. He fumbled a long time before he got his coat unbuttoned. He needed another drop—just a bit, leaving two scanty drinks for when he wished Dave Walton good luck and prosperity.

"Rich land, this Indian Territory," Hank muttered. "Mighty fine claim Dave staked. But let him have that

good luck. I got Molly's smile and a claim next to her father's acres."

The bottle was missing. Hank clawed his other pockets, but could not find it. He wondered if he had lost it while struggling up the fall. Or was there any fall in that corner of Indian Territory?

Better see Dave in the morning. He'd sat up too late the night before, on the front porch with Molly. Hank began to hesitate about breaking the news to Dave, who had met her first. But all's fair in love, and Dave should have staked a claim. He'd tell Dave that, get it over with.

Hank swayed crazily, then settled back, chin drooping on his chest. He was comfortable and warm. Spring in Indian Territory was clear and crisp and sunny. New settlers were coming in, though the rush was over.

THEIR voices were lusty. Whips cracked, harness creaked, wheels rumbled. A whole wagon train was coming down from Horse Flats. Hank was puzzled for a moment, being in two places at once. There were covered wagons, top buggies, plain buggies. Teams of oxen were drawing huge freight wagons heaped high. There had been none for many a year, and he wondered how time and voices could ignore all limitations.

Men shouted, women exchanged greetings, and dogs barked. A young fellow twanged a banjo and sang:

"Comin' round the mountain—"

This pleased and bewildered Hank. Somehow this was the same old scene, the same unforgettable day. Yet it was different, and of a sudden he knew why. It was the same day, but now he was here first, ahead of Dave!

The wagons stopped near a river crossing, and the leader rose in his stirrups. When he shouted, the high rocks flung back his voice.

"Only one more river to cross!"

Molly Kane was beside Hank, watching the newcomers. She had great dark eyes and a smile that was beauty

slowly blossoming. There was a man on a white horse. Dave had arrived, riding with his father. They wore wide-brimmed, low-crowned hats.

"Bring 'em over slow, and mind you stick to the middle of the ford," Hank shouted.

Animals strained against the harness, and some shied back from the water that came high as the hubs.

"There's room for them here," Hank said to Molly. "Good pasture, rich soil, friendly land, and enough for all."

She nodded, shaded her eyes and looked ahead.

"Who's that tall man on the white horse?"

"That's my partner, Dave Walton." Hank said proudly. "We went to school together."

This was how it should have happened, half a century ago. Time and space played tricks on old Hank as he nodded in the shifting snow, for he was first now. It was like an old deck dealt into new hands. He was no longer puzzled, for anyone could understand how the same cards can make a new and winning pattern.

Then Molly's voice faded, and with it went all the splendor. Hank stirred missing the touch of her hand, the sounds of the train. A tall man came on foot through the gray white haze, through the gray between dusk and dark. He loomed up monstrously, yet the bulk of the ranchhouse was half-visible behind him. Hank's loneliness left him as he rose lightly.

"Dave, you old coyote! Been nursing a bottle, and there's just a swaller left. I got something to tell you."

The tall man came forward, hand extended.

"It's been right lonesome, Hank. Mighty glad you found your way out here. . . ."

The swirling snow obscured the two friends who walked into the failing light. They did not seek the shelter of the ranchhouse. They went side by side. Neither was first now, nor was

there any girl's smile between them. They were quite unaware of what the drifts were hiding beneath the manzanita bush.

INSIDE the house, lamps were being lighted. A white-haired woman raised tear-stained eyes to her son.

"That storm seemed to make your father feel better toward the end." She tried to smile, a brave attempt that almost succeeded. "He wouldn't say much, but he'd been hoping old

Hank Tate would come over, before— Well, when it started storming, he knew that Hank just couldn't have come."

Colonel Walton's tall son nodded. His mother was telling him only what he also had seen and heard. Awkwardly he patted her shoulder.

"I know, Ma. I noticed he was anxious for awhile, looking for someone, expecting something to happen. And then he took it easy. I guess it sounds silly, but it was like he'd heard old Hank or seen him."



COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

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*The Snow-Thing, Whose Home is the White Silence,
Softly Caresses, but Exacts a Toll of Death!*



He was set upon by a wind "with snow in it"

ITHAQUA

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

Author of "The Man from Dark Valley," "Eyes of the Serpent," etc.

IN THE spring of 1939 there pushed into the public prints various obscure paragraphs, most of them very muddled, concerning such apparently unrelated matters as the queer beliefs of certain Indian tribe remnants, the apparent incompetence of Constable James French of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, the disappearance of one

Henry Lucas, and finally the vanishing of the aforesaid Constable French.

There was also a brief uproar in the press concerning a certain statement released on the eleventh of May, by John Dalhousie, Division Chief of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. The statement was a reply to the public criticism of

Constable French and the general handling of the Lucas case.

Lastly, by means of a strange grapevine system of communication, apparently not by word of mouth, since no one was ever heard to speak of it, there was a certain incredible story about a Snow-Thing, the story of a strange god of the great white silence, the vast land where snow lies for long months beneath a limitless, cold sky.

And yet these apparently unrelated phenomena, to which the press referred with ever-increasing scorn, were closely bound together by a sinister connection. Let us turn to the record. On the eleventh day of May, John Dalhousie wrote:

THIS is in reply to harsh unjustified criticism directed against me in the matter of the Lucas investigation. I am being especially harassed by the press because this case still remains unsolved. It is being pointed out that Henry Lucas could not have walked from his house and vanished, despite the fixed and indisputable evidence *that this is what Lucas did*.

"The facts are briefly these: On the night of the 21st of February last, during a light snowstorm, Henry Lucas walked out of his cabin on the northern edge of the village of Cold Harbor and was not seen again.

"A neighbor saw Lucas going toward the old Olassie trail near Lucas' cabin, but did not see him subsequently. This was the last time Lucas was seen alive. Two days later, a brother-in-law, Randy Margate, reported Lucas' disappearance, and Constable French was sent at once to inquire into the matter.

"The constable's report reached my office two weeks later. Let me say at once that despite public belief to the contrary, the Lucas mystery was solved.

"But its solution was so outré, so unbelievable, so horrible, that this department felt it must not be given to

the public. To that decision we have held until today, when it has become apparent that our solution, however strange, must be released to stem the flood of criticism directed at this department.

"I append herewith the last report of Constable James French."

Constable French to Division Chief Dalhousie:

Cold Harbor, 3 March, 1939:

Sir: I have hardly the courage to write this to you, for I must write something my nature rebels against, something my intelligence tells me cannot, must not be—and yet it *is!* Yes, it was as we were told—Lucas walked out of his house and vanished—but we had not dreamed of the reason for his going, nor that something lurked in the forest, waiting. . . .

I got here on the twenty-fifth of February and proceeded at once to the Lucas cabin, where I met and spoke to Margate. He, however, had nothing to tell me, having come in from a neighboring village, found his brother missing, and reported the matter to us.

Shortly after I saw Randy Margate, he left for his own home in Navissa Camp.

I went then to the neighbor who had last seen him. This man seemed unwilling to talk, and I had much difficulty in understanding him, since he is apparently very largely Indian, certainly a descendant of the old tribes still so plentiful around here. He showed me the place where he had last seen Lucas, and indicated that the vanished man's footprints had abruptly stopped. He said this rather excitedly.

Then, suddenly looking toward the forest across the open space, he said somewhat lamely that of course the snow had filled in the other tracks. But the place indicated was wind-swept, where little snow stayed. Indeed, in some places the footprints of Lucas could still be seen, and beyond the place from which he supposedly disappeared, there are none of

his, though there are footprints of Margate and one or two others.

In the light of subsequent discoveries, this is a highly significant fact. *Lucas certainly did not walk beyond this spot, and he certainly did not return to his cabin.* He disappeared from this spot as completely as if he had never existed.

I tried then, and I have tried since then, to explain to myself how Lucas could have vanished without leaving some trace, but there has been no explanation save the one I will presently chronicle, unbelievable as it is. But before I come to that, I must present certain evidence which seems to me important.

You will remember that twice last year the itinerant priest, Father Brisbois, reported disappearances of Indian children from Cold Harbor. In each case we were informed that the child had turned up before we could investigate. I had not been here a day before finding out that these missing children had never turned up, that, indeed, there had been strange vanishings from Cold Harbor which had never been reported to us, that apparently the disappearance of Lucas was but one in a chain. Lucas, however, appears to have been the first white man to vanish.

THERE were several singular discoveries which I quickly made, and these left me with anything but a favorable impression. I felt at once that it was not a *right* sort of case. These facts seem to rank in importance:

1. Lucas was pretty generally disliked. He had repeatedly cheated the Indians and, while intoxicated, had once tried to interfere in some matter apparently pertaining to their religion. I considered this as motive, and it may yet be so—but not so obviously as I had first thought.

2. The chiefly Indian population of Cold Harbor is either very reluctant to talk or refuses to talk at all. Some of them are downright afraid, some are sullen, and some are defiant and even warning. One of them, Medicine Three-Hat, when questioned, said:

"Look, there are things you are

not to know. Of them is Ithaqua, whom no man may look upon without worship. Only to see him is death, like frost in the deep night."

Three-Hat would say nothing more. However, what he did say has since taken on much significance, as you will see.

3. There is a curious ancient worship here. Of this, more below.

Frequent hints of some connection between great bonfires in the pine forest skirted by the old Olassie Trail, sudden, inexplicable snowstorms, and the vanishings, put me at last upon the thread of discovery tying up to the odd worship of these Indians of the North.

I had thought at first that the villagers' guarded reference to the forest and the snow were only the expression of the natural fear of the elements common to people in isolated countries. Apparently, however, I erred in this.

On the second day after my arrival, Father Brisbois came into Cold Harbor, and he, seeing me at one of his brief services, sent an altar boy to tell me he would like to see me. I saw him after the services.

He had assumed that I was looking into the disappearances he had reported to us, and expressed considerable surprise when he learned that the lost children had been reported found by their parents.

"Then they suspected my intentions," he said in explanation, "and prevented an investigation. But, of course, you know that the children never did turn up?"

I said that I knew it, and went on to urge him to tell us all he might know about the mysterious vanishings. His attitude, however, surprised me.

"I can't tell you, because you wouldn't believe me," he said. "But tell me, have you been in the forest? Down along the old Olassie Trail, for instance?" And, at my negative, he went on: "Then go into the woods and see if you can find the altars. When you find them, come back and tell me what you make of them. I'll stay in Cold Harbor for two days or so."

That was all he would tell me. But I saw then that there was something to be discovered in the forest, and though the afternoon was on the wane, I set out along the old Olassie Trail and out into the woods, though not without carefully estimating the hours of daylight yet remaining.

I went deeper and deeper—it is all virgin woods there, with some very ancient trees—and finally I came upon a trail through the snow. Since there had been a rather clever attempt made to disguise this trail, I felt I had hit upon something.

I followed it and had no difficulty in finding what Father Brisbois meant by the altars. They were peculiar circles of stone, around which the snow appeared to be all tramped down. That was my first impression, but when I got up next to the circles of stone I saw that the snow outside the circle was like glass—smooth, but not slippery—a fact, incidentally, that could not be ascribed solely to *human* footprints. Inside the circles, however, the snow was soft as down.

These circles were quite large, fully seventy feet in diameter, and were crudely put together of some strange kind of frosted stone, a white, glazed rock with which I am totally unfamiliar. When I put out a hand to touch one of these rocks, I was severely shocked by what was apparently an electrical discharge of some kind. Add to this the fact that the stone is certainly of great age and incredibly cold, and you may conceive of the amazement with which I viewed this strange place of worship.

There were three circles, not very far removed from each other. Having examined them from the outside, I entered the first circle and found, as I have pointed out before, that the snow was exceedingly soft. Here there were very distinct footprints. I think I must have looked at them in mild interest for some minutes before their significance began to dawn upon me. Then I dropped to my knees and examined them carefully.

The evidence before my eyes was plain. The footprints were made by a man wearing shoes, certainly a white man, for the Indians hereabouts

wear moccasins. Moreover, the prints were the same as those made on the open space by Henry Lucas when he vanished. On the face of it, I felt I could work on the hypothesis that these prints had been made by Lucas.

BUT the most extraordinary thing about the footprints was that they gave evidence that the man who had made them had neither walked into the circle nor walked out of it!

The point of entry—or, rather, the beginning of the line of prints—lay not far from where I stood. Here was partly snow-covered evidence that he had been *thrown or dropped* into the circle.

Lucas had then risen and begun to walk around toward the circle's only entrance, but at this entrance his footprints hesitated, then turned back. He walked faster and faster, then he began to run, and abruptly his footprints stopped entirely, cut off toward the middle of the circle!

There was no mistake about it, for, while the preceding footprints were slightly snow-covered, the light snowfall had apparently stopped coincident with the cessation of the footprints.

As I was examining these curious prints, I had the uncomfortable feeling that I was being watched. I scanned the forest covertly, but nothing came into my line of vision.

Nevertheless, the feeling of being under observation persisted, and a mounting uneasiness took possession of me, so that I felt a definite sense of danger within this strange and silent circle of stone deep in the hushed woods. Presently I emerged from the circular altar and went toward the forest in some apprehension.

Then suddenly I came upon the site of great fires, and I remembered the half-hinted suggestions put forth by some of the natives of Cold Harbor. The fact that Lucas' footprints were within the stone circle certainly linked the fires to his disappearance, and, as I have pointed out, snow was obviously falling at the time Lucas stood within the stones.

I remembered then, too, that there had occasionally been rumors of fires

seen in the deep woods along the Olassie Trail when that trail was still in use a few years ago. I examined the ashes, though, owing to encroaching darkness, I could not be as careful as I wished. Apparently only pine boughs had been burned.

I now saw that not only was darkness closing down, but that the sky had clouded, and flakes of snow were already beginning to sift down through the trees. Here, then, was another point in evidence—the sudden oncoming of a snowstorm, when but a few moments before, the sky had been devoid of clouds! One by one those queer hints were taking tangible form before my eyes.

All this time, I was still certain that someone was observing my every movement, so I calculated my movements in such a way that I might surprise anyone in the woods. The fires had been burned behind the altars, and as I turned, I faced the stone circles.

Now, as I say, it was getting dark, and snow was falling—but I saw something. It was like a sudden cloud of snow hanging over the altars, like a huge shapeless mass of thickly packed snow—not just a swirl of flakes, though snow-flakes did seem to encircle it. And it did not have a white color, but rather a blue-green tint shading away into purple.

THIS may have been the effect of the dusk which was rapidly invading the forest. I want to make clear to you the fact that I was not then conscious of anything strange, being fully aware of the weird light-changes sometimes affecting one's vision at dusk.

But, as I went forward, past the altars, I looked around. And I saw that the upper half of that weird entity moved independently of the lower!

As I stood looking up into the darkness, the thing began to fade away, just as if dissolving into the falling snow, until at last there was nothing there. It was then that I became frightened, with the fear that the thing encompassed me, was all around me in the falling snow. For

the first time in my life I was afraid of the woods and the night and the silent snow. I turned and ran, but not before I saw—*where the snow image had been, a pair of bright, green eyes hung suspended like stars in space above the circular altars!*

I am not ashamed to confess that I ran as if a pack of hell-hounds bayed at my heels. I still thank whatever powers there are for guiding my mad flight to the comparative safety of the Olassie Trail, where it was still quite light, and where for the first time I paused. I looked back toward the woods, but there was nothing to be seen, for the snow now was falling thickly.

I was still afraid, and I half imagined that I heard whispering among the snow-flakes, a hellish whispering urging me to return to the altars. So strong it was, so clear, that for one awful moment I stood wavering on the trail, almost ready to turn and plunge again into the ominous darkness of the forest. Then I broke the spell that held me and ran on down the trail toward Cold Harbor.

I went directly to the house of Dr. Telfer, where Father Brisbois was staying. The priest was frankly alarmed at what he described as my "wild and horror-struck appearance," and Dr. Telfer wanted to give me a sedative, which I declined.

I told them at once what I had seen. From the expression on his face, I gathered that what I was saying was neither exactly unexpected nor new to the priest. The doctor, however, made it rather plain from his comments that he considered me the victim of illusory phenomena common enough at twilight.

Father Brisbois disagreed. In fact, the priest hinted that I had penetrated a veil always present but seldom seen, that what I had seen was no illusion but indeed a tangible proof of a ghastly other world of which most human beings, mercifully, know and suspect nothing.

"There exists no legend," Father Brisbois said, "that is not firmly rooted to something, even if that something existed in a long, long forgotten past beyond memory of

man. Elementary forces are still worshipped in far out-of-the-way places in this world—the Wind-Walker, and Ithaqua, god of the great white silence, the one god of whom no totems bear sign."

THE memory of what I had seen hanging above the stone circles deep in the forest beyond Cold Harbor came to me.

This and the knowledge that one old Indian had mentioned to me a name that the priest had now spoken—*Ithaqua*.

"Do you mean that the Indians hereabouts worship this thing called *Ithaqua*, offering up their children as human sacrifice?" I asked. "Then how explain Lucas' vanishing? And who or what, actually, is *Ithaqua*?"

"As to Lucas," Father Brisbois answered, "he was extremely unpopular, steadily cheating the Indians, and at one time got himself mixed up with them at the forest's edge. That was but a few days prior to his disappearance. As to *Ithaqua* and who or what he is, I am not capable of answering. There is a belief that none but worshippers dare look upon him. To do so otherwise means death. What was it you saw above the altars? *Ithaqua*? Is he the spirit of water or of wind, or is he truly a god of this great white silence, the thing of snow, a manifestation of which you saw?"

"I don't know about that," I said. "I'm thinking about those poor Indian children."

"I buried three of them," said the priest thoughtfully. "They were found in the snow not far from here, found encased in beautiful shrouds of snow soft as down, and their bodies were colder than ice, even though two of them still lived when found, only to die shortly after."

I did not know what to say. If I had been told this before going into the forest, I would frankly have scoffed at it, as Father Brisbois foresaw. But I saw something in that forest, and it was nothing human, nothing even remotely human. I am not saying, understand, that I saw what Father Brisbois meant by his "god of the great white silence," what the

Indians call *Ithaqua*. No, but I did see something.

At this point someone came to the house with the astounding announcement that Lucas' body had just been found, and the doctor was needed to examine it. The three of us immediately followed the Indian who had brought this message to a place not very far from the fur-trading post, where a large crowd of natives stood around what seemed at first to be a large and gleaming snowball.

But it was not a snowball. It was the body of Henry Lucas, cold as the stones in the circle I had touched, and the body was wrapped in a cloak of spun snow. I write *spun*, because it was spun. It was like an ineffably lovely gauze, brilliantly white, with a subtle suggestion of green and blue, and it was like pulling away brittle, stiffened gauze when we tore the snow covering from the body.

IT WAS not until this wrapping had been torn away that we discovered Henry Lucas was not dead! Dr. Telfer could hardly credit his own senses, though there had been two previous cases similar to this. The body was cold, so cold we could hardly bear touching it. Yet there was a faint beating of the heart, sluggish and barely perceptible. But it was there, and in the warmth of Telfer's house the breath came, and the heart's beating became firmer.

"It's impossible," said the doctor, "but it's happening. Yet he's dying, sure as I'm standing here."

"Hope that he may become conscious," said the priest.

But the doctor shook his head.

"Never," he said.

And then Lucas began to talk, like a man in delirium. First it was indistinguishable sound, a low monotone like a far-away uneven humming. Then words began to come, slowly, few and far between, and finally phrases and sentences. Both the priest and I jotted them down, and compared notes later. This is a sample of what Lucas said:

"O, soft, lovely snow. . . . Here, *Ithaqua*, take *Thou* my body, let the snow-god carry me, let the great god

of the white silence take me. . . How soft the snow, how drowsy the winds, how sweet with the smell of locust blossoms from the south."

There was much more of this, and most of it is meaningless. Lucas never talked like that in his whole life. Whence, then, had come the words that issued from his lips?

From Lucas' maunderings we managed to piece together a story, the story of his disappearance. Apparently he had been drawn from his cabin that night into the snowstorm by the sound of unearthly music combined with an urgent whispering which seemed to come from just beyond the cabin. He opened the door and looked out. Seeing nothing, he nevertheless went out into the snow. I should venture to guess that he had been hypnotized—though that seems far-fetched.

He was set upon by "something from above"—his own words, which he later qualified by saying of it that it was a wind with "snow in it." By this he was carried away, and he knew no more until he found himself dropped into the circle of stone in the forest.

Then he was aware of great fires burning in the woods, and of the Indians before the altars, many of them flattened out in the snow, worshipping. And above him, he saw what he spoke of as "a cloud of green and purple smoke with eyes." Could it have been the same thing I saw above the altars?

As he watched, this thing began to move, to come lower. He heard music again, and then he began to feel the cold. He ran toward the entrance, which stood open, but he could not pass through—it was as if some great, invisible hand held him away from outside. Then he became frightened, and he ran madly around, and finally he cut across the circle.

And then he was lifted from the earth. It was as if he were in a cloud of soft, whispering snow. He heard music again, and chanting, and then, terribly, far in the background, a ghastly ululation. Then he lost consciousness.

After that, Henry Lucas' story is by

no means clear. We can gather that he was taken somewhere—either far underground or far above the earth. From some of the phrases he let drop, we might suspect that he had been on another planet, were this not absolutely impossible. And he spoke as if this were a punishment he had incurred. His words made Father Brisbois very uneasy, and several times I am sure that the good priest was praying to himself.

He died about three hours after being found, without gaining consciousness, though the doctor said that his state was normal, except for the persistent cold and his being apparently unaware of us and the room.

I hesitate to offer any solution beyond giving you these facts. After all, these things speak more clearly than any words. Since there is no means of identifying any of the Indians present at those hellish services in the woods, there can be no prosecution of any kind. But that something fatal happened to Lucas in those stone circles—probably as a result of his brush and interference with the Indian worshipers—remains indisputable. How he was taken there, and how he was transported to the place where his body was finally found, is explainable only if we accept his terrible story.

I suggest that in the circumstances we would be quite justified in destroying those altars and issuing stern warnings to the Indians of Cold Harbor and the surrounding country. I have ascertained that dynamite is obtainable in the village, and I propose to go out and dynamite those hellish altars as soon as I have the proper authority from you to do so.

Later: I have just learned that there are a great number of Indians making off into the woods. Apparently there is to be another meeting to worship at those altars, and, despite my strange feeling of being observed—as from the sky—my duty is clear. I shall follow as soon as I dispatch this.

* * * * *

THUS ends Constable French's report. John Dalhousie goes on as follows:

"The foregoing is the complete text of Constable French's final report to me. It reached my office on the fifth of March, and on that day I wired instructions to him to proceed with the dynamiting, and also to arrest any native suspected of being a member of the group who worshipped at those strange altars.

"Following this, I was forced to leave Headquarters for a considerable time, and when I returned, I found the letter from Dr. Telfer telling me that Constable French had disappeared before receiving my telegram. I later ascertained that his disappearance took place on the night he dispatched his report to me, on the night that the Indians worshipped at the altars near the Olasie Trail.

I SENT Constable Robert Considine to Cold Harbor immediately and I myself followed within twenty-four hours. My first business was to carry out myself those instructions I had wired to French, and I went into the woods and dynamited those altars. Then I devoted myself to finding trace of French, but there was absolutely nothing to find. He had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed him up.

"But it was not the earth that had swallowed him up. On the night of the seventh of May, during a violent blizzard, Constable French's body was found. It was lodged in a deep snowbank not far from Dr. Telfer's house. All evidence showed that it had been dropped from a great height, and the body was wrapped in layer after layer of brittle snow, like spun gauze!

"Death from exposure to cold! What ironic, empty words those are! How little they tell of the colossal evil lurking beyond the veil! I know what Constable French feared, what he more than suspected.

"For all that night, and all last night, I saw from my window in Dr. Telfer's house a huge, shapeless mass of snow bulking high into the sky, a huge, sentient mass surmounted by two inscrutable, ineffably cold green eyes!

"There are even now rumors that the Indians are gathering again for another meeting at the site of those accursed altars. That shall not and must not happen, and if they persist, they must be forcibly removed from the village and scattered throughout the provinces. *I am going now to break up their hellish worship. . . .*"

But, as the world now knows, John Dalhousie did not carry out his plan. For on that very night he vanished, only to be found three nights later as Constable French and Henry Lucas were found before him—wrapped in "ineffably beautiful" snow, like spun gauze, scintillating and gleaming in the wan moonlight, like those others who had suffered the vengeance of Ithaqua, the Snow-Thing, the god of the great white silence.

The Department scattered the Indians throughout the provinces, and all persons were forbidden to enter the forest bordering the unused Olasie Trail. But somewhere, in the forest night, sometime they may gather again, murmur and bow low, offer their children and their enemies as sacrifices to the elemental object of their worship, and cry out to him as Lucas cried: "*Ithaqua, take Thou my body . . . Ithaqua. . . .*"

Next Issue: Complete Novels and Stories by SEABURY QUINN, HENRY KUTTNER, DOROTHY QUICK, DON ALVISO, RAY CUMMINGS and Others

Appointment With a Lady

By WYATT BLASSINGAME

Author of "The Blank Face of Horror," "The Flame Demon," etc.



Maloney saw the grim figure standing in the doorway

*Maloney Ran from His Date with Doom—But Fate
Is a Jealous Jade Who Refuses to Be Jilted!*

THE doctor walked to the door of the hospital with Maloney, and there they shook hands.

"You've had a close call," the doctor said. "It placed a great strain on your heart. Not many get that close and manage to come back."

"I have you to thank," Maloney said.

"No. You have to thank yourself. There wasn't much I could do for you. You pulled yourself back by the sheer, overwhelming will to live." The doctor looked straight into Maloney's

eyes. "I hope you'll remember that."

"I will," Maloney said. He hesitated, obviously embarrassed. "I won't try that—that again. I promise you."

The doctor put his hand briefly on Maloney's shoulder before they said good-by and Maloney went down the steps. The doctor stood in the doorway, looking after him. He saw Maloney walk to the corner and stop for the light to change. It was not a particularly busy corner, but Maloney was being careful. Any man who had been as close to death as Ed Maloney would be careful. When the light turned green, Maloney started across the street.

The automobile appeared so suddenly, it seemed almost to have materialized out of the air itself. It swept past the sedan which had hidden it from view, roared beneath the red light, and bore straight down upon Ed Maloney. Instinctively the doctor yelled a warning.

Maloney had already seen the car. He whirled, leaped back for the curb. Tires shrieked as the machine swerved toward him, then straightened again, missing the man and curb by the barest margin.

Instead of stopping, the car gained speed as it rushed on. It tore past the hospital. The doctor, still tense on the front steps, saw that the woman driver was its only occupant. He had a brief, fragmentary glimpse of her face as the car raced past, and quite abruptly he was shivering. He felt a cold sensation that was not altogether shock at the near accident.

The automobile whirled left at the next corner and somehow avoided upsetting. As suddenly and violently as it had appeared, it vanished.

ED MALONEY stopped at the first bar. He was still trembling and he felt a sick weakness in the pit of his stomach. That close brush with death had badly frightened him. He ordered brandy and soda, downed it quickly and asked for another. Sip-

ping the drink, he let his mind turn back to that other time. . . .

The papers had called it a suicide pact, and it had come close to being a successful one—too close, for Ed Maloney had never intended to die. The idea of death had never occurred to him until Mary mentioned it.

He finished his drink with a gulp, telling himself for the thousandth time that he had not killed Mary. She had wanted to die and he had merely allowed her to commit suicide. That other—the stage setting—had been necessary. It would not have helped for him to die also. He couldn't have kept her company in the grave. Why should he have killed himself simply because she had grown morbid, because she didn't want to live any longer the way they were living?

It was not pleasant to think of those last months. One job after another had slipped away from Maloney. For awhile they had managed to live on what Mary made. Then she, too, had lost her job because she couldn't carry on any longer. The baby was to be born in another month.

He remembered the queer flame in Mary's eyes as she had looked at him.

"I'm not going to have the baby, Ed," she had said quietly. "I won't do it. I won't bring a child into the world to live like this. I'll kill myself first."

But it would have done no good for him to die too. He was thinking that, his hands clenched on the bar rail as he ordered another drink. He was remembering the one thing he was always afraid to remember and which he could never forget. Again he heard the insidious softness of his own voice as he handed the sleeping pills to Mary.

"Take these. If we are going to—to do it, it'll be easier if we are asleep."

She had taken them without question, but he had dropped his own out the window.

He remembered how quietly she had lain there on the bed while the room filled with gas. He could almost feel

the gas, a light but tangible substance, like fluffed cotton as it piled up and up in the room. He had knelt with his nose close against the tiny crack at the bottom of the window, waiting for the neighbors to become aware of the odor, waiting for them to begin breaking in before he closed the window completely and stretched out upon the floor.

Mary had lain utterly still. He could no longer see her chest rise and fall with her breathing.

"She's already dead," he had thought. Then abruptly she had moved. She had stood up and stumbled toward him. On hands and knees before the window, he had tried to avoid her. But she had stumbled and fallen against him, knocking his head hard against the window-sill.

That was how the neighbors had found them, lying together on the floor.

"He doesn't have one chance in a hundred," the doctor had said, working on him. "The woman is already dead."

Maloney thought of that now as he paid for his drinks with money from the insurance.

"Death money," he thought, and desperately pushed the words out of his agonized mind.

IT WAS early twilight when he finally left the bar. Now the pavements gave back the fierce heat of the day. The faces of passers-by looked pale and tired. Maloney at last became conscious of the sweat oozing from his pores, of the weariness of his body. He wanted to go home and take a bath. But not the old home, of course, not the apartment where it had happened. His temporary home would be the apartment on the Drive which a friend who was leaving town that day had said he could use. At the next corner, Maloney went down the steps to the subway.

Although it was after the peak of the rush hour, the station was fairly

crowded. The crowd moved with a slow, weary surge toward the trains, back toward the stairs. Maloney found his way along the guard rail to the place where the traindoor would stop. The station filled with the echoing roar of oncoming wheels.

Someone must have stumbled against him, for he was suddenly shoved forward, straight past the end of the guard rail toward the tracks. He tried desperately to regain his balance, failed, and began to fall.

He had a wild glimpse of the train. It seemed to be expanding violently in size, thundering down upon him. He saw the contorted face of the motor-man. Then one flailing hand clutched the guard rail and he dragged his paralyzed body away with the strength of that hand. Somehow he managed to keep his feet, and he was safe an instant before the train ground past him.

Hardly anyone had noticed the near-accident. Maloney couldn't even tell who had pushed him. That woman in the crowd, going away from him? He had only a glimpse of her face. He couldn't be certain. But a man whom the woman had passed abruptly began shivering, hunching his shoulders together beneath his white linen jacket. "That's damned odd," Maloney heard the man saying to a companion. "All at once I felt cold all the way through."

Unreasoning fear took hold of Ed Maloney. He went reeling away from the train. He shoved people aside, began to run, fighting his way through the crowd and up the subway steps.

On the sidewalk, he kept going, not running now but walking fast with a kind of blind, fixed purpose that he did not question or understand. He pushed through the revolving doors of a bar.

"Whiskey," he moaned, and was holding out his hand before the bartender could pass the bottle and glass to him.

He stood and drank and kept his mind a tight, fierce blank. Twice he

paid his bill and went to the door. Each time he turned back to the bar again. He was afraid to go outside. He did not know why he was afraid, nor did he even know definitely that he was afraid. He did not want to face either reason or result. He did not want to think at all. He wanted to shrink his skull tight around his brain so nothing could move within it.

"Buddy, if you're going to keep drinking all night, you ought to eat something," the bartender said.

"Sure," Maloney grunted.

was keeping his mind too tight on nothingness.

"Take a cab uptown," he mumbled. "Tell the driver to be careful."

But when he reached the corner, a bus was parked there. He knew instinctively that it was long after the last bus should have run, but he got on. Buses were more careful than cabs.

"This ain't a regular run, mister," the driver said. "I'm through for the night." Then he shrugged. "Well, okay. It don't hurt the bus to take one more trip."

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He ate what the bartender brought him. Then he began drinking again, unaware of time, surroundings or the occasional men who spoke to him.

"We're closing now, buddy," the bartender was saying. "You want me to call you a cab? There's a stand right down on the corner."

"I'll get one," Maloney replied. "I'm all right."

He walked quite straight without even the stiff-kneed motion of the drunk who doesn't want to stagger. The liquor seemed to have no effect on him. He did not feel it in his brain nor in his stomach either. He

Maloney had taken his seat and the bus was in motion before he realized that he was not the only passenger. A woman sat across the aisle from him. He was startled to see her there. He must have passed right by her without noticing. But now he stared at her with a kind of hypnotic unwillingness.

He was aware first that he could get no idea of her age. Nineteen? Thirty-nine? He could not have guessed. She had huge scarlet splotches of rouge on her cheeks. Her eyes were deep-sunken, her chin bony. She was hideous and yet she somehow exerted a definite attraction. Like—

Quite slowly she turned and looked straight at him. When she smiled, he tore his gaze away from her, swung around and stared out of the window. He was cold, frozen all the way to the marrow of his bones. He began trembling. His teeth chattered. He held to the edge of the seat with one hand, clutched the window-sill with the other and forced himself to stare out into the night.

The bus rolled on steadily with a low hum of motor and wheels. It did not stop at all. Street lights flickered past.

BYOND the lights, the dim park sloped down to the empty flatness of the Hudson. Beyond the river, other lights strung a thin misty necklace of diamonds above the Palisades.

In the window, Maloney could see a dim reflection of the interior of the bus, yet he could not see the woman behind him. He could feel her there, though. He could even feel sure that she was watching him. But because the reflection was poor, he could not see her. He turned slowly.

She was there, directly across the aisle and looking fixedly at him. All at once he had the wild, crazy idea that this was the woman in the automobile that had almost struck him, the woman in the subway station. At that moment she moved, and he knew that she was going to sit beside him.

He flung himself from the seat, went reeling down the aisle. He grasped the motorman by the shoulder.

"Let me off!" he cried. "Let me off here. Quick!"

The lurch of the stopping bus threw him forward against the windshield. Then the door opened and he was out, running. But he stopped quickly and turned to make sure the woman had not followed.

She was not in sight. He looked at the bus, but it was already in motion and he could not see inside it. She was nowhere in sight.

It was then the truck came swiftly

out of the side street and swerved in front of the bus, just missing it. Ed Maloney felt the muscles of his throat tighten spasmodically. If the bus had not stopped to let him off, it would have collided with the truck! If he had not got off when the woman moved to sit beside him—

He walked the rest of the way. Twice he stopped, listening, peering back into the darkness. But there was no one following him. An occasional car hummed along the Drive, and that was all.

Once a taxi pulled alongside, slowed down, then roared ahead. Maloney was tired now, but he was determined to walk the rest of the way.

"I'm drunk," he muttered. "That long strain in the hospital, and too much liquor tonight. I've been imagining things."

But though his legs had begun to ache, he kept walking.

The elevator boy had gone off duty when Maloney reached the apartment house.

He had to climb the stairs. He went up them slowly. The exercise made his heart beat in heavy, dull throbs. It ached a little as it squeezed the blood in and out until he finally reached the fifth floor.

He opened the door of his friend's apartment, entered, and closed the door behind him. He switched on the light. Standing there panting, he steadied himself.

He stood just inside the door, looking about him. The lights were not bright. The corners of the room were in shadow and the shadows seemed to flicker and move gently. He started toward the sofa, which was beside the door leading into the next room.

Suddenly he saw her for the first time. She stood there in the doorway, looking steadily at him.

He felt the coldness, the fierce, terrible upsurge of fear within him. But he was too tired to run now. He stood and gazed at her. She was hideous and attractive. Her bony cheeks were

splotted with rouge, her hair sprawling loosely upon her shoulders.

"You've been difficult to meet," she said. "You've struggled so hard."

Staring at her, he seemed to be hearing something the doctor had said, a long time ago, it must have been. "The sheer overwhelming will to live—"

But the woman was saying:

"I always keep my appointments. You should have realized that."

"Appointment?" he quavered. "I've made no appointment with you."

The lights were so dim, he could scarcely see the walls of the room. But he could see her there in the doorway.

"Don't you remember?" she urged.

"You and Mary. But only Mary kept her appointment on time."

"Then you—you are—" he said slowly.

For an instant his terror was greater than the weariness that held him. He screamed, a hoarse, horrible wail as he turned and went stumbling for the door.

But in the dim light he could not find it. The moving shadows confused him. They closed around him.

They filled the whole room and grew darker.

Then black, ultimate weariness rolled toward him. But he was still screaming and struggling to reach the door when it struck.

"THAT'S the man who tried to commit suicide about a month ago," the doctor said. "And then, his first day out of the hospital, he got drunk and climbed five flights of stairs. His heart was already weakened. It couldn't take the strain."

"Well, he didn't go without complaining," the ambulance driver said. "Folks said they could hear him screaming down in the basement."

"I thought we had saved him," the doctor mused. "When he left here—" A puzzled expression was in his eyes. He was remembering the automobile which had swept under the red light and almost struck Ed Maloney, remembering the queer, cold sensation he had felt as the car passed.

He shrugged and turned back to his work with a baffled, helpless feeling, like a blind man trying to paint with colors he has never seen.

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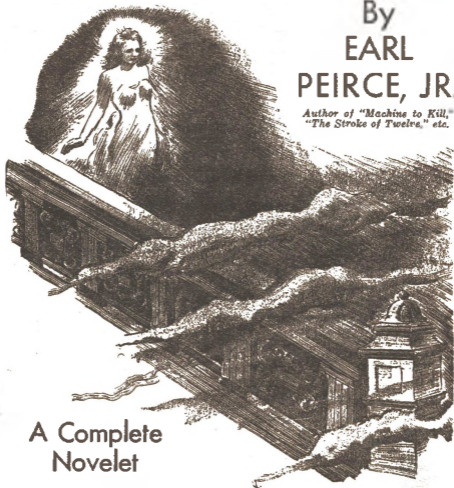
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THE SHADOW

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EARL
PEIRCE, JR.

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A Complete Novelet

*Captain Crane Believed His Lost Love Dead—Till He Found Her
Helpless in a Mystic Spell Where Only Death Could Bring Release!*

CHAPTER I *Mysticism and Wine*

I WAS at sea when Corinne and Hayward were married, and I regretted bitterly that I was unable to attend the wedding. But three days later, when my boat docked, I found myself in time for Corinne's funeral. Her death was the hardest blow I

could have taken. Inexplicably, only three hours after the ceremony, she came down with a chill and complained of sharp pains in the back of her head. Alarmed, Hayward drove to the nearest village and spent frantic minutes routing out a doctor. A country physician, he smilingly diagnosed "emotional mix-up" when he learned that his patient was a bride on

OF NIRVANA



Corinne stood there, her gown a web, her hair a golden halo

her honeymoon. But his provincial medicine was wrong. Within twenty minutes Corinne was dead.

Some of the wedding guests were still at home when Hayward telephoned the news, and it was his father who took the call.

"Corinne has just died!" Hayward

blurted. "I'm in Hanover, just beyond Richmond. No, there hasn't been an accident. Oh, God, father, I don't know! Is Clyde there? Please ask him to come at once. No, Father—just Clyde!"

Clyde was the family physician, the only man Hayward would allow to

touch his wife. When he arrived, however, he could do nothing. His searching examination only confused him more.

"Something obscure she may have picked up in the Orient," he muttered.

Pain-racked, sobbing, Hayward glared about the dingy mortuary.

"Oh God, Clyde," he cried, "sign that certificate and let's take her home."

"But I don't know what killed her. I can't do anything until I've conducted an autopsy."

"Autopsy! Not in a thousand years. Never!"

"I know how you feel, Hayward. But it's a medical question. Her illness might be contagious. It might be a form of plague."

Hayward closed his eyes. "No autopsy! No matter how much you mutilated her, you'd never know what killed her. She just died, Clyde. Can't you understand that? She just died! Often she told me that when people were divinely happy they were closest to death. It was a philosophy she picked up in the Orient."

Clyde winced at the irony. He knew that he could not lift a scalpel to Corinne.

"I'm not relenting," he said suddenly. "She'll have to be buried in a metal casket, hermetically sealed with lead. It's to be done here and now."

"Yes—anything. Only don't destroy her. Oh God, she was so beautiful! You can't destroy her, Clyde. Not her!"

Hayward collapsed, and Clyde took him to a hotel and put him to bed. Returning alone to the mortuary, he signed a certificate attesting that Corinne had died from a heart attack. The coroner was satisfied, for it lessened his own burden in the matter.

He assisted Clyde with the final preparations. Selecting a bronze casket, settling Corinne into its depth, they screwed down the lid and sealed it with molten lead. It was a heart-rending task for Clyde, and he executed it with the most objective callousness he could command. He was one of the many men, including myself, who had loved Corinne above all things on earth.

If it appears abrupt, this story of Corinne's death, the story of her life is even more so. For eighteen years she lived among us, first as a chubby pink-cheeked child in her nurse's perambulator. Then, as a girl who carried dolls and wore blue dresses that always reminded me of a petite ballerina. Then, as a school-girl who rapidly outgrew dolls, who had many beaux and outgrew the beaux to develop into a prematurely thoughtful girl.

She was blonder than Aurora, with beautiful long legs, the shoulders of a boy, and a face as piquant as a yellow jonquil. Her beauty was a myth before she reached seventeen. Afterward, she herself was rather a myth, for she came and went among us like some recurring sylph—to Switzerland, France, Belgium, and England, and latterly to India, Sumatra, and the Islands. She went wherever her father, old Colonel Starling, who died last year, was ordered by the War Department.

Now Corinne was dead. Many times during those first few hectic days I deceived myself into doubting that she had ever really lived. It might be said of her, as of Keats, that she was comet-like, flashing across the horizon of our lives, burned out of our vision by her own brilliance.

These may be maudlin reflections, the despoiled fruit of my own affection for Corinne, but I know they are shared by older and by younger men than I. We all loved her. We could not help ourselves, we young lieutenants fresh from the Point who found this vibrant girl gayly going the rounds of Army posts from Hawaii to Washington.

In France, there might have been duels for her. In England, secret sacrifices of heroic magnitude. But here, where the communal spirit is so strong, our individual love for Corinne was absorbed by the common love for her. The closest we came to possessing her was to be a part of that society to which she returned again and again.

For a short while there was some hope of an individual conquest. When the colonel died, just after Corinne

turned eighteen, it was assumed that one of us would marry her. I believed that she understood that assumption, for she became serious and talked with us of such things as parenthood and child-psychology.

But we should have known—I should have known—that those intimate conversations were only substitutions for the nightly talks she used to have with the colonel.

It was a shock, then, when Corinne married a man outside of the service—a man, worse, who had left the Point as "misfit for military duty."

I knew Hayward's father well, had served under him at Fort Benning during my first two years out of school. He was a veteran warrior.

But the spirit had died after him. On compulsion, Hayward went to the Point, but lasted only a year. Then, after an abortive six years spent traveling about India, he returned with a mad streak of mysticism and an insatiable appetite for wine.

He was twenty-six then, skinny as a Hindu, with pale, oddly luminous skin which contrasted unhealthfully with the damp darkness of his eyes and hair. He was, I suppose, a romantic change from the ramrod-backed youngsters fresh from school, with their military haircuts and dress-parade stiffness.

But that he would snare Corinne from our midst, squire and win her within a week, and marry her in a month, was something which none of us could have believed.

I know little of their brief and hectic courtship, for I was stationed as an observer in a troublesome spot in the Balkans. My only contact with unofficial Washington was by mail.

The letters of friends thinly disguised their disapproval of the impending match. One said that at first Corinne had strongly disliked Hayward. Another hinted that Hayward was hypnotizing Corinne.

No matter how he accomplished it, Hayward definitely won Corinne over. Within a week, they were inseparable. Within a month, engaged.

The wedding was set for the thirtieth and I was to be Hayward's best man. But I was delayed and by the

time I arrived home Corinne was dead.

CHAPTER II

Suspicion of Murder

THE time phase of Corinne's death, rather than its unexplainable nature, horrified us. When I first heard the news I was so stunned that I could not credit it. Later, when that bronze casket was brought home, I stared at its closed lid as though defying it to contain the corpse of the girl I loved.

Hayward took the death with unsuspected stoicism. There was no hysteria, not even a tear. He was white-faced and sober, with a savage intensity to his actions, attesting to the inward course taken by his frustration. It was evident—that he loved Corinne with a passion I could not equal—a semi-fanatical love.

Yet somehow I couldn't help but feel that a perverse streak in his nature derived a peculiar joy from it all. This is difficult to explain, for it was pure impression, with nothing factual to back it up. Yet the impression became stronger each time that I saw Hayward until, at length, subjective as it may have been, I was disgusted by the sight of him.

The bride's body was taken to Cypress House, the home of Hayward's grandfather, which had been deeded to him as a wedding gift. It was a charming, old, but lonely house on the Potomac, not five miles from Mount Vernon. With ivy and clinging mosses, quiet and brown, the sentimental dust of generations enclosed it with an aura of sentient homeliness.

Corinne had romped about the bluegrass lawn as a tot, and I still retain a vision of her as a girl of thirteen, in her first "grown up" dress, sagely playing hostess at one of General Hayward's teas. And then, there was the cool, damp, lichen-covered vault below the garden where Corinne was to be laid away.

She had hidden there once during

a game of hide-and-seek. As though it were only yesterday, I can recall her frightened tears when nobody had come for her until after dark.

The burial took place in mid-afternoon, and then all of us but Hayward returned to Washington. He was to remain, vigil-like, to complete the aborted honeymoon at Cypress House.

After, I understood, he was to sail for India and enter the Buddhist monastery at Benares. His life, he had told us, was ended. The duration of his years must be spent in purification for his eventual reunion with his beloved. Admirable sentiments, perhaps, but too Oriental, too womanish, for either the general or myself.

Corinne was dead—a shocking, "damnable" tragedy, as the general said. But people had died before, and life must go on. And so, leaving Corinne behind, we slid back into the life-streams that would carry us away from her.

Weeks passed, and then months. I heard nothing from Hayward and saw his father only once or twice in the line of official business, until, one day, I had an unexpected visit from Clyde. He had driven to Cypress House a few times at the General's request. Aside from the fact that Hayward was postponing his pilgrimage to India, he had found nothing out of the ordinary. This time, however, he returned with suspicions which disturbed me profoundly.

"For one thing," Clyde began abruptly, "he's discharged both servants and barricaded himself in the house. For another, he flatly refused to let me in. We stood on the porch a bit talking generalities, then he point-blank told me to leave. He's been drinking heavily and he's thinner than a rail."

HE PAUSED a moment, then dove into a gist of his suspicion.

"I think he's mad—literally mad, I mean. I hate to say it, knowing how straight the general is, but the facts are staring us in the face. He's a sickly specimen, morbid, and—well, fanatical.

"He's got a woman up there. Oh, I know that for a fact! After dark I

circled back and climbed up on the front porch. There was a woman asleep in one of the beds. There were nightgowns on a hanger, perfumes and combs on the dresser, and a steamer-trunk full of clothes. The hellish part, Steve, is that he's loaned her Corinne's things!"

"My God!" I whispered.

"Yes, it's pretty rank. The General would flay him with a saber if he found out. What's more, he intends to keep her. The larder's packed with food and wine.

"Another thing," he went on without giving me a chance to speak, "is that he's molested Corinne's casket. I sneaked down to the vault and had a look. It was gloomy and I couldn't see a lot. But the flowers were strewed about the floor. And the casket has been moved!"

I said nothing for a moment. A mad thought had occurred to me, and I despised myself even before uttering it.

"This woman in the bed," I began. "Did you see her face?"

"No. Her back was toward me, and the blanket covered her completely."

Swallowing, I forced my next words. "Was she *breathing*?"

Clyde stared at me for a second, then exploded.

"God, Steve! What an idea! Thank God she was breathing. Oh, she's alive! It's not *her*!"

I breathed my thanks. The horror of my own suspicions gave way to repulsed anger.

"In that case, Clyde, this other woman must be some kind of an accomplice. As Corinne's only heir, Hayward should inherit a considerable pile of money. A hellish thought, I admit, but as you said, the facts are staring us in the face. And you'll admit that Corinne's death wasn't according to Hoyle?"

"I know, I know! I should have done an autopsy. But good God, Steve, how could I have suspected? She had eaten nothing, drunk nothing but the wine at the wedding. And Hayward seemed so forsakenly in love with her. Who among us would have dared to imagine that he and another woman were plotting murder?"

"There's only one way to find out. Order an autopsy."

"I can't do that. Not yet. And suppose we're wrong? Think of the scandal."

"If it was murder. . . ."

"I know! But. . . . Oh God, I don't know what to think. I'm a physician, not a psychiatrist."

"I'm neither," I snapped. "But I know what to do. If Corinne was murdered, he's going to pay with his life for it. I'm going up there—now—alone!"

It was after sundown when I arrived at Cypress House. For the last hour, regardless of traffic and intersections, I had kept the speedometer steadily at sixty-five.

It was raining slightly and the private road to the house was an April quagmire. The car spun upward, careened over a hillock, and thrust its headlights upon the rambling porch of the building.

The windows of the lower living room and of one upper bedroom were lighted. Otherwise, the house was obscured by blackness. It looked unfamiliarly large and desolate. The grass was thick and heavy as a carpet. As I crossed the lawn it sprinkled water about my feet.

The place was so run-down that it shocked me, but it was the thought of Corinne that I had in mind as I climbed the steps of the porch. It had been three years since I had seen her—three years culminated by her marriage to another and by her death.

And now I carried up those familiar steps the dread suspicion that she had been murdered.

Before I reached the door, I obtained a glimpse of Hayward through the front window. He sat in a chair facing me, but his eyes were focused on the wine glass which he held loosely in his right hand. To judge from his dishevelled hair and blood-shot eyes, he was in an advanced stage of intoxication. Two empty bottles lay on the rug by his feet, and a third bottle, half empty, stood on a table by his elbow. There was no one else in the room.

CHAPTER III

Never Dead!

STEPPING away from the window, I moved forward and knocked sharply on the door.

I heard the chair creak as Hayward sprang up, and I scarcely had time to brace myself before the door was flung open in my face.

"Get away from here!" Hayward shouted. "What the hell are you doing here?" He stopped when he recognized me. "Crane," he faltered. "Captain Crane!"

"Right, Hayward. Mind if I come in?"

Without waiting his response, I gripped his arm and shoved him back into the house. Still holding him back, I closed the door.

"Your father asked me to drive out," I lied. "He was worried because he hadn't heard from you in some time."

"Oh," he said. "Nice of you." There was a trace of a sneer in his voice. "When you return you may tell the General that I'm in the best of health. I presume that's all he wants to know."

"No, not all," I parried. "He wants you to come back to Washington with me."

This also was a lie, but it had suddenly occurred to me that I could handle Hayward better if he were away from the now malign influence of Cypress House. Moreover, I had a vague plan of taking him to a psychiatrist and, while he was away, of removing Corinne's casket to Walter Reed Hospital for an autopsy. Added to this, Hayward's absence would give me an opportunity to talk with his mysterious woman boarder.

"You'd better get your raincoat," I said. "It's a rotten night."

Hayward glanced at the window. "So it is. That's all the more reason why I should remain here." His eyes met mine defiantly. "Listen here, Crane. You might have had a claim

to come noseying around here at one time, but that claim's gone. The quicker you get out, the better!"

By "claim" I presumed that he meant Corinne, for he knew that I loved her. His words stirred my anger. However, I held myself in check while feeling my ground.

"The General's afraid you're too lonely here," I said after a moment. "The house is certain to bring back unpleasant memories, and this brooding seclusion isn't helping you any. We all understand how you feel, of course, but life can't just stop."

He sneered again. "So that's it. You think I'm planning suicide. Hiding out like this, brooding, as you call it. Well, you can go back, Crane, and tell the General there's no danger of that. I know he thinks I'm crazy, but I'm certainly no coward."

Suicide had not entered my mind. But now it gave me the excuse I needed to remain at Cypress House and keep Hayward under surveillance.

"Frankly," I said, "I disagree with the General's suspicions but inasmuch as he asked me to keep an eye on you, I'm going to do it. He said you'd be alone long enough."

I stressed the alone. At the same time, I studied his face for any indication of irony. I was rewarded. A faint half-amused smile touched his mouth.

"So the General thinks I'm alone, does he?"

A tremor touched me.

"Naturally," I said.

"That's funny. You actually think that Corinne is dead?"

I THOUGHT I misunderstood him.

"Dead!" he shouted. "You think that Corinne is dead!"

"I—"

"I know! An Army doctor—the worst kind—scribbled a death certificate when he didn't even know what he thought had killed her. And an Episcopalian minister quoted words from a Bible over a coffin that contained her alleged corpse. Also, of course, she was buried in a vault. Time-honored rituals, Captain Crane, which mean absolutely nothing.

Christ was buried, too. And so were a few thousand yogis of upper India. But you couldn't call them dead—"

Oddly enough there was no fire in his eyes and his voice was under good control.

"Listen," he said. "You and the whole pack of your smug Army friends have ridiculed me ever since I outgrew short pants. When I left the Point, you all laughed because you thought you were so damned superior with your righteous traditions and your stiff-necked militarism. I was an outcast, a misfit, a round-shouldered introvert who didn't know enough to come out of the rain. Because I preferred a few lines of poetry to a bayonet I was a sissy.

"But get this, Crane. I learned things in India about which the Point or any other service school will never breathe a word. I learned things about life and death and the in-between that so far outshine your cozy American thinking that I can't help laughing my sides out at your sheer stupidity.

"I learned, for example, a few things about love. Yes, Crane—love. You were abroad when I first met Corinne, but if you had been here you'd have seen love as it is made by those who really study it. I was a laughing stock when I came in. Corinne laughed too, damn her! She laughed at the pale, awkward misfit from West Point. But she didn't laugh after she was alone with me.

"It was pretty fast work, wasn't it? Even the big-chinned boys in the brass buttons had to admit that it was pretty fast work. The belle of the ball, mine within a month, snatched from under your noses!

"How did I do it, you ask? I'll tell you, Crane. I'll tell you that you don't get a woman with big chins and brass buttons, but you get a woman with what's here and here"—striking his chest and forehead—"and you keep a woman with what's here!"

He thrust out his hand, not a fist, but a grappling claw.

"Does that make sense or doesn't it?" he flung at me. "Because if it doesn't, just ask yourself, who has Corinne now?"

I was so stunned by this maniacal

outburst that I could not speak, but Hayward saw what I was thinking, and for the first time his emotion boiled over into anger.

"You think she's dead, do you?" he cried. "You think I won her and lost her, do you? Well, she's not dead. She's alive. Got that, Crane? She's alive, she's here, she's mine!"

Turning about, he cupped his hands about his mouth.

"Corinne! Wake up, Corinne! Put on your negligee and come down here!" he shouted.

There was a moment of dead silence. I shook my head. Then a door opened upstairs. A moment later, there was the sound of a woman's tread at the top of the blackened staircase. . . .

It was Corinne.

I knew that the instant she stood in the doorway. She seemed thinner and taller, more graceful than she had ever been before. Her skin was lustrous white. And her eyes, fixed on me in a look of cold appraisal, were as bright as gems. She wore a cream-colored robe wrapped closely about her silk nightgown. Her blond hair was parted in the middle and combed down to her shoulders. On her feet she wore the fishskin slippers I had sent to her from Paris.

Corinne!

I would have fainted if she had spoken to me. My head was rocking. I could find no words. There was nothing to say, nothing to believe. Was she actually alive? Or was this some zombiesque apparition? Or had she never been dead? I turned to Hayward in a blank stare of bewilderment.

Hayward actually grinned. "Have you ever seen her more beautiful?" he asked.

I passed my hand across my eyes. "You fiend," I breathed. "What have you done to her?"

"My dear Crane, I've done nothing to her. Nothing, that is, which can bring her any harm. You'll admit she looks healthy."

Healthy! I shuddered. Corinne was an animated corpse. Her face was ashen. Her eyes were haunted.

"You think she's pale?" Hayward asked. "True. But paleness becomes

her. Thinner? But not too thin. You see, Crane, this is a woman's natural condition. Too many women are bloated with overeating and discolored by cosmetic poisoning.

"Even Corinne, when I first met her, was a specimen of this decadence. But I've changed that. The poisons are gone, and all of the petty vanities have been excised. I didn't stop with mere physical cleansing. There was, naturally, an essential purging of the mind."

His mockery was wasted on me. I could do nothing but stare awe-stricken at the woman who stood in the doorway. There was no recognition in Corinne's eyes. She was like a sleep-walker. Zombie? What else was she? Clyde himself had pronounced her dead.

"You are thinking of the death certificate?" Hayward asked suddenly. "It's not the first time a cataleptic patient has fooled a doctor. However, we're grateful that Clyde didn't insist upon a post mortem examination."

He looked at Corinne and she returned the glance, much as a hypnotic patient looks at her physician. Again a tremor went over me. Between these two, I could feel a powerful psychic bond, and all at once I realized how distant Corinne and I now were.

"Yes," said Howard, "she's a different Corinne. She's the real Corinne, pure and unspoiled as dew. You see, we of India regard women as flowers. They must be carefully guarded against injury, tended, nurtured, and looked after. Their beauty would perish unless it were protected. For that's all they are, Crane—beautiful flowers. And a flower has no greater purpose than to be cared for by its gardener."

Hayward brought a glass of wine to his lips and began drinking slowly. His eyes flicked across the space which was separating him from Corinne. A horrible transfiguration took place in her. Her body stiffened as though struck by an electric current. Her mouth opened and closed. There was a tetanic tightening of her muscles. The most awful change came in her eyes.

Hayward finished his drink and threw the glass on the floor. Corinne's eyes followed it, and as the untasted dregs of the wine spilled onto the carpet she ran the tip of her tongue across her lips and made a movement to step forward. Hayward grasped her arm. Immediately, she relaxed. Her eyes closed and she began swaying.

I started forward, but Hayward swiftly scooped her into his arms and carried her up the steps. On the landing, he looked back, and his glance told me not to follow.

FOR the three minutes that he was gone, I didn't move. Even my thoughts were paralyzed. I distinctly heard him carrying Corinne into a bedroom and heard the creaking of the bedspring as he laid her down, but my mind did nothing more than to repeat her name over and over:

"Corinne, Corinne, Corinne. . ."

I was still in a daze when Hayward came downstairs. He gave me an indulgent grin as he crossed the room. Immediately he filled another glass with wine and sank into a chair.

"Help yourself," he invited.

Shaking the suggestion irritably aside, I reached for cigarettes and nervously lighted one. Even then I was at a loss for words. I simply looked at him, and in that glance he understood all of the horror and revulsion and bewilderment I felt.

It amused him.

"You should see yourself, Crane. What would the War Department think? Is that the face which launched a thousand protocols?"

His attempted comic usage of a trite phrase shattered my mood. I came back to earth with a sickening snap of perspective. An urge for action stung me.

"You're insane, Hayward," I cried. "I don't know what you've done and how you did it, but I do know that you're raving mad. And whatever it is, the police will hear of it. Where's your telephone?"

The grin on his flaccid lips didn't change. He lifted his eyebrows over the edge of the glass.

"Police? I don't think so, Crane.

What would you tell them? That I've resurrected my wife? Think how they'd laugh. Even when you proved that Corinne is alive, they'd deny she'd ever been dead. Y'see, Crane, she never was dead. That makes it rather confusing, doesn't it? As for my sanity, that's a matter of viewpoint. What you so glibly mistake for madness is nothing more than superior knowledge."

He finished the rest of his wine with a grandiose toss of his head.

"Summing it up, I don't exactly see how you can lodge any complaint."

His logic was as cold and lucid as crystal. It made me realize that despite the ghastliness of what he had done there were no legal points against him. He hadn't murdered Corinne.

CHAPTER IV

The Spectre of Corinne

BUT what had he done to Corinne and why?

"Catalepsy, you say?" I demanded. "But why, Hayward? Even if you could produce catalepsy, why in God's name have you done this to Corinne? She loved you, Hayward. Trusted you. And you, you . . ."

"I have endowed her with the highest perfection of life—serenity."

"Serenity!" I gasped. The memory of that possessed face swept over me. "Serenity! Oh, God, Hayward!"

Hayward reached for the wine bottle again and, finding it empty, flung it on the floor and settled back in his chair.

"You saw her at the wrong time," he said. "Ordinarily—twenty-three hours out of twenty-four—her face resembles that of the Buddha. It's only during feeding time that the basic emotions dominate."

Feeding time! His words numbed me with horror.

"It's the wine," he explained. "That's all she eats. The nourishment is just sufficient to provide a heart-beat. There is no waste. She is living

at the level of perfect metabolism. As a result there is no decay or degeneration. I can think of no reason why she should grow old.

"In fifty or sixty years, when her flesh dries, there will be a shrinkage, a kind of mummification, but her body will be as clean as a baby's. By that time, of course, I expect she'll be completely immersed in Nirvana."

He was so calm, so undisturbed by these prophecies, and so confident in his knowledge, that it occurred to me that perhaps I was the mad one. Nirvana? Was there such a thing? And was there any truth to the claims of yoga? Passive resistance to life, submission, self-effacement, negation. The whole nullifying panorama of Hindu lore swirled about me like a potent anesthetic. But no! These things belonged to India, not to America, to decrepit age, not to youth! How, then, could I sanely associate Corinne with such matters. They were as apart as poles.

"You have my sympathy," Hayward said. "Having been an unbeliever once myself, I well know the quagmire of confusion in which your mind is wallowing. Like a cow stuck in mire," he added, chuckling.

"Fortunately for me, when I first began the study of yoga I had a teacher, Swami Kanahvira, now dead, who was the most accomplished *guru* since Pantanjali. I learned slowly, and I convinced myself of yogic powers only after the most severe discipline.

"In your case it has come in one indigestible lump. For that I'm sorry. But you must understand one thing—there is nothing malign in my conduct. I am simply putting into objective reality the cherished dream of any man, the gift of serenity for the woman he loves."

He was godlike in his expression, as though he were personally beyond good and evil, and transcendent of all human laws. Hence his words rang as false as a cracked bell. Imagine, if you can, a youth of twenty-six playing the godhead!

Again Hayward's uncanny telepathic sense struck home.

"You wonder what I get out of

this?" he asked. "Surely there is no normal marital life. But as a result, largely due to the proximity of one as beautiful as Corinne, my sublimated energy is superhuman. I am utilizing that energy for the attainment of the same gift which I have synthetically given Corinne, namely, the Eightfold Path to Nirvana."

AS HE talked I got a clearer picture of him than I've ever had. As though, for the first time, I saw his amazing vitality. It was evident in the lustrous pallor of his face, in the oiliness of his hair, and especially in the spirited animation of his eyes. When he talked, I heard him *think* rather than speak, for he talked as much with his eyes as with his tongue. And his voice was under such marvelous control that it was like the cadenced piping of a flute.

"Creative genius," he said, "is largely a matter of energy control. This is especially true in religious mysticism, where intense cerebration alone can bring about results. Unfortunately each individual is endowed with only so much energy, and he must distribute that energy as cautiously as a physician distributes an opiate.

"Normally a man wastes his energy on trivial matters. He is like a sieve which permits its water to escape willy-nilly. This is vegetative existence. Some men, however, have the power to stop the casual flow of energy, thereby permitting it to flow into definite channels. The fewer the channels, the greater the intensity of energy release, and the greater consequent results.

"Such men are rare, for a program of this kind demands infinite self-control. Hence all of the great saints were simple men who lived rigidly abstemious lives. Thus you find celibacy the inflexible rule of all priestcraft.

"So, when you refrain from expending your energy on the superficial pleasures of the flesh, you are in a position to direct it into any chosen field. Eating and a little exercise are enough. All else must be turned in toward the self. When this is done,

Captain Crane, a man taps the reservoir of Universal Mind. He is, virtually, in the power-house of God."

His words were calm. He was musing aloud.

"Unfortunately," he went on, "few men undertake such a devastating program without inspiration. To Christ, humanity was the inspiration. To Spinoza, it was wisdom. And to Pasteur and Mendel, the advancement of man's lot on Earth. And to Hitler, the power of dictatorship provides sufficient drive. I, however, have no illusions of advancing man or the state. I can think of only one ideal pure enough to justify a life of yoga.

"My inspiration is beauty. This alone can keep me adhering to the path; and in all my travels I have never met a woman as beautiful as Corinne—I mean physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual beauty. To me, Corinne is the incarnation of beauty.

"I CAN see by your expression, Crane, that I am not alone in my opinion of Corinne. Everyone who has met her thinks the same. But let me ask you this—what would happen if Corinne belonged to you? The answer is evident—a few years of adolescent romance, then children, a home, a life of domesticity, and then she would grow old and fat.

"But with me, she will find emancipation from this sordid fate. Already, she is beyond pleasure and pain, and in a few years the superficial flux of emotional disturbances will be quelled. She will be tranquil.

"And eventually her ego will be replaced by the Universal Mind, which is all-knowing. Meanwhile her beauty is the catalyst which will start me on the same path. Each time that I see her, I burn with the desire to possess her. By withstanding that desire, I can sublimate my energy into the channel of mysticism. And by the time her beauty succumbs to dehydration, I also will be in Nirvana.

"Thus we will have projected ourselves beyond mere physical and intellectual mating and will have fulfilled our marriage vow by entering together into everlasting life."

I do not know whether it was his words or his voice, or a combination of both, which lulled me into accepting all that he said. Already I was numb from shock. Now I became a blank of credence.

To me, Corinne was no less dead, and there were no fresh tears to shed. It was now a nightmarish unreality which intrigued me only by its strangeness. As in a motion picture, I wondered what was going to happen next. And this had to wait upon Hayward, for surely there was no role here for me.

Hayward smiled again, understandingly, utterly lacking his former mockery. It made me feel like an illiterate child learning rhetoric from a kindly instructor.

"You get a glimmering of the truth, I see? So much the better for your peace of mind. But don't let your conviction rest alone on what I have said. Having come so far, you might as well come the rest of the way.

"Later tonight you will observe Corinne as she takes her nourishment. If my words have been impressive, her actual demonstration will sweep you into complete conviction. It's agreed, then? Meanwhile you look as though you need a glass of this excellent tokay."

With these words he reached for a fresh bottle. . . .

It lacked ten minutes of midnight. For the past two hours I had not exchanged a single word with Hayward. I was immersed in groggy introspection. And he, having killed one bottle, was well on the way to consuming the second.

But he was not drunk. He sat deep in a comfortable chair, sipping his wine meditatively, brooding into his glass upon some private musing which I would never know.

Only once had he risen, and that was to change the records on his electric phonograph. Inappropriately, the machine had been playing over and over the ironic compositions of Alec Templeton.

Now, having changed the repertoire, the room was suffused with a sombre Brahms.

Unexpectedly a clock bonged a

single chime. Hayward jerked out of his chair.

"Five of twelve," he said. "I keep a clock to remind me in case I'm asleep or in a trance, for if Corinne doesn't get her wine at exactly twelve the results would be fatal. Her balance of metabolism is hair-line perfect."

"Why twelve?" I asked.

"Arbitrary. There's poetry in the hour."

Opening a wine cabinet, he selected a ruby-glass goblet etched with silver. It was a beautiful piece, and as he lifted it in the light it reflected a diadem of red and silver sparkles.

"Persian," he explained, as he filled it with wine from a decanter. "This was a gift from my *guru*. During his student years he drank tiger's blood from it."

Having filled the goblet, he carried it upstairs to the landing and set it down on a small teakwood table. All of this was visible from where I sat. Then he came downstairs and turned off the lights.

Only the light on the landing remained. It was heavily shaded, permitted only a soft bluish light to glow. It was like a stage scene in an Orson Welles production. As Hayward settled back in the chair beside me I felt an electric, pre-theatre hush.

"You're the first outsider who's ever seen this," he said softly. "Nonetheless I know I can count on your discretion. This isn't the type of thing that you talk about at the Officer's Club."

HE NEEDN'T have spoken. Thoughts of the Officer's Club and of the rest of my life were so remote they had not even entered my mind. As before, yet in greater concentration, I felt myself to be an impersonal observer, a brain and eyes without a heart, about to witness something which itself was heartless.

"She should be coming any minute now," said Hayward.

I could not help myself. A chill of horror ran through me. I wanted

to run. I could not move. It was like looking at the gallows a minute before the condemned person is brought in.

The silence was damning. I could hear Hayward breathing and that was the only sound in the room. The blue light on the landing was blindingly bright. In my heart I prayed for darkness. And we lolled in our chairs like wine-sated Romans in the amphitheater. Disgust, horror, and nausea tried to reach me, and I was worse off because my soul could not admit them.

"Less than a minute," Hayward breathed.

Parts of the landing, those corners where the bedroom doors were located, were hidden by darkness. I could not tell which door was opening. The rest of the landing, particularly the table which supported the goblet of wine, was under a cone of harsh light.

"Here she comes," he whispered.

At that instant, my mind went blank. I tensed. Leaning forward, I riveted my eyes on the darkness where the doors stood.

Corinne stood there.

She was a shadow of herself. In the blue light, her gown was a web and her hair a golden halo. Between these two, there was no semblance of a woman. It was the ghost of Corinne. Her face was a Benda mask of silk, and there was nothing in her eyes but blackness. She moved limply, flowed along, as a phantom moves, seemingly without touching the floor. At the table, she paused, and with the grace of a sylph, lifted the goblet to her lips and drank.

Here the illusion was shattered. It was no phantom drinking. The noise reached me first—the slaking noise of liquid taken greedily. I saw the tetanic convulsions of muscles in her throat. She seemed to gasp as an asphyxiated person gasps for air. The wine spilled. In red rivulets, it dripped from the corners of her mouth. It was like blood. And Corinne, drinking it, was suddenly monstrous.

"Under hypnotic compulsion," Hayward whispered, "the muscular con-

trol is weak. She will improve with practice."

And as she stood there still, spilling the wine down the white of her gown, the thought struck me like a mailed fist—"This is Corinne. This is the girl I have known and loved. This is *my* Corinne!"

As suddenly as she came, she went. Laying down the goblet, turning around, she vanished into the gloom. I did not know she was truly gone until I heard the faint clicking of the door.

AGAIN the silence fell, and for my life I could not shatter it.

Hayward stood up. In the darkness, he was as ghostlike as she.

"She didn't know we were here. That was better than I expected. It means she is now completely beyond our plane. Nothing can disturb her now, Crane. You have just seen the woman Salome would have liked to be. Now I suppose you'd like a shot?"

"Make it rye," I pleaded.

I knew I could never touch a drop of wine as long as I lived.

"Sorry, no rye. Nothing stronger than wine in this house. Maybe a bit of air? I think it has stopped raining."

He walked to the door, and I followed. The cool cleanliness of the night air did more for me than the strongest rye. I inhaled, I drank the air in gulps. Then Hayward took my arm to lead me down into the garden.

I struck him. Why, I don't know. It was instinctive, as mechanical as striking a snake. I hit him squarely on the chin with a blow that nearly cracked my fist. It was the hardest blow I've ever struck. He snapped up straight, then doubled over. I think his jaw was broken. His mouth was bloody when he picked himself up.

A normal man would have struck back. But Hayward wiped his sleeve across his mouth and grinned—that horribly mocking grin I knew so well.

"Of course," he muttered, "I expected something like that from you.

As I said before, it's a matter of energy running through a sieve."

CHAPTER V

Blood—for Wine

IDID not sleep that night. Nor did Hayward and I exchange another word. Immediately after our scene on the porch, he went back into the house. Later, I heard his chair scraping on the library floor. Presumably he was settling down for a few hours, "intense cerebration."

What did occupy my mind was the bedroom at the top of the stairs where Corinne lay in her deep sleep. It was difficult to withstand the urge to enter the room. I wanted desperately to touch her, if possible, to awaken her and try to pierce the veil which separated her world from mine. That she was under some hypnotic influence I did not doubt. But whether it was a normal somnambulism or a psychic state known only to yoga, I could not guess. One thing was definite—Corinne was alive.

The longer I stood on the porch, the more convinced I was that something must be done to queer Hayward's plans. I was tempted to return to Washington and get Clyde's help, then I canceled the idea. Any publicity would be intolerable. Besides, Clyde had no experience with this type of thing. So it was up to me. But what could I do? I was no psychiatrist, Corinne's hypnotic state was as mysterious to me as death itself. But she was alive, and therein lay all my hope of bringing her back to a normal condition.

It was dawn before I went back into the house, and even then I had formulated no plan of action. The house was silent. Apparently Hayward had gone to bed. I stood at the foot of the stairs for a few minutes, staring at Corinne's bedroom door. Then I abruptly turned about and went back onto the porch. How could I possibly deal with this thing?

I shall not attempt to describe my activities during that day and evening. Externally they were dull. I walked about listlessly, smoked a lot, and ate almost nothing. Mentally, however, I was performing gyrations. How to awaken Corinne? I thought of such things as throwing water on her, shaking her, trying to talk to her. But they were theoretical questions. I did not once attempt to enter her room. I admit that I was frightened. Any blunder on my part might throw her mind off its precarious balance of sanity.

IN THIS I was wise. Hayward, who awakened shortly after noon, apparently sensed my thoughts. Without any preamble he threw a diatribe which once and for all abolished any plans I had formulated.

"I told you once," he lisped through swollen lips, "that Corinne's condition was on the hairline between life and death. Any disturbance will kill her outright. Remember that in case your West Point tradition suggests any heroic rescues."

This was no jest. From his expression and his voice I knew that every word of it was true. But to make it even more clear, he went on with dispassionate iciness, emphasizing his words with a warning forefinger.

"As far as you're concerned, Corinne died over two months ago. You've shed your tears, and if you hadn't blundered in here last night you'd have been none the wiser. I admit I was foolish in showing you Corinne. But in the long run, it's harder on you than on me.

"All day you've been walking around like a sick calf. The officer in you refuses to leave a lady in distress. But the man in you—if there is a man left—would do better to clear out and forget all this. Go back to Washington, tell them you've knelt at Corinne's bier, and then forget her. For believe me, Crane, to you and the others, Corinne is as dead now as she will ever be."

He left me then, entered his study and closed the door. But he did not

know that his words had resurrected my once dormant dread. Corinne was dead to me. But I vowed not to leave this house until she was dead to everyone else, not only to Hayward, but to herself as well.

From then on Hayward and I had no words for each other. When I made no move to leave Cypress House, he merely ignored me. Possibly he wished to show his contempt for me. Nonetheless his taciturnity was convenient. I was left with free run of the house and grounds—except for Corinne's bedroom, which he had locked. And Hayward made no objections when I helped myself to his food and tobacco.

For the most part, he remained in his study on the second floor, and from the occasional glimpses I obtained I saw that he was drinking more than was good for him. Possibly the blow on the jaw hurt him more than he would admit.

Meanwhile I had formulated a simple plan for bringing this bizarre affair to an end, and I bided my time patiently until midnight.

Hayward showed no surprise when I appeared a few minutes before midnight. Probably he thought I only wanted another look at Corinne. He made no comment. Ignoring me, he poured Corinne's wine and carried the goblet up to the landing. This time he did not sit down beside me. After unlocking Corinne's door, he came downstairs and went directly to the library. He had left me alone!

I suspected at first that he was spying on me from some vantage point I knew nothing about, but a silent visit to the library convinced me of my error. Hayward sat at his desk with a thin volume opened before him. He looked too intent to be playing possum.

It was a better break than I had hoped for. My original plan had been forcibly to prevent Corinne from drinking the wine, thereby causing her death from malnutrition. Hayward had said the wine was a necessity and that without it she would die. A painless death, surely, for her heart, without its nutriment, would

simply stop beating. Now there was no need for violence. I would merely take away the goblet.

I was steeled to the job. I knew that it was murder. And I knew that, despite her trance Corinne would have a horrible moment when she found no wine. But the old Corinne would have wanted it done like this. It was the memory of the old Corinne that burned in my heart.

The thing was done with utter simplicity. Three minutes before midnight I walked up to the landing, removed the goblet, and carried it down to the garden, where I emptied the wine onto the ground. As an afterthought, I threw the goblet as far as I could into the night. Re-entering the house, I lowered the lights and settled down for the ghastly ordeal of waiting.

Ghastly is a weak word for it. Time dragged like an anchor. The silence was punctuated by night noises--the brushing of branches against the roof of the house, the whispering of the wind, and unplaceable sounds, like footsteps, or the creaking of floor, or even tensed breathing that was not my own.

I had the chill feeling that even in that darkness I was the object of scrutiny. Added to this, my sense of criminal guilt stirred me to repair the damage before it was too late. Yet I held myself in check. At all cost, this euthanasia must be carried out. If I failed now, I would never have the courage to try again.

The sound of the door opening was electrifying in that silence. The shock seemed to paralyze me into immobility. This was my savior! Without that paralysis I would have tried to call out.

CORINNE was suddenly on the landing. From that distance, I could see only blackness in her eyes. Yet I imagined that they were open and perhaps glazed by the trance that held her. When she stepped to the table a change came over her face. It was horrifying. She groped about like a blind person looking for an object which has been removed from its familiar place.

It was her hands, not her eyes, which exhibited surprise. Opening, closing, grasping, searching, they were animated first with impatience, then with anger, and finally with despair. Suddenly she flattened her hands and swept them frantically across the top of the table. Finding nothing, she straightened, and for a moment it looked as though she would collapse.

This was the most unbearable moment of all. This was the moment I had dreaded, and now, as it came true, I don't know how I stood it. Utter forsakenness was stamped on Corinne's face. Her body trembled, her face seemed whiter, and her hands, lifted to her temples, opened and closed as though kneading that poor brain, trying ineffectually to stimulate it to understand what had happened.

Suddenly her tension relaxed. Her face cleared. Bracing herself, she gripped the bannister and started to walk slowly down the stairs.

I shrank back. Down she came, straight toward me, her face a blank, her eyes clouded with blue shadows, with nothing in them but canny intelligence. For a horrible moment, I thought she would touch me, but at the foot of the stairs she turned and went directly to the table standing beside Hayward's customary chair. Standing on it was a decanter of wine.

Hypnosis? Tropism? I could not say. Something magnetic seemed to draw her. She reached for the decanter, removed the stopper, lifted it to her mouth. . . .

One, two, three, four sips. . . . She sighed as she set the decanter down. Then she turned and walked past me to the stairs, her lips glistening with wine, her white chin overrun with a red rivulet. For an indeterminable time, I did not move. Corinne vanished at the top of the stairs, and the moment after the door clicked shut I heard a voice speak softly from behind me.

"You see," said Hayward, "it's out of your control. Her flesh demands the wine, and the will-power behind it cannot be overcome."

I left Cypress House immediately. I had no plans, I didn't know where I was going. I only wanted to get away and give myself a chance to think this out. I drove aimlessly for hours. Finally my sleepiness forced me to draw up beside a lunch wagon. I ordered breakfast, and spent another two hours over my coffee.

It was clear what had happened. I had simply misjudged the potency of Corinne's hypnotic state. The only thing I could do was to try again. The next time all wine must be taken from Corinne's reach.

During the remainder of the day and evening I thought out my plans over and over. There must be no hitch. Tonight *all* the wine must be removed.

At eleven o'clock, I returned to Cypress House. It was a sultry black night, ideal for my purpose. A hundred yards from the house I stopped my car and proceeded on foot. I had better luck than I expected. The house was black. Hayward had gone to bed.

I had no difficulty entering. In his drunken stupor Hayward had neglected to lock the doors. So much the better. I slid into the living room at just ten minutes to twelve. There was no time to lose. As last night, I removed Corinne's goblet—Hayward had found a silver one someplace for the purpose—and emptied the wine outdoors. Following this, I searched the house and gathered every bottle of wine, then packed them all in the wine cabinet and locked the door. As an added precaution I threw away the key.

It was then just twelve o'clock. Corinne's bedroom door opened on the dot.

Pressing myself back against the wall, I watched Corinne cross the landing toward the table. She looked somehow more wan, as though the delay of last night's meal had produced fatigue. And again, as she reached for the goblet which should have been there, a look of stunned surprise came over her face. This time, however, there was no hesitation before her next move. Turning from the table, she started down the stairs.

I flattened myself as inconspicuously as possible. She was less than three feet from me, but her eyes were fixed upon the table beside Hayward's chair. It was empty. She stopped. Again her face changed from bewilderment to anger and to despair. Again it looked as though she would faint. And again she stiffened as her fuddled brain grasped a straw of hope. I could almost see an illumination in her face. She lifted her hands and walked directly to the wine cabinet.

It was ghastly. She rattled the handle, and when the door did not open, she began to dig at it with her fingernails. I could hear them scraping on the wood. She fought desperately—for her life. But the door did not give way. Then she realized its futility. Her body sagged. She turned around.

For a moment she didn't move. She seemed to be suspended in a vacuum of despair. Her eyes roved about the room, wide, haunted eyes that passed over me without any recognition, and finally lighted upon the stairs. Again something seemed to draw her. She lifted her hands like a sleepwalker and moved slowly across the room. At the foot of the steps she paused, as though uncertain of her next move. Then she straightened. She went swiftly up the stairs and disappeared in the gloom of the landing.

I watched breathlessly, then my knees sagged and I slumped against the wall. Sweat oozed over my face. My heart pounded. But I had won! In a few minutes at the most Corinne would fall into a sleep of death.

I waited. It was out of my hands now. One minute passed. I felt my strength returning. Two minutes. I worked up the courage to walk to the foot of the stairs. Three minutes. I began to ascend the steps.

I was halfway up the stairs when I heard a door slam. There was a moment of silence, then an ear-splitting scream rang out. I don't know if it was a man's or a woman's voice. I know only that it was hysterical with horror. Before I could take another step I heard the sound

of stumbling footsteps coming down the upstairs hall.

Out of the blackness a figure came, half-running, half-staggering, with its arms flopping grotesquely and its throat giving voice to a gurgling moan. It was Hayward. As he came under the glow of bluish light I saw his face white and drawn, his mouth an oval of glistening red. He was only half dressed. His bare chest was crimson with blood. And then I saw why. The whole front of his throat was torn out.

When he saw me, he tried to call out, but the words were macerated into groans. He tried to clutch me to keep from falling, but I backed away instinctively and he fell sprawling at my feet. Even then, he tried to rise. He got as far as resting on his elbow, but when he tried to speak again a spasm shook him

and he fell again, this time to remain motionless. Without examining him I knew that he was dead.

Vaulting his body, I ran down the hall to his bedroom. But I didn't enter. Corinne lay across the threshold, face-down, her arms outstretched as in supplication. She, too, was dead. But the blood on her hands was not her own. And the blood on her mouth was Hayward's—red as wine. And as I backed away, I could smell the wine, the strong odor of the wine he had breathed from his throat into the room.

I retreated from the weird house, sobbing under the strain of the broken spell.

"Corinne's really dead now," I mumbled.

"It's better so—Hayward, too . . . Better so . . . Better . . . so."

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*Oaths That Are Not Nipped In
the Bud Burst Into the Evil
Bloom Whose End Is Silence*

WILLIAM SEFFINGTON JEFFERS, JR., and Marilyn Hosmer, were born within twenty-four hours and twenty-five feet of each other, for their mothers occupied adjoining rooms at the Lamson Peel Memorial Hospital. When the nurse wheeled William from the baby-room for periodic feedings, Marilyn lay in the next basket in the carriage and seconded his lusty cries for nourishment with her shrill piping treble. When the time came for them to go home they rode in the same car, but William got out first, for he was going to live at 1632 Bay Avenue, while Marilyn's family lived next door at 1634.

The elder Jeffers was in the insurance business, Mr. Hosmer was a realtor. Both were active in Kiwanis, held memberships in the Shore Acres Country Club, subscribed to the same newspapers and voted the same ticket on election day.

When Bill—they had begun to call



Feverishly she turned for a noisook

him that already—and Marilyn were four, their mothers entered them at Mrs. Brink's Select Kindergarten. When they were six they entered public school together. Thereafter Bill was waiting at the front gate every morning and walked home with her each afternoon. When they graduated to the upper classes and homework was required of them, Bill strapped their books into a common bundle and bore the burden as a matter of course. On Saturdays they played croquet in her back yard, or, in Indian suit and armed with tomahawk and wooden scalping-knife, Bill rescued Marilyn from hostile Redskins, or sometimes, by way of diversion, scalped Mary Jane, her favorite doll, while she emitted piercing shrieks and begged mercy for her child.

When they were twelve the Jeffers family took a cottage in the Poconos and the Hosmers rented one next to it. That was a wonderful summer. Bill had a new book, "King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table," and within a week the children knew it by heart.

There was an added zest of adventure when you went for apples if you could tell yourself that they weren't really apples, but a hoard of precious "jools" to be recaptured from a wicked knight, and that the old gnarled tree wasn't just a tree, but a darksome castle, moated and battlemented, which had to be attacked by storm. The war-cry of King Arthur's doughty knights rang through the orchard while Bill swarmed up the tree and shook the apples down for Marilyn to gather in her pinafore, and "Well done, Sir Gawain!" or "Strike bravely, Lancelot!" Marilyn encouraged while she retrieved the booty from the orchard grass.

HIGH summer passed and on the hilltops fox-grapes ripened. On the tangle-wooded slopes the purple fruit hid under notched leaves, pungent with the tang of wild growth

and cool from its shadowed secret places. Both Mrs. Jeffers and Mrs. Hosmer were enthusiastic at the prospect of wild grape jelly, and a bounty of a quarter a basket was proclaimed.

"Why Marilyn, we'll make our fortunes!" Bill declared. "We ought to get at least a dozen baskets. That'll be three dollars, an' we can have a choc'late soda every afternoon 'til a'most Thanksgiving!"

It was September, but the sun was hot. The world was fairly drenched with warmth, late locusts whirred their strident cries in the heat, the golden light made latticed patterns on tree-shaded paths, the woods smelt sweet and moist. Bill walked a pace or two ahead, a basket of the precious grapes in each hand, Marilyn brought up the rear with a hamper dripping purple fruit. They were barefoot, a little travel-stained, more than a little dirty. Bill was jubilant.

"Seventy-five cents!" he gloated. "We've made a'most a whole dollar, just this afternoon—hey!"

He broke his computation of their riches on a sharp note of protest, for she pushed against him roughly, forcing him into the pathside bushes.

"Look what you're doin'," he admonished as he scrambled through the briars, for she had dropped her basket in the path and grapes were spilling on the stones like rice from a burst bag.

"Stay back, Bill; keep away!" she panted, reaching for a stick that lay across the trail.

Then he saw. The "stick" she seized with her bare hands was a two-foot copperhead which had been lying stretched full length in a warm patch of sunlight. Another step and he'd have put his unprotected foot upon it.

The reptile had the sinuous strength of its kind, but desperation gave her greater strength. Before it could writhe from her grasp or slip its head far enough forward to sink its fangs into her wrist she had thrown it

twenty feet away into the bushes, and she and Bill were racing down the path in panic flight.

"Gosh, but you're brave!" he complimented when they finally paused for breath. "Weren't you scared a' tall?"

"More than I've ever been in my life," she panted, "but I was more scared that the snake would bite you than of what it might do to me, Bill dear." Then she began to cry.

BILL suffered oddly mixed emotions. No female, other than his mother, aunts and cousins, had ever called him "dear" before. Certainly none had used the term in that tone. It gave him a queer and rather puffed-up feeling. Then, too, Marilyn was crying. In their twelve years of companionship he'd seen her cry perhaps a thousand times, but somehow this seemed different. What would Galahad, or Gawain, or Lancelot du Lac have done in such conditions? He had the answer instantly—a grand and noble, knightly gesture.

Down on one knee he went before her, took the hem of her dress in his hand.

"When anybody saves another person's life, that life belongs to him or her," he announced solemnly, and raised the hem of her brief gingham pinafore to his lips.

She laid her hand on his hair, and it was like an accolade.

"I am your liege lady, and you are my true knight," she answered. "You will bear me true and faithful service, and when we're grown I'll marry you and you must love me always—oh, Bill, please do!" she ended in entreaty. "I'll just die if you don't."

"'Course, I will," he replied stoutly. "Didn't I swear it?"

So, armed with stick and treading warily, they went back for the grape baskets, and in due time received their reward. But neither of them told of the adventure. Parents had a queer way of misunderstanding, and

there were too many pleasant walks in the woods to be taken in the two remaining weeks of vacation.

THEY went to their first formal dance together, and it was there that Marilyn began to have misgivings. For two years she had known, with all the certainty that she knew sunrise follows darkness, that they would be married. Secure in this knowledge, she planned their life together serenely, longing with impatience hardly bearable for the time when they'd be old enough to marry and settle down.

But Bill had grown into a handsome boy, tall, slim, attractive, laughing readily, wearing his clothes with an air of smart distinction. And she was not a pretty girl. Her little, heart-shaped, sharp-chinned face was too small for her large, brown trustful eyes, and though her mouth was sweet and tender it seemed almost childish in its smallness. The slenderness which might have seemed alluring in another girl seemed adolescent immaturity in her. Her clothes were well made and expensive, but they hung on her like smart gowns shown on window-mannikins—well displayed but definitely no part of her personality.

Only her hair was remarkable. She had never had it cut. In childhood she had worn it rippling down her back, or in two long braids. Now, unbound, it reached well past her knees. Braided and wrapped about her head in a coronal, it was like a Grecian head-dress and made wearing almost any hat with *chic* impossible.

When she was in Bill's arms as they danced she was ecstatic. She never noticed that he did not talk, she did not know if he smiled at her or not. Her eyes were always closed. But when another partner claimed her, she was like a bird in a strange nest, and her eyes were opened and alert. Watching Bill and the girl he danced with, seeing how he smiled at her,

nothing how he kept up a continual flow of small talk.

Bill was too used to her, too certain, accepting her as he might take a match or lighter proffered when he lit a cigarette. She must make him jealous—coquette with other boys. . . . Pshaw, this was childishness! He might flirt with other girls; he belonged to her. He'd sworn it. . . . "My life belongs to you. . . ." Soon they'd be out of school, Bill would go in business with his father, then. . . .

They were in their senior year at college when the Serpent entered her Eden. A very lovely Serpent, all the more disquieting for that reason.

Ernestine McMurtie was the essence of everything Marilyn was not. Tall, willowy, smooth-skinned, with a red mouth chiseled in long curves, raven black hair piled in Vigée Lebrun curls upon her sleek head, she made every move in the way of a lithe, silky cat. There were flecks of yellow in her amber eyes, giving them the effect of hot green. She knew her beauty. All her life the applause of men's eyes had told her she was different from other girls, more alluring, more desirable. Her father had some sort of vague connection with the theater, and she brought all the glamor of the mummer's art with her when she enrolled at State College. The sophomores were wild about her, juniors fought to dance with her, the senior class were her slaves to a man.

Sangreal, the quest of Galahad for the Holy Cup of Antioch, was the class play. Bill played Sir Galahad; Marilyn and Ernestine both tried for the part of Sir Percival's sister. Perhaps the acting honors went to Ernestine, but when Marilyn let down her hair so that it almost swept the floor and recited:

The girdle, lords, I'll weave of mine own
hair
Which while I yet was in the world I
loved full well . . .

the rôle was given her.

But triumph could be as bitter as defeat. At the dance held after the play, Bill waltzed the first number with her, and was her partner in the rhumba just before the intermission. Every other dance he had with Ernestine, and when the other men cut in he stood against the wall, hands almost elbow-deep in trouser pockets, and glowered jealously.

The two girls joined issue in the powder room. Ernestine pre-empted the best mirror, posing and preening before it as she renewed her make-up. She spoke, and at once it was evident that the loss of the part was still on her mind.

"Some day," she threw the threat across her shoulder, looking from her reflection for a moment, "I'm going to crop that mane of yours, my dear, and you'll not raise a hand to stop me."

Smoldering anger and resentment rose and washed a flush across Marilyn's cheeks.

"You are a pirate, aren't you?" she replied.

"Oh? Touched on the raw?" Ernestine laughed brittlely. "Don't worry about your boy friend, dear. You can have him—now. I can take him any time I want, you know."

Hatred came into Marilyn's heart then, and she answered almost automatically.

"Some day," she promised in a passionless, cold little voice, "I'm going to kill you, Ernestine."

That autumn Ernestine secured a little part in a road company of *Salute the Gentlemen*, and Marilyn and Bill were married.

TO MARILYN, marriage proved an exception to the rule that realization fails to match anticipation. When the clergyman proclaimed, "Whom therefore God hath joined together let no man put asunder," and Bill put back her veil and kissed her, she responded with the last small cell of her being. It seemed to her that she

had everything that she had ever dreamed of wanting.

Life flowed evenly and peacefully, almost monotonously for them. Bill joined his father in the office, joined the Shore Acres Country Club, addressed the Kiwanis at luncheon conferences, became a member of the Board of Trade.

Marilyn played bridge and attended meetings of the Ladies' Thursday Garden Club. When Bill junior and little Marilyn were old enough for school, she joined the P.T.A. and finally became its president. Everything went on and on, the groove of life deepened, but its course and pattern never changed. She loved it.

One afternoon, as she was coming home from a club meeting, she felt a sudden twinge of searing pain in her right side. For several months she'd suffered from recurrent aches like neuralgia in her stomach and had dosed herself with bismuth, peppermint and all the simple, harmless nostrums from the bathroom shelf, but this was withering in its suddenness. Hardly able to endure it, but fighting with the desperate ability women have to outface pain, she drove to Dr. Trowbridge's. By the time she reached his office the shrill torment had subsided, but her brow was beaded with small goutts of perspiration. She found it difficult to breathe, and where the pain had been there was an all-pervading, spreading numbness.

"Is—is it appendicitis, Doctor? she asked as he completed his examination.

"No," Dr. Trowbridge answered slowly. "It's certainly not that, but I'd like to have you call on Dr. Van Raalte. He's a specialist, you know; more competent to put his finger on obscure ailments."

"Then you think it's something serious?"

The doctor pursed his bearded lips. "One never knows, my dear, and it's best to take Time by the forelock when we're not quite sure."

As the door of the consulting room closed behind her, Dr. Trowbridge reached for the cigar that he'd been wanting for the last half hour.

"I'm not the hanging judge," he murmured as he snapped his lighter. "Let Van Raalte pronounce sentence."

Bill was going out of town that evening. There was a meeting of insurance men at Watertown and he was scheduled to address it.

"But Bill, dear, you don't have to speak till Saturday and this is only Thursday," she protested. "Must you go tonight? I've been feeling—" She halted in mid-word. Perhaps it wasn't really serious, after all. Dr. Trowbridge was an old man, and a general practitioner. He could be mistaken, and Bill must not be worried.

"Yes?" Bill prompted, a thought impatiently, as her silence lengthened.

"Oh, nothing. Just one of my silly premonitions, I guess. Go ahead and enjoy yourself. I know you'll make some valuable contacts at the convention."

IT MIGHT have been midnight, possibly an hour later, when she woke in dreadful pain. It was worse than it had been in the afternoon—tearing, piercing, ripping like a red-hot bayonet. She clasped her arms across her stomach, hugging herself in blind agony.

Bill! His name was like a beacon to a storm-racked ship. Just to hear his voice would be an anodyne. Half blind with suffering, she groped her way across the room, dialed long distance.

"Mr. Jeffers—William Seffington Jeffers!" she gasped when the hotel answered.

A moment's agonizing wait. Then the telephone girl's high-pitched, nasal announcement: "I'm sorry—we have no one by that name registered."

The pain eased slowly, but she was too much shaken to sleep. Switching on the bedside lamp, she opened the

evening paper, glanced through the club notices and turned to the amusement page. A child star's portrait smirked at her, there was a scene from a forthcoming movie, but like a compass needle swinging to the north her startled glance swept down the page to the halftone that was centered under the word "Charmer."

The picture was that of a woman beautiful in a well-tended way; a woman of high gloss and a hard finish: large eyes with long lashes, a straight and well-formed mouth chiseled in long curves. Her skin was flawless, her dark hair hung back from her face in a long bob that emphasized the good modeling of her head. Beneath the cut was the caption:

Ernestine McMurtie, star of "These Charming Ladies," now having its tryout at Hanneford. According to all indications both the charming Ernestine and the Charming Ladies are due for a long run on Broadway.

Ernestine . . . Hanneford . . . Watertown . . . Bill! The words clicked through her brain in series, like a telegraphic message. Hanneford was just ten miles from Watertown. The best hotel there was the Savage.

Hating herself, she ran almost headlong to the telephone, dialed long distance once more. It was mean, ignoble, disloyal and suspicious—but she had to know! Presently, the Hotel Savage's response: "Just a moment, please . . . Yes, there's a Mr. William Jeffers here, but he's not in his room. Shall we have him paged?"

"No, thank you." Marilyn hung up the phone and stumbled back to bed. No need to page him. As well as if she had been present in the flesh, she saw him . . . him and Ernestine.

In a little while the pain returned, and agony of body gave her some surcease from agony of heartbreak.

THREE people stood beside her cot: Bill, Miss Masterson, the nurse, Dr. Van Raalte. The room was banked with flowers—"just as if I

were already gone," she thought bitterly. Early sunshine gilded everything. A bird, deceived by warm September weather into thinking summer still lingered, was twittering outside the window.

"Everything'll be all right, dear," Bill said heartily. "You see if it isn't."

"Of course, it will—it's just a simple little operation," seconded Miss Masterson with a smile that was bright and artificial.

"How do you feel, Mrs. Jeffers?" Dr. Van Raalte asked. He was a tall, lean man in his early forties, with prematurely gray hair brushed so sleekly that it shone almost like a skullcap of burnished pewter. Trained at Heidelberg and Vienna, he had brought home something of the Old World with him. His lean features, studious and unsmiling, had a hint of Prussian arrogance. He held himself as if he were in uniform and on parade. His tailoring and haberdashery had the trans-Atlantic perfection of Saville Row and Bond Street.

"In half an hour, if you please, Nurse," he told Miss Masterson, speaking with the sharp-clipped, cold precision of a drill master.

"Yes, Doctor—oh, you can't come in!" Miss Masterson ran toward the door. "No one else is allowed—"

"Oh, you can't keep me out, you simply mustn't. Mrs. Jeffers and I are old friends."

Arms lifted with a bouquet of lilies, Ernestine McMurtie stepped into the room.

Her black sheer-crêpe redingote with the silver fox scarf draped across her shoulders, emphasized by contrast the ivory of her skin and enhanced the vivid black of her hair. She was poised and beautiful as she postured in the doorway—but she was not lovely. Something too closely akin to gloating malice shone in her eyes.

"Why, Ernestine!" Bill's heartiness of greeting almost hid his consternation and embarrassment. "It was kind of you to come—"

"See the lovely flowers Ernestine has brought, dear." He turned, smiling broadly toward the woman on the bed. "I'll get some water for them."

He leaned to take the lilies from the visitors, his back turned momentarily on his wife, and as he reached for the flowers his questing fingers found Ernestine's and clung to them, as if for strength.

Marilyn's great dark eyes seemed darker, deeper, and a small frown, as of sudden pain, brought her brows down. In the mirror of the dresser standing opposite her bed she had seen Bill's fingers seeking Ernestine's, and finding them.

"Doctor," she asked in a whisper, "how much chance have I?"

He answered coolly, impersonally. "Not much more than one in a million, Mrs. Jeffers. You waited too long—"

"Doctor," she cut in, speaking softly, but with dreadful bitterness, "if—when—I die, will I be truly dead, or will I just seem so, with a consciousness of what goes on around me still remaining?"

He gave her a look hard and keen as one of his own scalpels. He, too, had seen the furtive hand-clasp.

"You need not give yourself uneasiness, madame. You will be completely blotted out."

Two hours later as he stripped his rubber gloves off he reverted to the language of his student days.

"*Herr Gott*, there's hardly enough left of her to bother about putting in the ground!"

I'M TAKING charge of things for Mr. Jeffers," Ernestine told Miss Masterson. "A woman can handle such things so much better than a man. Have you a pair of scissors?"

"Scissors?" echoed the nurse.

"Yes, my dear, scissors. I want you to cut Mrs. Jeffers' hair. Cut it very short, please."

"Well," Miss Masterson prepared to carry out instructions, "all I can say is that if I had hair like that I'd

want it buried with me. I never saw such fine, long silky—"

"That's just it," Ernestine broke in. "It's not to be buried with her. She's to be cremated. It would be a shame to burn that lovely hair, wouldn't it?"

"Yes'm," answered the nurse, as the shears cut through the gleaming coils of chestnut hair with the neat precision of a guillotine blade.

Ernestine McMurtie smiled at her reflection in the hotel dresser mirror. She was beautiful; she knew it, and the knowledge pleased her mightily. Her night robe was cut like an evening gown, sheer amber crêpe, sleeveless, almost backless, cut so low in front that it exposed the shadowed hollow between her breasts. It was belted at her slim waist with a tasseled golden cord, Grecian fashion.

On her bare feet she wore little gilded sandals whose wide instep- straps made a pleasing contrast to the brilliant lacquer of her carefully kept nails. Across one slim bare arm she looped a braided length of hair—there must have been five feet of it, heavy as a ship's hawser, gleaming with the semi-iridescence of a chestnut fresh from the burr. She was thinking back twelve years, back to a scene in the powder room of this same hotel at the dance that followed the class play.

"I said I'd do it—and I did." Delighted laughter bubbled up between the words. "I promised that I'd crop that mane of hers some day. . . ."

She ran her hands along the smoothly plaited hair, kicked her sandals off and rose upon her gleaming-tipped toes to pirouette across the room.

"Stay there tonight," she tossed the heavy braid up on the shelf of the clothes closet. "Tomorrow I'll decide about you."

The coiled hair struck the back wall of the closet with a sound like that of a dropped coil of rope, partially unwound, and dropped a loose end over a clothes hook. Ernestine laughed again.

"I'm half a mind to hang you there all night, like an old gown," she said, then shrugged bare shoulders as she closed the closet door. Why bother? She'd won all along the line. No need to rub it in. Not now, anyway.

SHE had been sleeping soundly, but all at once her eyes were open. Involuntarily she sat up in bed, in a state of semi-wakefulness. The room was heavy with rich, creamy, silky perfumed darkness that buried her completely as earth thrown in a grave. What was it? She was feeling it, physically, like a cool draft over face and arms and neck and breast, yet there was no sound, no hint of movement in the room. All the same, she knew that she was not alone.

Some deep instinct, some inner warder of the senses, was telling her there was someone, something, in the darkness with her. She sat waiting, breathless. It was so quiet she could hear the ticking of the tiny watch clasped to her left wrist and the click-click-clicker-click of the little traveling clock upon the dresser.

Something stepped—no, wafted!—toward the closet. Light, invisible, impalpable as air it was. It couldn't be a person, couldn't even be a thing, but that it was some sort of presence, some entity, she knew. Reason denied it clamorously. Instinct affirmed it, and mankind had its instincts a million years before it attained reason.

The closet door creaked softly, hardly audible, as if a stealthy hand were trying it, or a light wind blew on it.

"No, you don't!" she murmured as she flung the covers back and leaped from the bed. "Oh, no! I took it, and I'm going to keep it. You shan't have it!"

Automatically her hand strayed out and turned on the bedside lamp. Beside it lay a folded copy of the eve-

ning paper. She snatched it up, ripped it apart, crumpled it and thrust it crackling into the empty fireplace.

"You think you're going to take it to be burned with you? Oh, no! I'll burn it myself, right here and now, and you can't do a thing to stop me. *You're dead!*"

She was at the closet now, jerking back the door, reaching for the braid of hair that lay coiled on the shelf. Too high. She couldn't reach it. A hassock was the answer. She dragged the little slipper-stool across the room, mounted it, reached for the hair, seized it, dragged it toward her. . . .

The thing seemed imbued with sentience of its own. It resisted. She stood on tip-toe for a better grasp on it.

It came away so suddenly, she lost her balance, swaying backward, almost falling from the hassock. But only for an instant. Like a snake that holds its stroke until its victim is in easy reach, the loose end of the plaited hair lashed out. There was a double loop twined round her throat. The hassock, slipping on the polished floor, slid from beneath her.

She struggled with the clutching coil of hair. It might have been a hempen hangman's rope for all the effect that her frantic fingers had on it. She stretched her feet until they were continuations of her legs, like a ballet dancer's when she rises on her toes. They missed the floor by something like two inches, and she swung clear in a small, struggling arc.

Now she was thinking back twelve years again. Back to the scene in the powder room of this same hotel at the dance that followed the class play. ". . . I said I'd crop her mane some day, and she said some day she'd . . ."

The pounding in her ears increased its volume till it rumbled like the thunder of a thousand kettle-drums. And Ernestine ceased thinking.

DEATH, I WANT TO DANCE!

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

Author of "Kanaïna," "Heads for Sale," etc.



Sharply revealed in my headlights, a girl stood at the side of the road

IT WAS strange country to me—wild and terrible, a land of ghost towns where savage men and fierce women had fought long ago, killing and gambling for bright gold. Except for an important purpose, no sane man would willingly tread that soil which still was drenched with evil. I had a purpose, but it was not

A Long-Dead Ghost Town Returns to Revelry While John Barham Follows a Moonlit Trail to an Eerie Rendezvous!

gold. Mine was the desire to visit weird places, to know eldritch people, and that country was indeed weird and its inhabitants eldritch.

Only an investigator of the *od* would deliberately drive a car up the snaky road that led to Crystal City. Nobody else would know that torrential rains had washed away the treacherous mud of the dirt road, leaving a smooth rock-bed on which my tire treads could find a grip.

But the ride was still rough and dangerous. My headlights gleamed yellowly on the brown mud which walled the road, like piles of earth beside an open grave. As the car rocked and rolled, the motor whined and missed, bravely struggling to bring me to my destination.

Within an hour, I thought eagerly, I would reach Crystal City and be alone in the city of the dead. Boot Hill, at the end of the town, contained its dead people, but their evil hopes still lived in the deserted shacks and streets. Nobody inhabited the place any more, yet the vicious ambitions of the dead continued to torment and terrorize those who dared to enter Crystal City.

I wasn't there yet, though, and the ride required all my attention. Sternly I restrained my eagerness and watched the road.

My overworked windshield-wiper shrieked a complaint. The rain came down so hard that I had to depend more on leaning out the open window than peering through the streaked windshield. The slope of a hill fell away to my left, and the headlights splashed over a swollen, furious river. Even the strongest swimmer could not have battled across it, I realized. If I had to swim it, my career as investigator of the *od* would be finished. The car, of course, would never be able to ford it, if it had to, and I would be compelled to spend the night in the open, until the wind and the rain ceased, and the flood abated.

That realization made me impatient.

Agonizingly I longed to reach Crystal City before midnight. I stepped recklessly on the accelerator and rounded a crazy curve.

That was when I saw the girl, standing in the vicious downpour. . . .

SHE wore no hat. Her hair was plastered down along her face. Sharply revealed by my headlights, her clothing was soaked through, clinging to her body like a tight second skin. I thought her dress was red, but I knew positively that her hair was the color of flame. Though it hung in limp, dripping hanks, it could not conceal its beauty, nor distort the loveliness of her face and her bright red lips.

Unafraid, she waved to me for a ride. When I saw the long shadow behind her, I released my breath. The shadow removed the first chill doubt that had frozen my hands to the wheel. But what was a girl doing on the road to Crystal City? Within fifty miles, there should have been nobody but myself!

I slowed to a stop. When I reached over and opened the door, she stepped in. There was laughter on her red lips and in her dark blue eyes, as though she loved the storm. The strange fragrance about her I took to be a mingling of incense and perhaps lavender. She couldn't have been more than twenty-one.

"I thought you would never come," she said, her voice lilting with delight.

"You were expecting me?" I asked, slamming the door to make sure it was closed securely. "How could you? You don't even know who I am."

"I don't know John Barham?" she replied. "But everybody knows John Barham. We all know you by sight or reputation. Naturally I recognized your face and, besides, I knew you were coming."

"Yes," I said as I meshed gears. "But how did you know I was coming?"

She tilted back her lovely head and looked at me out of the corner of her eye.

"A little bird told me," she said archly. "Now please hurry, or we'll be late to the dance."

"Dance?" I blurted. "What dance?"

"Why, the regular weekly dance at Crystal City! Don't say you won't take me. I'll simply fade right away if you do. I seldom get a chance to go. Before, of course, I never did."

"Before?" I repeated stupidly. "Before what?"

"Just—just before. Please hurry, John Barham. I don't wish to miss a single dance."

While I desperately kept my eyes on the murderous road, she began to hum a tune that was vaguely familiar. What was it? I couldn't place it, though I felt that long ago, perhaps in some far place, I had heard it often.

"I don't even dance," I said.

"Any man can dance with me," she stated casually. "I'm Drury Shane."

Apparently that was supposed to explain everything, but it made nothing clearer to me. When I heard the unmistakable sound of teeth chattering, I glanced aside. She was trembling. I stopped the car and took off my topcoat.

"Maybe this won't keep you warm," I said, "but it'll help. Wrap it around you."

She smiled gratefully—and I shivered. I didn't know why, except that the sensation of vague familiarity had returned to haunt me.

"How can there be a dance in Crystal City?" I asked. "It's a ghost town."

"Oh, but once a week—or when it rains—people from miles around come to make Crystal City live again. Yes, there will be music and dancing."

She leaned against me, snuggling closer for warmth. She must have known it was safe to do so. I wanted to kiss her, but I couldn't smash her confidence in me. . . .

Crystal City was ablaze with bright lights! Drury Shane had been right.

The ghost town was alive that night, with lights that shone through windows which had been without glass for so many years. The sagging, rotting sidewalks creaked under the weight of rough, bearded men. From the wide-open door of the Crystal City Bar, the largest building in town, came the squeak of a fiddle, the groan of an organ, the whine of an accordion, and the piping of a harmonica.

I heard Drury's feet begin to dance on the floorboards of the car. When I glanced at her, she smiled up with utterly carefree happiness. She was undismayed by the fact that the orchestra didn't play together.

Wind-driven rain crashed against the car as I drove down Crystal City's one street.

"Is it all right to go into the bar, Drury?" I asked tentatively.

"While I am with you—but only while I am with you—is it all right," she almost sang. "It never was before, but now it's safe even for me."

NATURALLY I didn't understand her. It seemed unimportant, and I was too interested in the reaction of the people as we drove up to the bar. They were staring at the car, probably because it was the only one in town. Either they were too poor, or they preferred horses. But they had no horses, either. There were just the men, shouting, swearing and fighting.

A knife flashed abruptly in the glare of my headlights. But it must have been pretense, for not even the apparently bloody fight interrupted the wild merriment. It couldn't have been anything but make-believe. Drury Shane would not have laughed in such high enjoyment if it had been real.

As if she were about to fly, she darted into the bar, and I followed her. During the ride, her hair seemed to have dried. It glistened like red gold in the lamplight. To maintain the illusion that Crystal City had come back to life, the people who had arranged the dance had chosen to use

lamps. There were lamps everywhere, some with dirty old chimneys, some with none. Most of them actually were festooned with cobwebs. Dirt cluttered the floor. Behind the dusty bar, a mirror had been broken long ago, but it only added to the smashed bottles and glasses on the sagging shelf.

It was weird, eerie—and it was fun. From behind a curtained door, the unseen orchestra creaked and grumbled "Turkey in the Straw." I felt an irresistible urge to dance, and caught Drury's wonderfully warm hand.

The couples that followed us on the floor maintained the illusion perfectly. They were roughly garbed, bearded men, and women in tight bodices and spangles, with glittering tinsel in their hair.

The old floor creaked under so many couples. But it was a grand dance, and I warmed to it. What delighted me most at the moment was that I hadn't forgotten how to dance, after all. Drury was so light in my arms that the man who couldn't have danced with her would have had to be dead.

Head thrown back, she hummed the tune as we danced. Somehow, I felt that dancing meant more to her than life or death. Whom she danced with meant less than nothing, as long as she could dance. When the members of the orchestra reached the end of the song by widely different routes, she kept on dancing until they started to play again.

The usual stag line tried to cut in. I didn't want them to, but it was Drury's prerogative. I looked down at her hopefully. Without a word from me, she evaded them. Completely puzzled, they gaped after her. And we went on dancing together, apparently both of us equally graceful. I no longer noticed anything, then, but the rhythm of our dancing and the warmth of her in my arms. I don't even remember the tune of the next dance, nor the next, nor the next. . . .

"It's almost midnight!" someone

yelled, startling me. "It's the shank of the evening!"

He broke the neck of a bottle on the bar. At that instant, a dusty lamp went out. I could smell the smoke from its dirty wick, and see the oil in it, with mud floating on top. As we went on dancing, another light went out, nearer the bar than the first.

I STARED in bewilderment. Around the first light that had gone out was a pool of deep shadow, which extended to the second lamp that went dark. No one had extinguished those lamps. They had simply gone out, with a smell of smoke. And the shadow crept closer to the bar.

Then I noticed that the dancers avoided the shadow, though Drury and I did not. It was deep, cold and strange. When we danced into it, I could hear her teeth chatter as though she were afraid, and she suddenly lost the music's tempo.

The third lamp flickered out. Instantly the shadow seemed to jump. As if an invisible hand were snuffing them, more lamps died. Now there was so much more shadow than light that the faces of the dancers looked pasty-gray and somehow haunted, watching the shadow that crept toward them inexorably, despite their terror.

The handlebar-mustached bartender must have been putting out the lights. He had nothing to do now but polish glasses sorrowfully, since fewer men were ordering drinks.

Not even the cold shadow could kill Drury's love for dancing, though she clung to me when we strayed into it. At those moments, her face was close to mine, and her eyes begged me to keep it from terrifying her. The illusion was so perfect that everything must have been rehearsed.

Immediately after the lamp nearest the bar went out, my eyes narrowed puzzledly. As the couples danced into the creeping shadow, they vanished!

Determined to investigate, I danced her into the shadow, and for the first time, she tried to resist. But the explanation was perfectly simple. The couples were cleverly using this eerie way of departing.

"I'm not afraid, while you are holding me tightly," Drury whispered. "It is only when you let me go that I am lost."

I smiled at her quaint whimsy, but my heart beat faster at the suggestion that she needed me. Involuntarily I held her more tightly, and she drew back. It was only natural for me to relax my arm when she was displeased. But with a little murmur, she snuggled closer to me. When I would have responded by tightening my arm, though, she pushed lightly at me, to let me know that I must not.

Nobody had called her by name, I suddenly remembered, yet most of the men had looked at her. Perhaps her sweetheart was among them, content to let her enjoy herself, but ready to fight if I attempted familiarity. That must have been the explanation for her reserve.

Two more lights went out, and only half the bar was out of the shadow. The bartender started to move toward the light. Sighing, though, he shrugged and stayed where he was. When more lamps darkened, the stench of wicks and oil filled the place, and the bartender seemed to be partially dissolved. The largest, dirtiest, most cobwebbed lamp died, and he was gone.

Slowly I shook my head in admiration for the wonderful illusion. I wanted to pass through the curtain and look at the orchestra, before going home as the "ghosts" of the ghost town were doing. But Drury Shane would not stop dancing, and I hadn't the heart to destroy her pleasure. Faster and faster we danced. She did not become breathless, nor did I pant. Even if I had been tired, though, I would never have let her know.

All at once, every light was extin-

guished. The place was achingly empty of laughter, for the couples had gone.

"We must hurry, John Barham!" Drury gasped. "They will be angry at home, if I am late. But I have never been happier in all my life. Hold me tightly, John, and take me back."

WHEN I led her out, Crystal City was eerily illumined only by the stars and a moon that swam close overhead and seemed to smile at us approvingly. I peered around. Drury and I had the town all to ourselves.

"Hurry, John," she whispered. "I am late already. If I am to stay with you all the way, we must hasten. Don't send me back home!"

I couldn't understand her, but it was enough that she would be with me if we hurried. I helped her into the car. She still wore my topcoat, which had swirled about her dainty figure while we danced. As she sat down, I could see how the red dress clung to her, making her a creature of life and flame.

"Well, Crystal City's a ghost town again," I said lightly. "I wish we hadn't stayed till we were the only ones left. I wanted to see how they worked that weird exit of theirs."

"But then we wouldn't have danced enough, John," she protested. "I can never dance enough!"

A subconscious memory rose to my conscious mind. During our last dance, the only music that accompanied us had been Drury's gentle humming, light and free, yet with an undertone of terror. I remember humming with her. We had been so joyously intent on each other that I had not even missed the orchestra. It had simply gone with all the people.

I turned the car around in the middle of the moonlit street. Holding my hand on the wheel, I twisted my wrist to look at my watch. It was fifteen minutes after midnight. On other midnights, I could remember—

Deliberately I refused to think those thoughts. If I could keep Drury with me to the very end, nothing past, present or future mattered. It did not surprise me that I loved this girl whom I scarcely knew. I did, and that was enough for me, even if I could not know how she felt about me. Eyes closed, head thrown back, she hummed and her feet danced on the floorboards, as though I still held her in my yearning arms.

Down the drying road I drove, toward the last town at the edge of the foothills. The banks were so high at each side of the road that no one could possibly get off it. Stealthily I glanced down at the girl. She caught me each time. Wrinkling her nose, she smiled at me, showing two rows of even, pearly teeth. Her eyes sparkled with utter delight, but she was merely dancing without music or a partner.

As we approached the place where I had picked her up, I began to slow down, looking for the road or trail that led to her home. She stiffened and caught my arm pleadingly.

"No, John. We must not tarry. They never liked me to dance, anyhow."

Would I never be able to understand her odd speech? Were all girls of the dreary mountain wilderness so difficult to comprehend? Naturally she spoke almost a different language. In New York, she would have had just as much trouble understanding other girls.

Stopping the car determinedly, I turned to her.

"Drury," I blurted, "I must tell you, even if I never see you again—"

Like a frightened creature of the woods, she stared at me. But I didn't feel her shrink back. Every action of mine followed instinctively. I caught her shoulders firmly and pulled her toward me. When my lips were almost on hers, she made a hurt little sound of protest. I felt her warm palm against my lips, struggling to prevent the kiss. But my arms tightened about

her, and my lips sought hers, refusing to be denied.

"Then you are like the others!" she breathed sorrowfully. "I am lost again! Perhaps my father and mother were right . . . No, John, please! Before they died, they made me promise—"

"But I held you close all evening," I whispered urgently. "Let me kiss you. I love . . ."

Instantly she was gone. I didn't open the door, nor did she. I would have heard it open, yet I heard no click and slam, and my eyes had not blinked in that heartbeat of time.

IN ONE moment she had been there, with fear in her wide gaze—and perhaps a hint of hopeless love. In the same breath, she was gone. And I could still feel the warmth of her in my arms.

I was so startled that I sat trying to figure it out. The motor was murmuring sympathetically. I stared through the yellow headlights. Nothing moved in the twin cones that searched through the night.

Swiftly I backed the car and cramped the wheel to the left, so the lights would shine along the top of the ridge where I had first seen her. Far away, where the two beams merged into a single funnel of light, she was running like a scared deer, holding my topcoat close to her throat with both hands. Like golden banners, her hair was streaming out behind her.

The light no longer shone full on her, and she became a blur against the darkness. In the next instant, she must have fallen into a ravine, for she was gone.

I wrenched open the door and scrambled out. Racing after her, I shouted her name. There was no answer. I ran faster, knowing she must have hurt herself badly. Perhaps she lay unconscious on bloody rocks. . . .

I reached the ravine where she had disappeared. It slanted toward the left. Recklessly I jumped into it and

kept running. The moonlight hadn't gleamed on a body, and I couldn't stop to search for her footprints in the wet earth. Shouting, I darted along the bottom of the ravine.

Far away, toward the mountains, I heard a swelling roar. The wind and the rain were returning to drench the hillsides and flood the lowlands. A violent river might soon be sweeping down the ravine, but I didn't care. If I couldn't find Drury, I would never care about anything again.

With horrifying suddenness, I came out upon a plateau. I stood shocked among cairns of rock, blackened crosses, leaning gravestones. Had she gone the other way? She must have. . . .

At that moment, I saw something dark flutter in the wind that shrieked through the ravine. My heart stopped beating until I reached it.

It was my coat!

"Drury!" I yelled. "Drury!"

She couldn't have been far away. But there was no answer. I stopped shouting and picked up the topcoat. It was still warm with her vital warmth, still fragrant with her wonderful fragrance.

The wisps of mist drifted from the moon's face. More brightly than ever, it shone down, revealing how despairingly hopeless it was to continue pursuing the girl of the wind and the rain. It glowed weirdly on the inscription of the gravestone my topcoat had covered.

To The Memory Of

DRURY SHANE

Born September 12, 1835

Died November 6, 1856

Her Death Could Not Destroy
Her Love For Dancing

Sobbing, I turned and ran back to the car. Lightning flashed behind me, and thunder rolled in a terrifying chase. The second I slipped under the wheel and slammed the door, the rain smashed down like a river.

I had found her in the rain. Perhaps I would find her again—

THE landlord of the village poured me a drink as I stood warming myself at the crackling fire.

"Drury Shane?" he repeated. "Yeah, that shore was a sad case, wasn't it? Long time ago, of course, but folks around here still talk about it. They kinda scare their youngkers with the yarn, and I can't say I blame them much. Kinda scares me, too, when I hear about it."

"What really happened?" I asked, my voice trembling, as I reached for the glass he was holding out toward me.

He downed a drink and poured himself another, shuddering as he nodded toward the window. Rain was slashing down in savage fury, roaring along the bed of the creek that was dry all the rest of the year.

"There's the kind of night they say she comes out in," he muttered. "Damned fool yarn, but the rest of it's straight enough. She was jest a fun-lovin' gal, happy as a yearlin' when she could be dancin'. Her folks, though, they didn't like their gal dancin' with men who'd always get proddy if she wouldn't let them kiss her. So they kept her home when there was a dance in Crystal City.

"Well, they went and died. But they made her promise she wouldn't go with no boys who jest wanted to kiss her, and make love to her, and break her heart. She promised, all right, 'cause she didn't want her heart broke. And she kept that promise, when she found out her folks was right. But losin' them and not bein' able to dance was too much for her, I reckon.

"She ailed only a couple of weeks, and then she died. It wasn't any sickness, and she wasn't in no pain. She just died from not bein' able to dance. But folks around here say that when it rains, and once a week regular, she goes to Crystal City and dances—

(Concluded on page 97)

Hate's Handiwork

By WILL GARTH

Author of "Murder Trial," "The Last Death," etc.

I WAS an instrument of hate. Hate destroys the hater. Yes, I know that now. Am I not powerless, a thing of death instead of life? Are my veins not a stranger to the flow of blood that warms? Is my pulse not silent and still?

Whom can I harm now? No one. Whom can I befriend? Can I touch a child's fevered brow to cool it, or grasp a man's hand to give him strength in adversity?

A helping hand to a fellow human being? How wildly I dream! The meanest homeless dog could not expect respite from a single bothersome flea through me. Life, which I did so much to mar, has slipped out of my grasp.

It began when I was younger, not very much younger, yet too young—so Mother said—to put polish on my nails. Mother was deaf to pleadings and blind to sulks. Her prohibitions were final. In a tantrum, believing the action unobserved, I slapped Muggsy when he came to be petted. But Mother heard him yelp. And to Father, not caring in her distress if she was overheard, she said:

"Viola is a strange child, Frank. Sometimes she doesn't seem to be ours. Her tantrums, her sulks—they're not like me, and certainly not like you. I don't know what to do with her."

Perhaps Viola Mosely was not their child. Perhaps she was the child of the Devil. But why do I say perhaps? Viola Mosely was *not* their child. It came out shortly after the episode of the nail-polish.

A hospital nurse, whose conscience had been bothering her all these years,

spoke. She was a fool. She should have kept quiet. She was not even certain that a mix-up had taken place. But she had grown old and gossipy. In an unguarded moment, in the nurses' dormitory, she let her tongue wag to a young probationer she had taken



VIOLA MOSELY?

under her wing. Her dormant misgivings found ambiguous utterance.

Footprinting of babies had not come into practice at the time. So she was not sure. The sexes were the same—the name-tags— She bit her tongue, but it was too late. The probationer was flighty, talkative. She did not consider the consequences, nor the fact that fourteen years had passed. She talked.

Strange Enmity Severs a Life-Long Bond of Friendship!

In a wealthy suburb such as Parkhurst, where homes are few because grounds are spacious, news travels fast. Gossip is an important pleasure and servants understand the penchant of their mistresses for juicy morsels of information. By nightfall, Mother and Father were no longer certain that Viola Mosely was really their child.

If not, who was? No, they would not have to search the hospital records or hire detectives to scour the country in a frantic attempt to trace the movements of the other family. The other family had never moved from Parkhurst, had in fact never moved from its original home.

If Viola was not the Mosely's child, then Mona Whitman was. Mona, who had been born simultaneously with Viola, was—if a mix-up had actually taken place—the child of the Moselys. And the Whitmans lived next door.

MONA and Viola went to school together, were in the same class. I played catch with Mona in the tomboy stage. I threw the ball harder and faster than she did. I threw it once when she was not ready—it was a new tennis ball—and gave her a black eye. Had I done it on purpose? Was the malice in me even then?

The problem that confronted the respective parents in the days immediately following the nurse's tongue-wagging was a matter for tears and no laughter. For fourteen years they had each brought up a child who now, it turned out, might not be their own. Suppose Mona was the Mosely's and Viola the Whitman's. What should be done?

There were conferences. The parents strove for calm, made strenuous efforts to be reasonable in their progress toward a decision. They posed the problem to themselves first in this way: Suppose they were sure that a mistake had been made? They could not be sure, but suppose they were? What would they do then?

Would they switch children? They could not answer the question. Again and again they asked it, and again and again they recoiled from answering it. It soon became apparent that two schools of thought were at war within each of them. What Mona and Viola were to become familiar with in their courses at college as the Great Conflict of Philosophy, was expressed by the parents in ordinary human terms—how much of what we know and feel is instinct, and how much the product of one's individual living?

"A mother always knows her own child," said the mothers. But they said it without believing it—because they *didn't* know. They appealed to an abstraction, the maternal instinct, and that instinct was silent. It could not help them.

But there was a way of becoming, if not completely certain, at least more certain than they were. All of them thought of it, all of them hesitated to broach it. It was Mr. Whitman who finally gave it tongue. A blood test.

The blood test would be proof—not positive, because there was always the chance that the blood-types were similar—but a blood test offered the possibility of certainty. It might show that one of the men was *not* the father of one of the girls, and the definite conclusion would follow from that that the other was, hence untangling the whole twisted skein. A blood test, therefore, was indicated. Should it be made?

And they answered, collectively, in the negative.

"No," they said. "Our children have lived with us for fourteen years. For fourteen years we have reared and nurtured them, seen them through their childhood illnesses, watched them off for their first day at school, signed their report cards, praised and punished them. For fourteen years we have said, 'This child is mine.' What if we now, suddenly, knew otherwise, because of proof? What would we *do*?

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Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared H. L. Herbert, who, having been duly sworn in law, depose 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 637, 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 5th day of October, 1940. **Bugene Wechsler**, Notary Public. My commission expires March 30, 1941.

Let's avoid the necessity of having to answer that question. Let's say to ourselves now, and forever—"this child is ours, and that child is yours. So be it."

IF ALL this, the children were at first unaware. They sensed that their parents were troubled, but the nature of the trouble was a mystery in the beginning. But other parents talked, and other children overheard that talk. Children brought the talk to school with them, and **Mona and Viola** heard strange things—things that mystified them at first, then terrified them.

They came home with questions, and at last the parents had to answer. For it was obvious to them that even more harm might be done by their silence than by their tragic declaration: "We may not be your father and your mother."

The reaction of the two children was different. **Mona's** sobbing subsided. She grew calm, listened quietly. At the end, she kissed her "father" and her "mother."

I shook off my mother's hand. No, **Viola "Mosely"** was not like **Mona "Whitman."** The two girls were very different.

It was at this time, or shortly afterward, that their interest in the two **Prentiss** boys, **George** and **William**, became something more personal than childhood friendships. The four ceased to be playmates—they became two boys and two girls. The trouble was that both boys fell in love with **Mona Whitman**, not **Viola Mosely**.

I speak of **Viola** in this impersonal way because she is no longer one with me—we are apart, detached. And I say that **Viola Mosely** found nothing in the rivalry to please her, and much to make her hate.

There was no pairing off. **Viola** was simply out of it. She was never snubbed; she was tolerated, which was worse.

Shortly after her sixteenth birth-

day, Viola had an acute attack of appendicitis and was rushed to the hospital. Quick surgery saved her life. But her convalescence was slow, and during it she had time to brood.

Her nurse was the one-time probationer with the loose tongue. Viola's hate, diffused and undirected up to then, fastening at times upon Mona or George or Bill, flashing out for an instant upon the two people who might or might not be her parents, intensified temporarily upon the now graduate nurse.

Viola required sedatives. One night the nurse came in with a fresh bottle of pills. Recalling something she had forgotten, she left them on the bedside table, and left the room. Viola, brooding, suddenly saw in the nurse the malign cause of all her unhappiness. The nurse must be punished.

The dosage was one pill to be taken before lights out. I uncapped the bottle, spilled three pills into my palm. . . .

When the nurse returned Viola Mosely was asleep. She assumed that the patient, knowing the dose, had taken the medicine without waiting for her. Later that night, she observed that her patient's breathing was shallow and rapid. . . .

A stomach pump and an antidote revived the patient. In the morning, Viola Mosely said:

"Nurse gave me three pills when I told her one wasn't enough."

The nurse lost her cap, her job and her career.

HATRED grows with what it feeds on. The taste of vengeance whetted the appetite for it. I plucked at the sheet restlessly, unsatisfied, anxious to do more. The nurse was not the enemy. The enemy was Mona. She I had not yet reached. And I felt within me the impulse to grasp her white throat and not release it until the pulse of life no longer beat.

The hospital soon discharged Viola, and she went home. But Viola had no

(Continued on page 90)

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(Continued from page 89)

home. Since the revelation of doubt as to her parentage, she had had no home. The fact that her parents went out of their way to bestow affection upon her only emphasized, in her own eyes, their doubts. They did not really love her. They did not believe she was their daughter. They believed Mona was their daughter, and loved her.

Mona was loved by all, Viola by none. Mona was loved by the Whitmans and the Moselys. Mona was loved by both Prentiss boys, Viola by neither. Since earliest childhood Mrs. Mosely had kissed Mona whenever she came to the house, as an aunt would kiss a niece, but now, each time it happened, a pang of hate shot through her "own" daughter—a pang so keen that it took Viola's breath away.

Such hate had to find a way into action. College years came and went, and marriage became the uppermost thought.

It was then that I took up the pen and wrote the first letter. With ink that was malice and a pen that was poisoned, I painfully disguised the handwriting that would tell George Prentiss things about Mona Whitman.

The first letter was followed by a second, and by a third. I wrote the letters that went to William Prentiss also. I shall not speak of their contents. They were clever—and ineffective. Yes, they were ineffective. The Prentiss boys disregarded them. Perhaps they guessed after a while who had written them. And if ever Viola Mosely had entertained hopes of arousing their love, she had to abandon those hopes now.

Eventually the time had to come for Mona to make her choice. She did not know of the letters, nor would she ever know. She chose a spring night to give the Prentisses their answer. They were to come to her house—her parents would be out—and she would

say yes to one of them and no to the other. She told Viola.

As the afternoon of that day waned, I grew restless. In room after room, I found myself opening and closing drawers, as though looking for something without knowing what. But at last, in Father's room, my fingers closed about and gripped the thing they had been seeking.

The Whitman living room had French windows opening on the porch. That was how I, and the thing I gripped, gained entrance. The three were there—Mona, Will and George. And Mona, at that moment, was making her choice. . . .

"I'll marry you, Will," she said.

Gladness broke upon the face of Will Prentiss. There was in George, as he looked in my direction, no slightest sign that now that Mona had rejected him, he would turn to Viola Mosely.

Hate, overmastering, ran through my veins and gave me strength to lift the automatic and aim at the heart of Mona Whitman.

The Prentisses knew the Whitman place as well as they knew their own home. Will Prentiss jerked the library table drawer open. His hand came up with Mr. Whitman's automatic, and he fired.

Blazing pain ran over me. . . .

THEY amputated me at the wrist—me, the hand—the hand that had thrown the tennis ball, that had rejected the soothing hand of my mother, that had filched the three pills, that had penned the poisoned notes, that had clutched and curled about a gun.

Viola Mosely died of blood-poisoning. I can speak of her impersonally because, you see, she is no longer part of me nor I of her.

As for me, I am a subject of study for the medical students attached to the hospital. The hand is a complicated bit of anatomy, and there is much to learn about it. . . .

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THE BLACK ARTS

(Continued from page 13)

sun is in full eclipse, and the Earth is darkest.

As the first ray of light begins to show again all hands are placed on the nearest stone beyond the wall. The chant goes on. The stone rises slowly like the four bloody ones. Then like a giant humming bird hovering over a honeysuckle blossom, it gradually descends directly over the body of the first maiden who had met untimely death. It will crush beyond shape and recognition what still remains of a beautiful creature that might have found happiness.

Before the stone descends, a priest sprinkles dried mortar over the crimson form of the girl. It mixes with the wet blood like salt dropped into an open wound—magic mortar of Mayan masonry to defy the ages of corrosion, joining two stones as one, never to be parted by the hand of mortal man.

The hovering stone finally presses down. Red mortar oozes out slightly. The grand master closes all crevices for eternity with the palm of his ungodly hand. The first cornerstone has been laid.

All's Well!

Then before the moon has passed across the face of the sun that magic day, and light has once more come to the mystic city of the Mayas, four cornerstones of blood and flesh have been laid with Mayan mastery. The rest of the construction may proceed. The Eye-God has been appeased—the temple has been properly dedicated—and all is well.

"Bunk," repeats the skeptic, "the human sacrifice perhaps took place to please the sadistic lust of the Mayan priests, but the stones were not lifted without mechanical means. There must have been derricks on the tower which lifted the stones in place, the spectators being unable to see the ropes or wires due to the darkness of the eclipse."

But can levitation be dismissed as lightly as that? The Neoplatonists, the last school of pagan philosophers, have too much historic proof behind them that they *did* lift heavy bodies in the air, bodies which remained suspended without mechanical means. This belief is referred to in many ancient writings. Many scientists today will not deny the possibility.

Influence of Levitation

Levitation influenced Clement, Origen, Augustine and other early Christian fathers, but was later outlawed by materialistic philosophers who refused to experiment for fear that levitation was the work of the devil. Consequently, the art was lost—or rather destroyed wilfully. Will it ever be re-discovered? Predictions have been made that it will. But when?

Those who doubt might try to gain the confidence of some educated Maya: de-

scendant today, whether in Central America or Egypt. Ask him how the Mayan temples or the Egyptian Pyramids were constructed, how those huge stones were placed so carefully in accurate position. He will not laugh at levitation.

More than likely if he believes you sincere, he will invite you to a secret seance where you can see gravity defied in a simple manner by words of magic and the touch of sensitive hands.

Mayan mystics in the sacred temples of the Eye-God—priests of unholy ritual who could lift a five-ton rock with but a gesture of the hand—masters of Black Arts who dedicated architectural beauty with the blood of terrified victims—who knows their mystifying secrets?

—LUCIFER.

LETTERS FROM READERS

AMONG the many interesting letters that have come in recently is one by a young lady who brings up a very significant point. It made us wonder how many others have perhaps misunderstood the scope of the Black Arts Department or of STRANGE STORIES. The young lady very intelligently discusses—well, here's the letter itself, which we're sure you'll enjoy reading:

I have just finished reading the December number of STRANGE STORIES, and I want to tell you how much I enjoyed it. I particularly liked "The Missing Mirage," "Misty Island," and "The Third Life of Nine" (I am fond of cats), although I think that every one of the stories are good.

I am looking forward to reading Eli Colter's story in the next issue. I feel a sort of particular interest in Eli Colter, because although I never met her, she lives, or at least did live, in my home town, Portland, Oregon, and I sort of watched her development as a fellow townsman, particularly since I myself have more or less dabbled in writing, and am interested in seeing anyone succeed at it. I like the stories she writes, too.

But do you know there is one thing about your attitude toward the sort of thing your magazine features, that puzzles me? Why on earth do you name your club the Black Arts Club? And why do you refer to the section as Black Art? Of course I suppose you figured that it would be oh, so alibery and thrilling and exciting to feature the idea of Black Arts—but it seems hardly cricket to me to ascribe such a thrill. And James Hilton's "Lost Horizons" definitely does NOT refer to any "black" art. Nor are the Tibetan Adepts "Masters of the Black Arts." They are not "Witch Doctors," either.

I note your "Lucifer" is touted as a "famous authority on witchcraft and superstition." Perhaps that explains why you consider the occult to be "black" . . . which is a definitely erroneous notion. It is perfectly true that there ARE people who DO dabble in it from a "black" angle. But what happens to them in their own bad luck, and I feel that it is a very unfortunate thing, to say the least, to give the impression that the occult is a sinister thing. Your stories, I am glad to say, have not so far given that impression, which is one that certain other magazines featuring your type of story all too often do give.

The Black Arts, as a real student of the occult understands them, consist of attempts to gain magical knowledge to use for selfish purposes. Only a very uninformed person—uninformed of the real aims of occultism—would entertain the idea that the occult itself is "black."

(Continued on page 34)

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CITY STATE

(Continued from page 93)

A study of the occult without spiritual understand-
ing, and without a sense of spiritual respon-
sibility, and a willingness to sacrifice self—to sac-
rifice all efforts to gain personal power and glory—
to become a servant of life, great and small, is a
very dangerous proceeding. . . not to other people,
but to the one who selfishly intrudes on things he
does not fully understand.

This is not a trivial subject. It is a very im-
portant one; and the right attitude toward it is
more important than the subject itself. It is per-
fectly legitimate, certainly, to inquire diligently
into the question of whether these things are true
or not true. No one should accept anything what-
soever, without due proof. But to investigate in
the same spirit as the baby trying to see whether
the match will really make a pretty fire or not is
something else again.

Occultism and what you laughingly call the
Black Arts are not just a matter of gaining powers
over the winds or being able to stay comfortable in a
snowstorm. Those things are not the aim of a
study of the occult, but simply some of the side
issues of a growth in spiritual understanding and
soul consciousness. If you will remember there is
a text in the Bible that says, "Seek ye first the
Kingdom of God, and all things shall be added
unto you." These powers, which have so astounded
some of the travelers in Tibet, are only those added
things. The people who have those powers did not
seek out simply to gain them. They set out to unfold
and to grow, and because they felt that soul urge
for growth and understanding, and were willing to
sacrifice selfishness to that end, they grew into
power and peace. The Black Magician is one to
whom the powers and not the growth was the
important thing. All occultists must make their
choice of which road they will take, when they
have reached a certain degree of development. . .

It is important to the development of mankind—
doubly, trebly important, in this age of horrors
and greed and grasping materialism—that the
veracity of spiritual truths be proven, and a way
showed men out of the terrible swamp they have
created themselves mired in. I think it is wrong to
give a wrong impression of things that are im-
portant. People should think about these things.
They should understand them—rightly, construc-
tively. . .

I can quite understand and credit the story you
print, of the boy who was bred for by the Tibetan
priests. They were certainly not "Masters of the
Black Arts." The "Black Arts" are definitely evil
. . . or let us say existing powers that have been
put to an evil use. No "Masters of the Black Arts"
would have ever taken care of this boy unless to
put him to some use for their own ends. What hap-
pened to him is prima facie evidence that he was
not in the hands of any "Black Arts" practitioners.
Why call them that? Why not discriminate, even
if it is not quite so shivery? Why give people a
stone, when they need bread?

I was amused at the other story about the White
Master and his son and the wicked inhabitants of
the valley. Obviously a parable concocted by some
teacher to keep the selfish, turbulent people in
hand. Such stories, of this type, were told to
people who would have been unable to understand
the reality, if it had been told to them. All ancient
tomes contain such stories. But no true occult
teaching ever is in conflict with biology. Occult
teachings reach above the material world,
but they do not conflict with its laws. They en-
deavor to lead to a better understanding of them,
and of the higher spiritual and natural laws, that
the life of man may be happier, more understand-
ing, more peaceful, just as life in Shangri La was
above selfishness and greed and war. The great
occult teachers desire above all things that all men
shall one day reach that peace, by the road of
understanding and soul growth. It is not a thing to
be belittled.

I should really like to belong to your club, but
to be perfectly frank, I would not touch a thing
named "Black Arts" with a ten-foot pole. Shangri
La, if you like, is a parable—an effort to bring to
the understanding of mankind that there is a bet-
ter way of life than grasping greed and an itch
for power. As the old Romans said, "Sic transit
Gloria Mundi," but the things of the Spirit do not
pass. Shangri La may actually exist, it is not at
all impossible that it should. But whether it does
or not is, after all, immaterial, because if it does
not, it is at least based on spiritual fact. Surely
you can see some analogy between it and your

scientist friend's Tibetan lamasery. It illustrates great spiritual truth that it would be well for this war-ridden world to learn something about. Your harping on "Black Arts" stimulates the wrong sort of urge—for the wrong sort of learning on this subject.

Violet Olive Johnson.

San Francisco, Calif.

We certainly have no argument with Miss Johnson's essential theme. Only, we have taken it for granted that the term, "Black Arts," was a general one meant to include the good and the bad in the occult. At least, it has been used in that sense (a usage approved by many masters of the occult) both in our fiction and factual articles, as well as in the letters from our readers. Hence, we drew no sharply dividing line. Perhaps there are readers who have received the wrong impression. We'd like to hear from them. And we'd like to hear from others, too, on this point.

STRANGE STORIES. We are proud to say, is read far and wide—on land and sea, as the following letter from an applicant for Club membership indicates:

I would like to apply for membership in your club, although just last night I read my first copy of **STRANGE STORIES.** It was the August issue, and I will be going ashore in a couple of days to buy a new copy.

If I may, I'd like to tell you my Strange Story, which is true:

About six years ago, while driving late at night at a high speed, I was struck by a passing car and was wrecked pretty badly. For almost a year after that every time I drove late at night I could see the "Death Angel" walking the middle of the road trying to catch a ride with me. I almost killed myself trying to keep from hitting this person draped in black with a pale face. Even now, if I drive too fast for my own safety, I can see this person. Can you explain this or have you ever heard of it before?

C. E. Johnson.

U.S.S. Dixie, Div. 3,
Marine Island, Calif.

We have an explanation for this type of occurrence. There have been quite a number of similar ones reported, and although in some cases, there may be an element of the occult, in most instances, it is easily

(Continued on page 96)

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

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(Continued from page 95)

explained by psychologists, Reader Johnson's subconscious, reacting to his previous accident, is wide awake, warning him by conjuring up a symbolic picture of Death. As a matter of fact, we might call this "Death Angel" the "Good Angel" protecting Reader Johnson from driving too fast for his own safety! Which brings us right back to the letter above by the young lady whose name, coincidentally, happens to be Johnson, too! Maybe you can find something occult in that!

Very peculiarly, too, the letters that keep popping up from the mailbox seem insistent on pointing out to us that our readers have not misunderstood the scope of our Black Arts Department. Here, for example, is one on telepathic experiments:

I have enjoyed STRANGE STORIES for several years, but am just now arousing myself to write you a letter. I would like to apply as a Master in your Black Arts Club.

I am an amateur magician, and have studied magic for about seven or eight years. I have experimented quite a bit with mental magic, mind reading and telepathy. My best results came unexpectedly one day while I was practicing telepathy with my sister. A friend of mine dropped in and showed curiosity concerning our experiments. When I explained that we were "sending" mental thoughts, my friend laughed.

I offered to prove my statement. My friend wrote a name on a piece of paper and showed it to me. My sister closed her eyes, while I concentrated on the name. A few seconds later, my sister told my friend the name on the paper. My friend claimed we used signals, although he watched us closely, but in reality it took several years of constant practice for my sister and me to reach that stage.

Albert L. Lopez.

East Boston, Mass.

Here's one on alchemy, and even though it's about base metals, its outlook is a noble one! The author, incidentally, is probably the youngest Master of the

Black Arts—or has anybody else a claim to this title? Anyhow, here's the letter:

I am applying for a Master's card, with this letter. I am only thirteen years old, but am interested in the Black Arts, chiefly alchemy. For my card I am writing an essay on alchemy.

From the murmuring alchemist hovering over his cauldron, to the white-coated chemist frowning at his test tubes is a far cry, but we find that a good many of them are, or were, working for the same results. The alchemists undertook the quest for the "philosopher's stone" with which they hoped to convert the baser metals into gold and silver, the "alkahast," or universal solvent, and the "elixir vitae," by which life might be prolonged. The "magisterium" was sought after the action of various drugs had been investigated, and was supposed to cure all diseases.

Alchemy flourished in the middle ages, and based on the work of Hermes, Trismegistus, and Geber was enthusiastically pursued by Albertus Magnus, Lilly, and Roger Bacon.

Perhaps the recent researches in radio activity and the growing convictions of the unity of matter will, in a way, make the alchemists' dream come true.

James G. Hudley.

Another applicant for a Master's Card in the Black Arts Club makes a point of differentiating between the "black" and "white" branches of magic, but apparently accepts them both under the heading of "Black Arts":

I have always been interested in the branch of magic known as White Magic. An interesting little bit of White Magic was called to my attention recently by a very close friend.

In 1918 there lived a very pretty woman who was very dissatisfied with her husband. One day she determined to get rid of him at any means. In her village there lived a man known as a Black Magician—versed in all the forbidden arts and willing to hire himself out to perform any black deed in the books. She went to him and offered him a certain sum of gold to destroy her husband. Her husband, however, learned of the plot by some means and went to a very close friend of his and revealed the plot to him. This friend of his was a White Magician and he promised to foil the plot.

On the night of a full moon, as the husband appeared home after a hard day's work, the woman proceeded to give him drugged wine. Becoming very sleepy, the man retired. As soon as he fell asleep the figure of the Black Magician appeared and began to chant a curse. . . .

Suddenly, in a flash of light, the White Magician appeared and drew a line about the sleeping man with a piece of sacred chalk. Protected by the chalk, the man slept peacefully while the wills of the magicians clashed and struggled over him. With the coming of dawn, the Black Magician disappeared, vanquished, and the life of the man was saved.

I believe that there is always this conflict of good and bad—White and Black Magic—going on about us at all times. Scorners will say that this statement is ridiculous! Is there deprive it. . . .

Keep up the good work!

Eugene Deutsch.

Bridgeport, Conn.

And finally, we come to a letter from a reader on the subject of voodooism, who evidently considers such things as Shangri La under the general heading of "Black Arts," for he remarks among other things, in his letter, "I have read all available books on the black arts, such as *Lost Horizon* by Hilton. . . ." Following is the essay on voodooism:

Voodooism is a form of worship usually practiced in the West Indies. It was brought over from Africa by the Negro slaves when they were imported. The object of this worship is usually a spirit of some kind.

If a voodoo desires to injure someone, a wax figure is made of that person. The spell works better if hair from the person or the parings of his

balls are put in the wax. Then pins are stuck into the figure, or it is crushed, buried or roasted. These secret formulae are repeated. If things go as the voodooist desires, his enemy will feel the pain and injury which were inflicted on his image.

Another popular marvel associated with voodooism is a zombie. This zombie is supposed to be a dead man brought back to life by the local medicine man or witch doctor. Those zombies were put to work on sugar plantations because they never grew tired or fatigued from severe heat or overwork. However, a zombie must never be fed salt or the spell becomes broken, and he rushes back to his grave.

Recently, it was discovered that the zombies were not really dead but alive. They were fed a drug with their food which took away all their willpower. They became human robots. The antidote for this drug was salt. Thus, when a zombie is fed salt, he recovers his willpower, but the sudden shock often kills him.

These are some of the things which voodooism has done. Due to the efforts of the island police, though, voodooism is almost extinct.

J. Fidelman.

Bronx, N. Y.

That about brings us to the end of our chat for this issue. We'd like to hear from more readers about the magazine, the department or any aspect of the occult. Those of you who haven't as yet joined the Black Arts Club can do so now by filling out the coupon on page 95 and mailing it in to us. Let's hear from you real soon!

—THE EDITOR.

DEATH, I WANT TO DANCE

(Concluded from page 85)

with other ghosts, or anybody livin' who'll take her there. . . ."

Without a word, I put down my untouched drink and stumbled upstairs to my room. The landlord called out a question that I didn't bother to understand.

I would never see her again, for I had behaved like every other man she had known. She had promised not to dance with men who would break her heart, and I had lost my chance to prove my love for her. . . .

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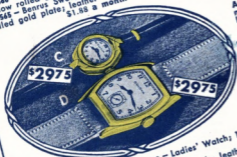
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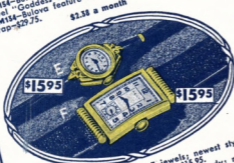
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